Recuperating Mimêsis: Jackson Pollock and the Indigenous American Spirit

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RECUPERATING MIMÊSIS: JACKSON POLLOCK AND THE INDIGENOUS AMERICAN SPIRIT

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Submitted to the faculty of
The Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

April, 2018
Accepted by the faculty of the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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April 16, 2018
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My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West.

– Jackson Pollock

For Ezra, Samantha, et al. May you always trust in your creative dreams and how they connect you with something infinitely larger.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many who have assisted and guided me along this dissertation process. First, I sincerely appreciate the effort and assistance given me by my dissertation director, Christopher Yates. Christopher has a wonderful gift for paying close attention to content and stylistic details and great perceptive capacity for clarity. I began this project with research and writing objectives and Christopher has been an important guide in both aspects. I am greatly indebted to him for the many hours he has spent introducing and explaining the finer points of Phenomenology that has informed much of my research, analyzing my argument points, and for his watchful care over this entire process and project. I also thank my dissertation committee members Simonetta Moro and Kathy Desmond for their keen insights and contributions to this study.

I want to thank George Smith, Founder and President of IDSVA, for his insight and vision in developing the IDSVA institute and program. His belief in me has inspired and driven me forward during the long and arduous years of intensive research and study. I have appropriated his term “recuperation” from our early discussions on this project, and I appreciate his insights and encouragement while my project was still in its infancy. I also appreciate Kent Minturn for his support and enthusiasm for my initial idea. I want to thank all who have contributed to or supported me throughout this doctoral journey: the IDSVA community of important mentors, colleagues, and friends like Michael Smith, Christopher Lonegan, Amy Curtis, our dear librarian, Laura Graveline, and countless others who have all contributed to my journey. Finally, but certainly not least, I appreciate my fellow students in Cohort ‘11, and especially my study group members and friends, Tammy Parks, Kathe Hicks, and Albrecht Mary Anne Davis and many other friends at IDSVA. They have been steadfast, insightful, and supportive throughout our journey together at IDSVA, and particularly during the dissertation process. Our regular study group communications have helped us all to keep moving forward together.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge my family, whose patience and encouragement has meant a lot to me, and I want them to know that I appreciate each of them. I am indebted to my mother for inspiring her family to appreciate beauty in all its forms. I appreciate Peter who has lifted my spirits many times during my long hours at work, and Sarah, Mary, Jacob, and René for reminding me that “we can do hard things”. I also thank Ezra and Samantha for being the joy they are in my life. Finally, I thank my friend and husband Cory L. LaBarge for his passion for learning, his gift for knowledge and insight, and his encouragement and support. Thank you to all of my family and friends for patiently sacrificing our time together while I have worked through the long hours that have passed all too quickly.
ABSTRACT

Maria S. LaBarge

RECUPERATING MIMÈSIS: JACKSON POLLOCK AND THE INDIGENOUS AMERICAN SPIRIT

Jackson Pollock has long been heralded as the quintessential Modernist. His work marks the pinnacle of the Golden Age of Modernism and the culmination of a long experiment with modernist ideas elaborated by theorists such as Croce, Fry, Bell, Greenberg and others. Within the predominant concerns of Modernism (including intuition, imagination, and abstraction), Pollock is the paragon of the modernist solitary genius. However, this view of Pollock depends primarily on analysis of his drip paintings and disregards the development of processes inherent within them. This enframing critique of Pollock overlooks the presence of symbol, allegory, and ritual upon which Pollock’s work depends. It neglects to account for the fact that far from pure abstractions, Pollock’s work crosses the boundaries of abstraction in order to reinstitute mímêsis in art.

My analysis of Pollock’s work views his methodology as a recuperation of indigenous American aesthetics through mímêsis. I claim that through the forms, modes, and functions of mímêsis Pollock’s work transgresses modernity’s claims to pure form in favor of an inquiry into the forms and techniques of indigenous American aesthetics, thereby reintroducing notions of ritual and mythos in contemporary art.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction  
page 1

Chapter 1  
On View: A Ubiquitous Indigenous Icon  
17

Chapter 2:  
Critical Modern Divisions  
72

Chapter 3  
American Primitivism: a Case for *Mimēsis*  
148

Chapter 4  
*Mimēsis* and its Forms  
209

Chapter 5  
*Mimēsis* and its Modes  
238

Chapter 6  
*Mimēsis* and the Truth in Art  
292

Conclusion  
*Mimēsis* and Ritual  
359

Works Cited  
376

Appendix A  
390

Notes  
394
Introduction

*Technique is just a means of arriving at a statement.*
_Jackson Pollock_

So much has been said about Pollock’s alcoholism and possible personality disorder that it is difficult to look at his art without seeing a representation of Pollock himself. Authors trying to put together Pollock’s psychological profile often take liberties with their own creative analyses. One author, for example, stressed that Pollock had a love-hate relationship with his mother. This strong assessment was gleaned from a letter shared between Sande and Charles (Pollock’s brothers), where Sande opined, “Jackson is afflicted with a definite neurosis. Whether he comes through the normalcy and self-dependency depends on many subtle factors and some obvious ones. Since part of his trouble (perhaps a large part) lies in his childhood relationship with his Mother in particular and family in general, it would be extremely trying and might be disastrous for him to see her at this time” (Emmerling 14). What is most revealing in this exchange is not that Pollock hated his mother, but that Sande was just as influenced by ideas of repression in Freudian psychoanalysis as were any of his contemporaries. This is not to suggest that Pollock’s condition did not require psychoanalysis; rather, during Pollock’s time most believed that the answers to mental illness, alcoholism, and modern angst were to be found through the process of analysis.

It is rather odd however, that the critique of Pollock’s work, more than that of any other artist, inevitably addresses Pollock’s psychological self. The works of other alcoholic
painters such as Mark Rothko or Willem De Kooning are largely reviewed as ontic or independent entities, apart from expressions, mental states, or addictions of the artists. But the artistic critique of Pollock’s work is nearly inseparable from that of his mental state (Wysuph 10). Even the art critic Clement Greenberg, who claimed that Pollock was on his way to becoming the ‘greatest American painter,’ addressed Pollock in terms of his personality and mental state, not simply just his artwork. In his January 24, 1948 review of Pollock’s one-man show at the Betty Parsons Gallery, Greenberg conflated Pollock’s work with both Cubism and Pollock’s emotional state, “Pollock’s mood has become more cheerful these past two years, if the general higher key of his color can be taken as a criterion in this respect” (qtd. in Karmel and Varnedoe, “Interviews” 60). Other reviewers also discuss Pollock’s work in terms of “mood” using words such as “brooding”, “impulsive”, “savage”, “joy”, “pain”, “reaction” “violent emotion” etc. 1

Pollock’s work is mythic, but Pollock himself is a large part of the myth. Lee Krasner sought to dispel some of the misunderstandings regarding Pollock’s personality and his work. In an interview with Art in America after Pollock’s death she explained, “there is so much stupid myth about Pollock, I can’t stand it!” (30). Pollock was not particularly violent, just verbal and angry when he was drunk. Pollock was very talkative when he wanted to be, and when talking, he was articulate and intelligent. Pollock was not suicidal. As Krasner explains, “There is the myth of suicide. There is no truth in this. It was an automobile accident like many others. That was a dangerous part of the road; just a while before, I myself skidded on that part of the road. The state highway department had to fix it soon after Jackson’s death. That speaks for itself” (30). Despite Krasner’s attempts to dispel the myths
surrounding Pollock, he is remembered so much for his life and personality that one can scarcely separate him from his artwork.

These underlying beliefs complicate the critical review of Pollock’s work, for both the abstract modernist and Jungian critiques emphasize Pollock’s mental health, but to differing ends. During Pollock’s time, the critical review of his work was largely based on the tenets of abstract modernism, which looks for flattening of pictorial illusion and space, structure based on the Cubist grid, abstract and non-representational form, and technical expertise. B. H. Friedman explains that Harold Rosenberg and Greenberg’s influential writings helped to define an American modernist aesthetic based on the European modernist values taught by Hans Hofmann (“Energy” 70). Greenberg summarized Hofmann’s theory on modern abstract painting saying that, “As is the case with almost all post-cubist painting of any real originality, it is the tension inherent in the constructed, re-created flatness of the surface that produces the strength of his art” (qtd. in Karmel and Varnedoe 65). Greenberg, who was one of Pollock’s greatest supporters during his lifetime, wrote for the New York publication *The Nation*. He situated Pollock within the modernist tradition, writing that “Pollock’s strength lies in the emphatic surfaces of his pictures, which it is his concern to maintain and intensify in all that thick, fuliginous flatness which began – but only began – to be the strong point of late Cubism” (Greenberg, “Prospects” 20-30). With this and other writings, Greenberg suggested that Pollock had appropriated and expanded upon the techniques of Cubism and thereby resituated the center of the art world from Paris to New York City.

While the modernist review largely focuses on the formal attributes of paint and color, calligraphic or hieroglyphic gesture or technique is also important. For example,
Margaret Lowengrund stresses the hieroglyphic nature of Pollock’s works, writing for *The Art Digest* that “of the Hieroglyphics School, this is an exciting display. It seems to strive to eliminate spatial form in favor of line and surface interest” (qtd. in Karmel and Varnedoe 61). Parker Tyler also stresses the technical virtuosity by noting that Pollock’s work is a form of calligraphic, describing it as “a paradox of abstract form in terms of an alphabet of unknown symbols” (65). Harold Rosenberg stressed the act of painting, or action painting, saying that “the big moment came when it was decided to paint ... just TO PAINT. The gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation” (“Action Painters” 581). However, this is not to say the critique of modern abstraction emphasizes gesture or drawing over color or space. For spatial composition, color, cubist grid or all-over painting, and technique all form the tenets of modernism and inform the modernist critique of Pollock’s work. But inherent within this critique lays an underlying awareness of Pollock’s emotional states which, as Rosenberg stresses, are inherent in Pollock’s work. Rosenberg explains that, “The tension of the private myth is the content of every painting of this vanguard” (583). Though the modernist critique focuses on the formal properties of art, the mythic nature of Pollock’s work remains a foundational factor. Following Greenberg’s valorizing of abstract form, later theorists and critics like Michael Fried, T.J. Clark, and most recently John Golding in his book *Paths to the Absolute*, uphold notions of pure form with its affinities to absolute order and timeless beauty. Pollock’s abstract drip paintings are summarized as the spontaneous and purgative expressions of the modern existential man. This mythic nature of Pollock’s work is again underscored by Rosenberg, who explained that “the act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist’s existence” (582).³ As W. Jackson Rushing notes, even in the view of modern abstraction Pollock’s work is seen to the result of a tortured artist
aiming to express the avant-garde’s profound desire to transcend the particulars of history and search out universal values (“Ritual” 273).

Shortly before and soon after Pollock’s untimely and tragic death, theorists such as Joseph Henderson, William Rubin, W. Jackson Rushing, Stephen Polcari and others began to look at Pollock’s work through the lens of Jungian psychoanalysis and formulated a new criticism based on formative elements from Pollock’s early childhood. Being the youngest of five sons, Pollock is said to have been born within a dysfunctional family with an overbearing mother and a disinterested father. Pollock’s life has been carefully scrutinized, from his early childhood and peers to his lifelong battle with alcoholism. In this view, Pollock’s artwork has more recently come to be described as a type of ritual healing wherein his tortured soul found solace. As art historians have begun to take more notice of the American Indian influences in Pollock’s early drawings and paintings, the psychoanalytic critique has developed into a belief that Pollock’s drip paintings are evidence of Pollock engaging in shamanic self-healing. This more recent line of thought is proposed by Restellini et al. in the catalogue essay to the 2009 Paris exhibition of Pollock’s work at the Pinacothèque de Paris, which frames Pollock’s work in terms of the cycles of life, fertility, creation, transhuman transformations, and ritual healing. In the essay the authors write, “Seemingly following Orozco in style, Pollock nevertheless found his very subject – shamanism. Shamanism is a form of religious ecstasy in which the participant undergoes ritual alteration of his identity” (Restellini et al. 8). Despite Krasner’s warning against such mythmaking, the psychoanalytic critique focuses on mythic content of Pollock’s life, claiming it to be the content of Pollock’s works as well.
Interestingly, these two divergent trains of thought arrive at the same conclusion: that Pollock’s drip paintings are expressions of the wounded man, evidence of his mental state or illness and his struggle with modern life and alcoholism. In these views, the art speaks of a type of universal expression of angst and is inseparable from the man. The divided critique seems to resolve this irony by dividing up Pollock’s works. The modernist critique claims the abstraction in Pollock’s later drip painting while the Jungian based theories of the unconscious provide clarity for Pollock’s earlier works, with the more recent ‘shamanic’ critique serving as the motivation for his later drip work. But this divided theoretical review is rather problematic, for although both views conclude with a focus on Pollock’s personality and alternately answer to his early and later works, they do not give us a conclusive understanding of Pollock’s achievements. Neither critique fully explains how or why Pollock made the jump from abstract figuration (or representation) to the abstract, non-representational drip paintings. Further, both critiques overlook the overwhelming references to Native American arts and aesthetic which are so prevalent in both his early and later works. While both critiques contribute to the mythic nature of Pollock’s personality, each overlooks Pollock’s great leap into his drip style, suggesting that he completely abandoned his interest in the American Indian arts to pursue either a pure expression of abstract paint applied in a new modernist technical mode, or a more Surrealist expression of his own unconscious mind. In light of this polemical critique, can we find a unifying notion or concept that runs throughout all of Pollock’s works; an underlying principle that answers to both the influence of Native American arts and aesthetics and his turn to abstraction in his drip paintings? Can we articulate a theory of an intentional indigenous modern style while at
the same time dispelling some of the myths about Pollock and his work? If so, we need to look beyond the abstract modernist and Jungian critiques of art.

I believe that we can understand Pollock’s work through a unified theory that draws upon the notion of mimēsis. Thus, in this dissertation, I argue that through the reinstitution of mimēsis, Pollock recuperates the spirit of indigenous American art. Fortunately, there are many thinkers, particularly in the field of phenomenology, who can help us articulate a theory of mimēsis which helps explain the jump in Pollock’s work from his primitivist references to American Indian arts, and his later abstract idealist drip work. We can glean understanding from an unexpected resource, namely Aristotle’s Poetics, as well as a long list of thinkers like Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Stephen Halliwell, and others who have contributed to a broader definition of the notion of mimēsis and its role in art. Therefore, this dissertation is a means by which we can look at Pollock’s work from a different perspective than what we have presently come to accept as the definitive and proper critique of Pollock’s drip paintings within the Abstract Expressionism nomenclature. Through the notion of mimēsis, we can account for the jump between primitivist works to drip paintings, and more particularly, we can view Pollock’s work as a whole and progressive inquiry into art from symbolic representation based on indigenous sources to allegorical and mimetic rituals.

The flow of this study is based on a hybrid methodology that progresses from a review of the historical context to discussions on art history and theory. It concludes with a mixture of art theory, aesthetics and philosophy. It is hoped that by doing so, we better understand more fully the phenomenon of mimēsis itself in art, and the ways in which it is manifest in Pollock’s work. We will also be able to contextualize the divergent critiques of
Pollock’s work as epistemic, and entrenched within the socio-political circumstances of the past. But more than this, it is hoped that this study will recall and resituate the importance of American Indian arts within the broader issue of mimêsis during the critical years just before and after World War II when the United States developed its late twentieth-century national identity as a commercial, political, and military superpower.

We have two basic and underlying questions. First, to what extent can we situate Pollock and his work within his social and political time, or what Martin Heidegger would consider as one’s inhabitation or being in the world? Second, was Pollock’s engagement with American Indian arts and ideas unique and specific to his life experiences alone or does it derives from his engagement with the broader world? In Chapter One the socio-political context of Pollock’s youth and his formative artistic training will be addressed in order to show that indeed, the representation of the American Indian played a large role in both politics and the arts. This review will identify how the American Indian has been traditionally portrayed as an ethnographic subject and then move on to explain an important epistemic shift in the representation of the American Indian from an ethnographic view to one of being an American icon. It will formulate a foundation upon which we can understand the primary importance of the American Indian as an icon for nationalistic purposes. It also demonstrates how the American Indian, as a topic and icon, permeated all cultural sectors, from politics to merchandizing, from fine art to popular arts and culture. While some scholars such as W. Jackson Rushing, Stephen Polcari, and others acknowledge Pollock’s engagement with American Indian arts, I claim that Pollock’s world was one wherein the American Indian was embedded into the very fabric or episteme of the era. Because the notion of the
American Indian was ubiquitous during Pollock’s formative artistic years, this chapter seeks to bring this context into view.

Chapter Two identifies the polemic within modernism. We have already mentioned that the discourse of Pollock is divided. But is it important to analyze this polemic or is it sufficient only to note that it exists? With some analysis based upon a ground of discourse and values, it is easy to ascertain that not only is the socio-political context epistemic, but also art criticism is epistemic as well. If art criticism is also epistemic, based upon a historical a priori that grounds knowledge, then both the modernist and Jungian reviews of Pollock’s work are as much (or more) of a critique of Pollock’s context then just critiques of his work. This review first looks at the modern abstraction review and how this critique is based on political and cold war conditions. Since the modern critique forms the standard view of Pollock’s work found in anthologies, histories, retrospectives and textbook reviews, it is imperative that we situate this view within its own historiography and epistemic context. This convincing modernist view connects Abstract Expressionism with analytic Cubism through a variety of influences and sources, but it also over-simplifies the trajectory of Pollock’s work and neglects to account for his engagement with indigenous arts and themes. Next, a concise review of the Jungian critique of Pollock will account for a variety of theories, from psychoanalytic and Surrealist to Jungian. These theories formulate an interpretation that contradicts theories of pure form, but these are epistemic as well, based upon contextual trends and interests in psychoanalysis that also fail to account fully for the indigenous aspects in Pollock’s work. Combined, both theories constitute a polemic within the critique of Pollock as well as the larger epistemic discourse of modern theory, with its ties to the political and social discourse of its time. While some have identified the political interests in
Greenberg’s writings, I claim that art criticism in general can be highly partisan and therefore un-objective. From this point of view, one which we shall consider as a polemic-modernism, we will see the divisive and unsettled view of Pollock and how it has overlooked important indigenous elements in his work. Having clarified the contextual purposes for the art historian in terms of social, political and artistic contexts, and a review of the nature of art criticism as epistemically relating to its own historiography and political situation, we will have established a foundation upon which we can build a theory of *mimēsis* and all that this entails hereafter.

Chapter Three asks, if Pollock did in fact engage extensively and purposefully with American Indian arts, to what extent did he do so and how can we conceptualize this? First, this chapter draws upon Rushing and others’ observations on Pollock’s engagement with American Indian arts. It reviews Pollock’s influences (such as Wolfgang Paalen and John Graham), and establishes his interests in American Indian arts. Few scholars acknowledge Pollock’s interests in the American Indian arts and this chapter aims to suggest that this interest was a deeply held motivation for much of Pollock’s art. Second, it is generally believed that Pollock’s work was highly influenced by Picasso’s Surrealist and Cubist works. But within our view of the indigenous influences, we can see in this chapter, that rather than being the inheritor of the Picasso-esque, Pollock’s early work can be shown to be distinctly American and primitivist rather than Surrealist-Cubist. We will see that, rather than being works of “significant form” (using the terminology of Primitivism coined by Clive Bell), Pollock’s works reintroduce a significant content (“Aesthetic Hypothesis”15). Third, we will look at the notion of significant content, or content within the viewpoint of *mimēsis* as representation in its role of participating in social political discourse by discerning the key
differences between European and American Primitivism. While many acknowledge the primitivist elements in Pollock’s early works, I claim that there are key distinctions between American and European Primitivism that better help us understand both Pollock’s works and *mimēsis* itself. We will look at the definition of *mimēsis* in art and philosophy in order to aid our understanding of *mimēsis* as content, and to connect our discussion on form and content within the larger theoretical polemic, the divided theory and the larger subject-object divide that we have identified in Chapter Two. Acknowledging this broader polemic is important, for without this view, we would be left with having to continue to choose either the modernist or the Jungian view, and it would be hard to ascertain just how phenomenal it is that Pollock engaged in the recuperation of the spirit of indigenous art forms through *mimēsis*. Because Pollock references American Indian arts throughout his works, we need the lens of *mimēsis* to provide a new way to envision and understand them. Up to this point we have several key themes we are tracking: first, the episteme of the American Indian as a political and artistic icon; second, an epistemic and divided modernist theory; and third, an expanded view the art style Primitivism in order to better ascertain Pollock’s engagement with American Indian arts that forms the basis for analyzing Pollock’s work as primitivist and mimetic.

We tend to think of *mimēsis* as mere representation, illusion, and copies of the natural world. Within this view, the concept of *mimēsis* seems a bit shallow and misplaced, particularly in light of Pollock’s drip paintings. However, it is important that we expand our understanding of *mimēsis* in order to apply it to what appears to be the most iconic modernist and abstract of Pollock’s works, namely the drip paintings. Chapter Four signals a departure from political art criticism and art historical contexts. Here I present an original analysis of
mimēsis in terms of its forms as naturalistic and idealistic representation in order to analyze Pollock’s work more fundamentally outside Jungian and Modernist lenses. This chapter continues with an analysis of mímēsis in terms of its forms within a view of its historiography and particularly within the notions of representational and idealist form in order to clarify the tenets upon which idealist form depends. This analysis further underscores Pollock’s profound artistic vision and his commitment to that vision.

Having accounted for naturalistic and idealist representation as the modes of mímēsis, Chapter Five continues an analysis of mímēsis in terms of its primary idealist modes of representation, namely: the symbolic, metaphorical, allegorical and ritual modes. Each mode is built upon its preceding modes and all are operational in Pollock’s work. In this chapter I continue with an original analysis of mímēsis in terms of its modes and claim that it is primarily these modes of mímēsis that give us a unique view into the profound depth of thought and execution in Pollock’s works, and where we most readily come to see and understand the recuperation of the indigenous spirit of art in Pollock’s allegorical works of art, including his drip paintings.

Though this dissertation could conclude having identified the forms and modes of mímēsis and their applications in Pollock’s works, we still have one more question to resolve: how can we account for the mythic qualities in Pollock’s paintings? Chapter Six leads us into a key issue that arises from the concept of mímēsis, which is the issue of myth and its relationship to truth, which is to say its functions. Within a discussion on mímēsis as mimeisthai, or that which represents the un-representable through idealist form, I analyze mímēsis as representational of notions of knowledge and truth in terms of recognition, cognition, correspondence, mythos and myth. In conclusion, Chapter Six enables us to see
how fluidly Pollock’s engagement or recuperation of the indigenous spirit in art can be explained through an expanded concept of *mimēsis* and *mythos*. Because our understanding of *mimēsis* ultimately derives from Plato and Aristotle’s concepts, our discussion ends with an analysis of *mimēsis* as it is defined and located in ancient thought. This excavation of *mimēsis* as *mythos* or truth and its relationship between myth and form is primary to our broader understanding of *mimēsis* and Pollock’s work. It also returns us to the problem of a divided and even polemical modernist critique. For our discussion will demonstrate that the divide in modernism between formal abstraction and psychoanalytic thought neglects the notion of myth in art, even while perpetuating the mythic in Pollock’s biography.

The Conclusion to this study ends with a discussion of *mimēsis* in terms of ritual as performance, or what we might call the dialectic of immanent and transcendent art. This point demonstrates how the recuperation of the indigenous spirit is manifest in the act of art making and the performance of art. Rather than being evidences of the autonomy of pure abstract form, through *mimēsis* as ritual Pollock’s drip paintings lie at the apex of two distinct art traditions: the modernist view of pure form, and the postmodern view of art as happening and performance. It is in this field of *mimēsis* that Pollock recuperated the spirit of American Indian arts as ritual and performance. This is not to say that Pollock acted himself as the shaman, but rather that he returned notions of truth and the event of truth to art.

There are many pertinent biographies which give insight into Pollock’s life and the social and political context of his life. One of the earliest is B. H. Friedman’s biography, *Energy Made Visible*. In an interview with Lee Krasner, Friedman asked Krasner about Pollock’s figurative work. Krasner explained that,
I was familiar with his notebooks and drawings, a great body of work that most people didn’t see until years later, after Jackson’s death. I’m not talking about drawings he did as a student of Benton, but just after that, when he began to break free, about in the mid-‘thirties. For me, all of Jackson’s work grows from this period; I see no more sharp breaks, but rather a continuing development of the same themes and obsessions. I saw his paintings evolve. Many of them, many of the most abstract, began with more or less recognizable images – heads, parts of the body, fantastic creatures. Once I asked Jackson why he didn’t stop the painting when a given image was exposed. He said, ‘I chose to veil the imagery’. Well, that was that painting. With the black-and-whites he chose mostly to expose the imagery. I can’t say why. I wonder if he could have. (“Interview” 35-36)

I believe that Krasner’s point is essential to our understanding of Pollock’s work. His work was based on a development of certain themes, a consistent inquiry into the nature of art inspired by his knowledge and engagement with the American indigenous arts. His desire to conceal and veil, and to expose and unveil figurative imagery is a key element in Pollock’s work, and one which we can best understand within an expanded discussion on mimēsis and its role in art.

After all the many monographs and biographies about Jackson Pollock and his drip paintings there is yet more to be learned from his work. This study builds and depends upon the important works of Henry Adams, Bernard H. Friedman, Helen A. Harrison, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, Francesca and Sylvia Winter Pollock, Jeffrey Potter, Deborah Solomon, and other biographers who have pondered and studied all that is Jackson
Pollock. Further, the critical reviews of Pollock’s works by Hilton Kramer, Lawrence Alloway, Jeremy Lewison, William Rubin, Irving Sandler, Charles Stuckey, Kirk Varnedoe, Pepel Karmel and others are all vital contributions to our understanding of Pollock’s work. Several key monographs, exhibition catalogues and key articles give insights to Pollock and his artworks as well, including those by Alberto Busignani, Elizabeth Frank, Ellen G. Landau, Frank O’Hara, Bryan Robertson, Daniel Abadie, Claire Stoullig, David Anfam, Susan Davidson, Margaret Ellis, Katharine Beatjer, Lisa Mintz Messinger, Nan Rosenthal, Francis V. O’Connor, Bernice Rose, and many others. Further, the insights of W. Jackson Rushing are essential to this present study. But despite all the work done thus far, we are still fascinated with Pollock, perhaps because we have not yet fully qualified what aspect of our humanity he reveals to us through his drip paintings, and more especially yet how his inquiry, research and pursuit of ideas remains to be fully understood and analyzed. This study therefore hopes to shed a bit more light, or uncover a new perspective on Pollock’s work and his drip paintings that will help us get closer to a fuller understanding of his work, the time in which he worked, and his art as it was, is, and has become. But the question now is not whether or not Pollock is the quintessential modernist or if he sought to connect or reveal the unconscious or Jungian archetypes through his art work. For while we know that art and art criticism springs from specific cultural and political motivations and sources, the question is why have the indigenous references in Pollock’s work been overlooked by the modernist and Jungian critiques? More importantly, how can we now account theoretically for the American Indian art elements in Pollock’s work? I argue that we can answer both questions through an analysis of both Pollock’s representational and idealist tendencies through an expanded understanding of mimésis.
Chapter One

On View: A Ubiquitous Indigenous Icon

I have always been very impressed with the plastic qualities of American Indian art.
Jackson Pollock

Introduction

While some scholars acknowledge Pollock’s engagement with American Indian arts, most overlook just how deeply the topic of the American Indian was embedded into the very socio-political context of Pollock’s youth and his formative years of artistic training. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the degree to which the American Indian was employed iconographically and ideologically within the arts and socio-politics of the era before and between the World Wars in order to prove that a distinct and pertinent view of the American Indian was epistemic to the times and it informed the arts, including those of Pollock and his contemporaries. This chapter excavates the importance of this Indian-episteme in order to demonstrate the degree to which this facet is vital to Pollock’s work and the degree to which it has been neglected by the critical review of Pollock’s work. In so doing, we will explore four main concerns. First, we will explore the degree to which the idea of the American Indian was of great interest to Pollock and his work. Second, this chapter will differentiate how forms of representing the American Indian and American Indian arts differ from traditional depictions of the Indian as an ethnographic subject to becoming an iconic subject in politics and the cultural landscape. It also summarizes the
ubiquity of the American Indian as subject and icon to suggest how vital this was to an important mid-twentieth century epistemic shift that appropriated the American Indian as an icon for nationalistic purposes. Third, this chapter identifies the aestheticized American Indian in art display and three primary schools of artistic production and art criticism, all of which further identify the era as one of the Indian-episteme. Fourth, this chapter summarizes the prolific dissemination of the iconic American Indian in all cultural sectors, from politics to merchandising, and from fine art to popular arts and culture. The result of these considerations will confirm that as modernism took root in the New York art world, particularly just preceding and after the end of World War II, artists like Pollock relied heavily upon ancient indigenous American traditions, themes and symbols to create a powerful and unique version of modern art. That many other artists also did so is evidence that the American Indian was a vital aspect of the geist, ethos, or prevailing episteme of the time.

I borrow the notion of episteme from Michel Foucault, who used to term to denote any given body of knowledge (constituted by the sciences, arts, language, and economics) that defines or describes a given historical era. This is to say that an episteme is one which defines the spirit of an era, or its cultural tendencies, marking out its apparent boundaries, concerns, and knowledges. This body of knowledge or understanding defines an era while constituting what can be considered to be knowledge. As Foucault explains, “in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always [an] episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice” (“Order” 168). This is to say that each society has its body of ideas or paradigms that govern and define the subjects and themes which predominate in arts and sciences, and as Foucault
explains, these constitute the discourse of what is held to be true or valid for the age (Foucault, “Truth” 109). For example, the Age of Enlightenment describes the concepts, ideals, inquiries, and outcomes within the arts and sciences which describe it. These facts and descriptions of the era can be compared and contrasted to the concepts, ideals, inquiries, and outcomes of the arts and sciences of any other era (such as the Renaissance era, or in our case, post-WWII American arts and politics). This system or body of knowledge is both descriptive of the ethos or geist or spirit of the era, and constitutes what is permissible as knowledge or understanding. In our use of the term here, we are suggesting that the spirit or condition of the socio-political era that informed Pollock’s youth and formative creative training was one imbued with a particular and describable notion of the American Indian that is inherent within the arts, politics, and social sciences of the era, so much so that we can describe this era as an American Indian-episteme even though this facet of the American ethos or episteme of the era has been grossly overlooked. This chapter aims to demonstrate the ubiquity of the American Indian subject in order to highlight its relevance as epistemic in the politics and arts of the era, and particularly those of Pollock.

The American Indian Aesthetic in Pollock’s Work

In a questionnaire accompanying his first one-man show at the Art of This Century Gallery, New York City, in November of 1943, Jackson Pollock confessed that the indigenous American Indian arts were influential in his work. He wrote,

I have always been very impressed with the plastic qualities of American Indian art. The Indians have the true painter's approach in their capacity to get
hold of appropriate images, and in their understanding of what constitutes painterly subject matter. Their color is essentially Western, their vision has the basic universality of all real art. (“Answers”, 560)

Pollock believed that American Indian art traditions represented the notion of ‘westernism’, containing universal vision and displaying ideal subject matter, imagery, and color. Bernard Freidman, one of Pollock’s friends and early biographers quoted Pollock’s own description of his working method. According to Freidman, Pollock said,

My painting does not come from the easel, I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the west. [Italics mine.]

I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added.

When I am in my painting, I am not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of ‘get acquainted’ period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well. (“Energy” 100)
Synthesizing from Navajo sand painting the methods of circumambulation, sand as media, and working around and within a painting from the four sides, Pollock (by his own admission) created his best works, his drip paintings.

We might ask why historians have consistently referred to Pollock’s early engagement with the Southwest and the American Indian yet scarcely examine how this context may have shaped him in his early formative years by creating a unique orientation to the world, and likewise contributed to his aesthetic development? His interest in American Indian art is well documented and probably began when, as a seven-year-old boy, his family moved to Phoenix, where there were several Indian reservations nearby. We can certainly see that Pollock’s childhood environment was unique. Even today more than twenty reservations occupy one-fourth of the land area of Arizona, including the nations of the Apache, Hopi, Maricopa, Navajo, Papago, Pima, Yavapai, Yuma, and others. The largest tribes include the Navajo, Apache, Hopi, Hualapai, Colorado River Community, Gila River Community, Havasupai, and the Kaibab-Paiutes. The Gila River Reservation and the Ak-Chin Indian Community are located on the southern outskirts of Phoenix. It was there that Pollock first encountered American Indian and Navajo art, explored ruins, and attended public exhibitions of sand painting. According to Sanford Pollock (Jackson’s brother), their exposure to Indian culture and art was a frequent occurrence. Sanford reflects, “In all our experiences in the west, there was always an Indian around somewhere” (qtd. Rushing, “Ritual” 281). Rushing reminds us that Pollock’s brothers, particularly Charles, were also interested in the art of the Southwest Indians. Together they had collected some twelve volumes of the Annual Report of the Bureau of American Indian Sand Painting sometime between 1930 and 1935 (“Ritual” 281).  

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In a letter to the critic William Rubin, Pollock’s brother Charles wrote,
I have the Eighth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1891). Among other things, it contains 12 chromolitographic plates. Four of these are sand paintings, the others ritualistic paraphernalia – blankets, feathers, paints, etc. Jack had several volumes of this kind. As I remember, we bought them together in one of the then innumerable secondhand bookstores on 4th Avenue – sometime between 1930 and 1935. (qtd. Friedman, “Energy” 91)

Pollock’s interest in indigenous arts is also evident by the many journals and articles on indigenous arts in his personal library. The artist Alfonso Ossorio (who was a personal friend of Pollock and also an early collector of his works) recalled that sometime in 1949 he saw Pollock’s extensive collection of some twenty volumes of the proceedings of the Smithsonian Reports on Native American Art. The Reports are filled with nineteenth-century drawings, various artifacts, and artworks including buffalo hide paintings, masks, tepees, and sand paintings. Ossorio writes,

He had an enormously catholic appreciation of the art of the past: Indian sand painting, Eskimo art, or the baroque. I think at one stage, when he was younger, he went to museums. He certainly knew the anthropological collection at the Museum of Natural History very well. And he knew the art of the American Indian because he had lived part of his life in the Southwest. He had the fifteen volumes published by the Smithsonian on American anthropology – he once pulled it out from under his bed to show me – I remember being surprised that someone so poor could have such a publication. (Plessix and Cleve 50)
Francis O’Connor tells us that in addition to the twelve volumes of the *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Indian Sand Painting*, and the fifteen volumes published by the Smithsonian on American anthropology, Pollock also owned a copy of John Graham’s *System and Dialectics* and several volumes of Wolfgang Paalen’s *DYN*, all of which featured the art of the American Indians. He also owned multiple books and articles based on mythology, anthropology, and the primitive art of the American Indian and other cultures (O’Connor and Thaw 4:187-99). While more will be said later on about the influence of Paalen and Graham in promoting Native American arts and aesthetics, Pollock’s interest in Native American art is evident by his extensive literary collection on American art and shows both his focus on these influences as well as the great impact they had on his later work.

Pollock’s interest in indigenous arts, particularly in the techniques of Navajo sand painting is evident, not just in his drip paintings but throughout much of his work. Early works display Indian symbols and allegories, while his later drip paintings mirror Navajo sand paintings in the use of horizontal canvases as well as his technique of circumambulating the canvas while dripping paint mixed with sand by the use of sticks and trowels. In methods and materials, Pollock’s work shows many affinities with indigenous art traditions (Fig. 1).

Pollock’s interest and focus on Indian culture and art preceded his formal studies in New York, continued throughout his formative work, and is also well documented in nearly all of the biographical literature. From this viewpoint, it is strange then that in the critical debate, particularly between Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg (as well as in the reviews of various others), these interests and influences were not seriously considered as a point of Pollock’s aesthetic inquiry.
It is from this question of Native American aesthetics in the art of Pollock (and others) during the decade of the 1950s, that this dissertation takes as its point of departure. For Pollock’s engagement with American Indian arts and techniques is fundamental to his work, even so much so that the bulk of his work can be seen as a recuperation of indigenous American aesthetics.

When reviewing the critical review of Pollock’s work, it is clear that this issue of indigenous aesthetics has been misunderstood or even grossly overlooked or covered up. The present modern and postmodern discourse insufficiently accounts for the recuperation of this indigenous aesthetic spirit in the work of Pollock and other likeminded artists. The result of this deliberate omission has had far-reaching consequences, since the modernist and postmodern art criticism has left unexamined the processes of representation, allegory, ritual and trace in Pollock’s work. It has also missed the fact that Pollock united the notions of
ideal form with the postmodern tendency towards the revival of historical, cross-cultural
elements and process, and this missing perspective threatens to breach the critical line that
has historically been drawn between Modernism and Postmodernism, Western and Non-
Western aesthetics, notions of the ‘civilized’ and ‘indigenous’, and the issues of ideal form
and postmodern multiplicities. Situating Pollock’s work within an alternate view with regards
to indigenous influences blurs long established critical boundaries that have shaped the
current understanding of Pollock’s work. The blurring of these critical boundaries reveals
that Pollock’s work relies upon an underlying indigenous aesthetic, which articulated within
notions of mimésis provides us with a new and profoundly expanded understanding of his art,
and also formulates an alternative reference point from which to address his works.

This new perspective on Pollock’s work and its ties to indigenous ritual will also allow us
to perceive a common logic, affinity, and natural progression within the experiments of a
peculiar set of artists that include John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg,
Allan Kaprow, and even the work of Andy Warhol (particularly his life films). For these
artists understood that the progress of art was not to be found in the regressions of inter-war
period Social Realism nor the worn and hackneyed schematics of immigrant Surrealism, but
rather in the representation, reiteration, and ritualizing of an indigenous American spirit, and
an experiment on the manifestation of such geist in ritual, in life, and in object. 6 This present
chapter seeks to define this geist or spirit of the age as one which looked to the American
Indian as an icon of a burgeoning nascent American identity that profoundly affected the
course of Pollock’s work and outlook. With these points of orientation in view then, we have
before us the notion of Pollock as a deliberate seeker into the forms and subjects of American
Indian arts, and in so doing, he developed a new expansive indigenous aesthetic that
combined elements of both the indigenous American Indian arts and contemporary modernism. For our purposes here, the use of the term ‘indigenous’ is twofold. It involves the matter of the ‘indigenous’ American Indian and arts as well as the larger matter of Pollock’s contribution to an evolving American art paradigm and style. The notion that Pollock’s work is an amalgam of Indian and indigenous aesthetics, and art as process, trace, and form, constitutes the balance of this dissertation.

But before we can turn our attention to Pollock’s aesthetic we must better understand the broader world into which Pollock was born (or “thrown”) and the socio-political context that informed his life and work. This concept of “thrownness” (which I borrow from Martin Heidegger), is to say that we all exist in a pre-existing world which we share with others. This shared world is constituted by the socio-political conditions, culture, language, values, mores and traditions. “Thrownness” describes the shared socio-political-cultural heritage which one enters at birth. As Heidegger explains, “thrownness” is to be “within the world” as being-in-the-world in such a way that [one] can understand itself as bound up in its “destiny” with the being of those entities which it encounters within its own world” (Heidegger and Krell 56). Our first task in this chapter is to look at this shared world in terms of its views and representations of the American Indian, in a context that lies outside of the traditional historical frame, in order to formulate a theory of the Indian as a primary political and social icon during the era. But the purpose of this chapter is to do more than suggest the impact of the American Indian on Pollock’s formative years and artistic development; it is also to reveal how entrenched the American Indian was in nearly all social disciplines, from government and popular culture to the fine arts.
Reframing the Cultural Landscape

Traditionally the American Indian was portrayed ethnographically in studies and fine art. But these portrayals were exchanged for a view of the American Indian as a socio-political icon of the era and demonstrate how this icon permeated all social disciplines representing the ideals and values of the era. As we revisit our traditional views on the Depression and inter-War era, we will see more tangibly just how the American Indian as an icon is embedded into the cultural fabric. It is in a view derived from the aesthetic and representational realm that we see the pressures and assumptions of an ‘artefactual’ and ‘political’ American Indian being particularly pressurized and worked-out. As we will come to see, this shared cultural and aesthetic view is internalized and aestheticized in a deeply personalized way for Pollock. Our appreciation of this fact is enhanced with a review of the visual culture of the Americas as it regarded and represented the Native American.

At this point, there are five key elements that need to be addressed showing just how embedded or epistemic the visual ‘artefact’ of the American Indian was during the era. First, the visual culture of the American Indian maintains a traditional ethnographic view of the American Indian. Second, the appropriation of the American Indian as an iconic image infused with political meanings arose in the New Deal era. Third, the iconic image was established within government sponsored art programs and artworks (including architecture and murals) and repeated and distributed throughout the nation. Fourth, aestheticized viewpoints within art, art criticism, exhibition, and community education further contributed to the entrenchment of the iconic-aestheticized American Indian within art circles. Finally, the distribution of the iconic and aestheticized American Indian spread, in a type of trickle-down aesthetics, throughout all popular media and mass-consumer sectors.
While the ethnographic view of the American Indian was a popular topic in the thirties, it was not a new phenomenon to natural history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As early as 1846, the Smithsonian Institution was commissioned to collect and display Indian artifacts in order to demonstrate the customs, manners, and history of the American Indians. Fully aware of the destruction and loss of life, habitat, and lifestyle for diverse Indian tribes across the nation due to Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the doctrine of Manifest Destiny in the United States, museum directors attempted to historicize, study, and to some extent preserve the ethnographic Indian before ‘its’ complete disappearance. We can refer to this period as the “artefactual” phase in the development of the emerging indigenous-episteme that we are discussing, a paradigm which would be in full appearance as a particular mindset in Pollock’s youth, epistemic within political, popular, and aesthetic viewpoints. During this era, Manifest Destiny (as an official policy of the United States) was still under full sway as late as the 1890s. The primitive state of the American Indians was viewed as destined to decline in the wake of modernity. Within this burgeoning national identity in terms of expansion, the ethnographic regionalist view of the Indian was promoted by bureaucrats and critics alike.

Speaking to the Smithsonian Board of Regents, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, the author of a 6-vol history called the *Native Americans, Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (1856), commissioned the museum to collect and preserve Indian artifacts from each Indian nation as each began to wane or disappear in terms of its unique cultural identity. This move created a wide collection of ethnographic knowledge, widely available to the broader museum going and academic culture. The United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the
Smithsonian Board of Regents, the United States Bureau of Ethnology, and various ethnologists and anthropologists collected, studied, and popularized various artefacts and produced theoretical historiographies. To this end, the Smithsonian underwrote several studies and expeditions and established the National Indian Portrait Gallery in 1865. The gallery included portraits of Indian Chiefs who had traveled to Washington and which Charles Bird King had painted for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Fig 2).

Figure 2  Charles Bird King, *Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees*, 1821, oil on canvas, 28 in. x 36 1/8 in. (71.1 x 91.8 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum

Early publications included *Sketch of the Navajo Tribe of Indians, Territory of New Mexico* by Dr. Jonathan Leatherman, 1865 and *The Problem of the Ohio Mounds* by Cyrus Thomas in 1889.

Other artists aware of the critical problem of the decline of the American Indian and culture created works of art in protest of the government’s offences, showing that artifact gathering was a way to preserve the essence of indigenous culture. Such views have since
become part of the American artefactual landscape and the ethnographic paradigm which were in full focus during Pollock’s youth and formative years. For example, Pollock would have known of the artist George Catlin who attempted to document the fading American Indian and his likeness. Anticipating the potential demise of authentic Indian culture, Catlin emphasized the importance of his work saying, “I have flown to their rescue – not of their lives or their race (for they are “doomed” and must perish), but to the rescue of their looks and their modes” (Catlin 165-6). In similar fashion, as a form of protest and documentation, John Augustus Stone wrote *The Last of the Wampanoag an Indian Tragedy in Five Acts*. The play was performed at the Park Theatre in New York City early as 1821. At least seventy-five other Indian related plays were subsequently written in the nineteenth century. Moreover, following Old World ethnological hierarchies, the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair hosted a view of humanity with exhibits of national groups. On an outdoor arcade outside the main fairgrounds was a region named the Midway Plaisance where live exhibits, rides, orchestras and bands playing ethnic music and sideshows delighted more than two million fair attendees. Much like Disney World’s “It’s a Small World” display, whites (Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, and Celtic groups) formed the front line of exhibits. Farther into the arena one could see exhibits of live Asians, Africans, and finally American Indians on display (Fig. 3).
These types of ethnographic representations and displays attempted to preserve ethnographic information that continues even today to shape our prevailing ideas regarding the American Indian and his/her cultural past. Our prevailing cultural knowledge remains topological and ethnographic and this view is preserved in textbooks, anthologies, and museum collections. Pollock’s knowledge was likewise framed by such artefactual compilations, and this is an important fact that is often mentioned, but little understood within the context of Pollock’s oeuvre.

The idea of the American Indian as a primitive man in decline in the wake of modernity was in full revival during Pollock’s youth and developing years as an artist. This resurgent interest was expressed in the many exhibits, natural history museums, and galleries during the late 1930s and 40s. In fact, during this period the United States experienced a vast increased interest in the ethnographic American Indian. A gathering of information was disseminated in the form of articles, books, and exhibitions – largely aimed at preserving Indian arts in the wake of cultural decline. By the 1930s natural history museums had
substantially increased their efforts to collect Indian art objects in their permanent collections. Along with early collectors such as the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (founded in 1869), and the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian) in Washington D.C. (founded in 1910), the Museum of the American Indian, the Heye Foundation, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Brooklyn Museum all had established extensive permanent collections (Fig. 4).

Figure 4  Images Selected from Goodyear Archival Collection at The Brooklyn Museum, Images with caption quotes selected from A Portfolio of Photographic Views of the World's Columbian Exposition

Like the stately Renaissance wunderkammers, United States natural history museums and university collections had amassed a large collection of American Indian artificialia, namely,
handcrafts, rugs, pottery, jewelry, clothing, and ritual objects, making them available to the wider public. These exhibits were generally ambiguously designed displays that mixed ethnographic objects, photographs, and paintings. These cabinets of American Indian art were also displayed in the expositions, exhibits, and galleries that Pollock visited. These objects and artworks on view were also extensively reproduced in the publications that Pollock extensively collected. Before the American Indian was appropriated for nationalistic purposes, the subject of the ethnographic American Indian was already a key feature in the cultural landscape and was regarded and represented in ‘artefactual’ or ethnographic ways. These tangible facets of the social landscape can be defined as contributing to the overall Indian-episteme or geist of the era.

This ethnographic view changed significantly, however, once New Deal bureaucrats promoted and defined the national art program which was to represent a new national Depression era consciousness and identity. The American Indian, as a symbol of nationalistic authenticity, history, and origins became embedded within a new political-Indian-episteme. Under Roosevelt’s New Deal bureaucracy and programs, traditional views of the ethnographic American Indian were shaped and institutionalized into a new American ethos and nationalist identity. During a meeting on the future of the arts, held in Washington, D.C., December 8, 1933, an arts committee created the general outlines of the first federally-sponsored art program in the history of the nation. The committee included Edward Bruce, director of the newly created Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), Forbes Watson, a former art critic and technical director of the PWAP, several museum directors, and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Their art program supported New Deal aims of reform, repair, and relief. Designers of the Project were aware of the vastly diverse American landscape. They hoped to
unify that landscape through the promotion and dissemination of public art. A press release on the significant meeting was released the following Monday. The release announced that,

More than at any time during the past fifteen years the American artist is contemplating the American scene. More than ever he is looking at and into the life of his own land. So that at this time particularly the government’s project should result in a valuable native record [italics mine]. (Smithsonian)

The committee defined the artistic paradigm aimed at including the indigenous and unifying the diverse. From 1935 to 1942, Pollock worked for the PWAP, first in the public monuments department making $1.75 an hour, and later in the mural division, where his brother Sande also worked (Adams, “Tom” 154).

Following the example of the Mexican government, Roosevelt’s New Deal government commissioned artists to promote the national agenda, similar to the muralist program in Mexico. It had begun in the early 1920s (a decade before the US program), when the Mexican government funded many intellectuals and artists in Mexico City to design murals for public and government buildings in order to reinforce official political messages that emphasized Mexican rather than European themes. As Octavio Paz explains, the similarities to both the Mexican and the United States’ programs are more than coincidence since both expressed the geist of the times, a nationalistic fever which had spread throughout Europe and Russia, Latin America and the United States (Paz 11). In fact, the artistic and critical response to the New Deal art program is similar to the critique of leftist theories by the likes of muralist painter David Siqueiros, who cried, “We must rid ourselves of the European Utopia of art for art’s sake... We must put an end to the egocentrism of modern
European art and the false *collection* of official Mexican art, with its ‘socialism’ ” (413). Siqueiros promoted an inclusive art, “We will be preparing ourselves for the society of the future, in which our type of art will be preferred to all others, because it is the effective daily expression of art for the masses” (414). Abroad, Theodor Adorno, in a *Letter to Benjamin*, succinctly unveiled the matter underlying the issues inherent in European art and political art, which came to be a concern in the United States in later debates regarding Regionalism and modernism. Adorno explained, “I am convinced that the further development of the aesthetic debate which you have so magnificently inaugurated, depends essentially on a true accounting of the relationship of the intellectuals to the working-class” (523). Whether framed as New Deal relief reforms or working class agendas, art was at the service of politics, and in the United States, both disciplines appropriated the iconic and ethnographic views of the indigenous in order to define the nation as being separate and distinct from European and socialist nations.

This national agenda for art was supported and promoted by Interior Secretary Harold L. Ickes. As Secretary, Ickes oversaw the construction in the mid-1930s of the new Department of Interior Building in Washington D.C. one of the most significant projects propelling the American Indian to the foreground of American politics and art. The new Department of the Interior Building was designed by Waddy Butler Wood with much input and direction from Ickes (Fig. 5).
Ickes had previously served in the Works Progress Administration over Indian Affairs, and he used the construction of the building to promote the new iconic American Indian by adding distinct motifs and commissioning key works of art. For example, he commissioned details such as a buffalo doorknob with an eagle doorplate to adorn the building (Fig. 6). As well, Ickes commissioned at least twelve murals for the building featuring and highlighting American Indians in several traditional domestic habitats and scenarios, including being taught agriculture by European American farmers. To promote Indian art objects, Ickes also designed the Indian Craft Shop, located on the first floor of the Department of the Interior Building, which sold arts and crafts by living Indian artists. Ickes was fully involved in all these commissions in his work for the PWAP and as Interior Secretary. He reviewed sketches and inspected mural cartoons, made design changes and requests, and inspected murals as they were being painted for the Interior Building. Ickes was particularly influential in bringing a new iconic Indian into the limelight of contemporary news and attention. For
example, the Washington Daily News wrote that “Secretary Ickes has a paternal concern for the new Interior Building. He designed most of it himself, and financed it through WPA” (Look 13). It is especially in the Building’s murals that we see an official arts program and the epistemic nationalized iconic American Indian.

The murals demonstrate how the ethnographic profile of the American Indian became embedded in the visual fabric of the social world as an icon for political purposes. They show that through the WPAP working artists, government bureaucracies and bureaucrats, the American Indian became a central subject within the new national agenda and episteme. Painted by Maynard Dixon, the Interior Building murals *Bureau of Indian Affairs: Indian and Teacher*, 1939 and *Bureau of Indian Affairs: Indian and Soldier* 1939 which hang in the Building’s third floor on the north side stress this centrality of the American Indian as a key epistemic national subject (Fig. 7, 8).
Both murals represent the core agenda the Bureau of Indian Affairs had for the American Indians, providing a means by which they could culturally transition from a warrior based economy to an agricultural economy. The soldier mural features two Indians, one of which wears a full warrior headdress and carries a war club. Both Indians are positioned next to two soldiers, one of whom resembles Captain George Armstrong Custer resting on his cavalry sword. The central Indian holds a peace pipe that points to the throat of the central soldier.
Dixon meant this to suggest that “This is our land. You shall drive us no further” (Doss, “Presentation”). But the overarching theme suggests the victory of the US over the Indian warrior and the transition of the nineteenth-century warrior lifestyle into a peaceful coexistence with the dominant power. Like the iconic image on the Indian Head penny, the warrior signifies a stoic and idealized past, a symbol of the ethnographic view which surrenders to the commercial and political US agenda.\textsuperscript{11} The ethnographic American Indian takes on new meanings that are entrenched with nationalism and contemporary economic concerns. Furthering iconic associations with political economics, the Indians are framed in part by the silhouette of either a tepee or the suggestion of a country church façade, suggesting the role that religious conversion might play in the domestication of the Indian, while the abundant buffalo in the distance now echo a time long past.

A similar message is represented in Dixon’s farmer mural where a twentieth-century chieftain in western dress stands proudly against a tall stalk of corn. Meanwhile, an Indian woman carries large stalks of corn, and a youth (both in western clothing) learns farming techniques from a government official dressed in a khaki uniform. Beyond the figures there is a vast open landscape and a tall barn, suggesting an ample harvest and stores for the winter. Clearly there is a change in the epistemic framing of the American Indian, from ethnographic views to one of assimilation. Lost in the view of the American Indian are the ethnographic details of tribal dress, cultural practices, and beliefs that otherwise distinguish the figures from their European American counterparts.

Both murals were officially titled “Themes of the Bureau of Indian Affairs” and were intended to suggest a progressive narrative of “the passing of the old regime of the Indian and the beginning of a new era” (Doss). Dixon’s narrative murals suggest the Bureau’s agenda
for the modernization of the Indian while also highlighting the loss of Indian culture this involved. The sense of loss is underscored by the monumental figures which are pushed close to the foreground and removed from a natural landscape through the flattening out of the picture plane. The wide empty space evokes the vast Western horizon but removes it from any notion of time or historical specificity. The presence of the Indian underscores a new era in Indian affairs and art-political agendas wherein the Indian is an important icon.

All the other Indian murals in the Interior Building commissioned by Ickes emphasize similar iconic views of the American Indian. Each shows a custom from Indian life and culture that situates the Indian within their cultural practices, but does so in symbolic and iconic ways. *Scenes of Indian Life* and *Apache Round Dance* by Allan Cafran Houser, 1940, *Buffalo Hunt* by Woodrow Wilson Crumbo, 1940, *Preparing Yard for Weaving* by Gerald Nailor, 1940, *Pueblo Life: Buffalo Chase, Pueblo Life: Buffalo Dance* and *Pueblo Life: Pottery Making* by Velino Herrera, 1940 and others feature Indians in social settings performing everyday activities pertaining to their respective lifestyles and customs (Fig.9).

Figure 9  Allan Cafran Houser, *Apache Round Dance* 1940, Mural, oil on canvas, 97" x 95", Program: Treasury Section of Fine Arts, Location: South Penthouse
But removed from any context, the images fail to show the effects of acculturation or assimilation relating to relocation, or 1930s policies aligned with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and its new commitment to Indian land ownership, tribal government and economic self-sufficiency. These other murals serve as a study of the characteristics of various peoples and the differences and relationships between them, but framed within the context of the larger government bureaucratic viewpoint. The view is always of an iconic Other wherein one Indian stands in for the whole or all others while representing a new political mode. Like in medieval emblems, the American Indian serves as a personification of a new nationalistic political identity. It precisely this type of political promotion of the iconic view of the American Indian that justifies the claim that the indigenous defines the episteme during this era.

One of the most iconic of WPAP murals featuring new political views on the American Indian was designed by Kenneth Adams, 1937 (Eldredge 13). Adams was commissioned to paint a mural series in the Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque (Fig. 10). Library president James Fulton Zimmerman requested four panels to portray the unity of the region’s diverse ethnicities: “The Indian, showing his work as the artist, The Spanish, giving a general idea of their contributions to the civilization in this area in the fields of agriculture and architecture, The Anglo, with scientific contributions, and The union of all three in the life of the Southwest” (University). The Indian mural depicts figures in traditional dress representing three nomadic tribes, the Apache, Pueblo and Navajo. The Spanish mural presents figures in traditional Spanish dress in an agricultural scene that includes agricultural fields, a small cabin, and a church.
A doctor with scientific emblems is emphasized in the Anglo mural. The arrangement of the panel continues to promote Old World hierarchical programs for ranking ethnographic groups and data. But in the fourth and final mural the ethnic groups are brought together in a scene of friendship and unity. Now dressed in contemporary clothing, the figures no longer represent individual cultural identities. Rather, the collective figures now embody New Deal ideals of unity, mutual cooperation and democracy for all. Adams’ Indian within New Deal politics is the quintessential iconic Indian figure. He is fully politicized and entirely assimilated. He is seen to be a united part of one nation, with a single shared cultural heritage and history. Overall the mural sequence is a tribute to the unification of European-American industry and agriculture displayed as an archetype ideal that relies upon the notion of a shared indigenous cultural heritage. The episteme of the era is one that seeks for origins and appropriates an iconic view of the American Indian in order to define a new national identity.
Just as seventeenth-century Dutch nationals looked to Germania and their mythic origins, Americans of the wartime thirties looked to establish a unique and indigenous national cultural heritage. Thus, stemming from a long history of ethnographic interest in the early origins of the United States forward, through a plethora of imagery the notion of the American Indian was codified and institutionalized as a political icon through government programs and bureaucracies growing out of the Depression and the New Deal policies. Through changing attitudes from Manifest Destiny and industrialism to a new nascent national identity based on nationalistic tendencies and origins, an ethnographic view became a politicized emblem rich in iconographic meaning. Ethnographic views of a remote Other became a central icon of government power. Ironically, this transition from margin to center appears to have occurred seamlessly. Roosevelt’s New Deal social welfare domestic policies were intended to repair the economy, bring relief to the poor, reform the financial system, bring about ethnic assimilation and the regulation of the American Indian. Regional art (with its inclusion of regional folklore, industries, and American Indians) was popularized through commissions to decorate the Interior Building, and the Treasury Department’s many commissions for murals in court houses, post offices, libraries, museums, universities, state capitols and other venues (Mazow 102). These artworks ostensibly document the episteme of the time as one of a new social consciousness of the American Indian as iconic and pertinent to the era. In promoting these representational and iconic views of the American Indian, the politics of the era influenced artists like Pollock, Gottlieb, Barnett, and others.

While this vision gives us a remote commentary on the state of American Indian affairs, it also echoes the world in which Pollock found himself as a youth in Arizona, and as a student and artist in New York City. Furthermore, this vision was not limited to the desert
fields of southern Arizona and the bureaucratic halls of Washington D.C. The New Deal Art Registry, an online collaborative database that catalogues public art created under the New Deal programs from 1934 to 1943, lists 135 Indian related murals. Many of these were painted on the walls of public federal post office buildings across the country. In post office murals, genre themes featuring heroicized American Indians witness to the emerging nationalistic episteme. Such murals were distributed throughout the broader American landscape. While art imitates life, it also implants images into the mind such that the average city or rural dwellers could perceive the plight and sights of the American Indian just as well any other sight or sound within their own perceptible locale. Thus the ubiquitous American Indian was, through murals and other commissioned projects, disseminated throughout the fabric of the US political-cultural landscape.

The distribution of the view of the American Indian as iconic demonstrates a politicized and popularized episteme, one that Pollock would receive and internalize from his youth onward, and which would later expand upon in his aesthetic practice. In a viewpoint of the “thrownness” of one’s being in the world, Pollock’s world consisted of views of the American Indian in his childhood and a plethora of American Indian imagery and artefacts in the WPAP works he was familiar with, and in some cases contributed to. During the Depression, when Pollock began working for Roosevelt’s Federal Arts Project, the United States experienced a new epistemic episode, an outgrowth of a prevailing and systemic interventionist paradigm which sought to construct a collective and unified national identity distinct from any European heritage or aesthetics. Pollock’s engagement with American Indians was unique, from his childhood experiences, interests in collecting publications and journals, and his work on the highly politicized WPAP murals. His life experiences gave him
a unique viewpoint into the complexities of iconic representation, appropriation, diversity, and alternative art making practices, all of which come to be factors in his later work after he left the WPAP. Within a backdrop of a tradition in representing the ethnographic –artefactual American Indian, New Deal bureaucrats promoted and defined a new national art program which appropriated the American Indian as an iconic symbol of authenticity, origins, and nationalism. The American Indian became embedded within a new political-Indian-episteme.

**The Aestheticization of the American Indian**

Within this backdrop of the ethnographic turned iconic view of the American Indian appropriated by a national agenda, Pollock and other artists tapped into the collective consciousness of the political frontier and appropriated indigenous art and art objects for new artistic purposes. These iconic artworks were government sponsored through New Deal art programs and artworks that distributed the iconic view throughout the nation. But the art world also embraced the representation of the American Indian. One of the early attempts to fully aestheticize the ethnographic was initiated by Amelia Elizabeth White. Originally from Santa Fe, White was a Bryn Mawr graduate and socialite. After serving as an army nurse in World War I, she relocated to Santa Fe along with her sister Martha, where in 1920 they built their estate El Delirio (“The Madness”) in a hybridized style that combined Moorish, Mexican and Pueblo designs. White became a passionate patron of Southwest American Indian art and an advocate for Pueblo Indian rights. She was connected to a wider circle of like-minded American cultural nationalists: intellectuals, artists, writers, musicians, anthropologists, and archaeologists who rejected national identities affiliated with Europe in
favor of more regional identities and affinities. White frequently relied on the advice of the archaeologist F. W. Hodge of the Heye Foundation for her developing collection of ethnographic literature. She also consulted with artists Walter Pach and John Sloan on her collection of modern art literature. At her estate, White entertained artists and ethnographers with chamber music concerts, costume parties, and theatrical entertainments. White also organized the Indian Arts Fund, the Laboratory of Anthropology, the Old Santa Fe Association, and the Santa Fe Indian Market. Notably, she also founded the Ishauu Gallery on Madison Avenue in New York, which later became the Gallery of American Indian Art in the early 1930s, a gallery Pollock would have frequently visited. The Gallery was exclusively devoted to Indian art. The gallery manager was Dolly Sloan, the wife of artist John Sloan. John Sloan also taught art at the Students Art League, where Pollock studied. Thus the New York and Santa Fe art schools were connected by White, Sloan and others.

In addition, White organized several traveling expositions of Indian art, including the widely known 1931 *Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts*. The *Exposition* was a well-organized attempt to promote American Indian arts. In addition to White, organizers included Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, wife of John D. Rockefeller, and Dorothy and her husband John Sloan, who served as the president. The Expo was supported by a long list of backers such as the Carnegie Corporation, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The Expo was also endorsed by the College Art Association and had the support of art critics like Walter Pach, the archaeologist F. W. Hodge and others. Many of the objects were drawn from the collections of avid and wealthy Indian art collectors including Abby Rockefeller, Jr., and Lou Henry, wife of Herbert Hoover, Amelia Elizabeth White, and Mary Cabot Wheelwright (Mullin 176). Clearly, early efforts to aestheticize were politically supported by
the artistic and political communities. The organizers were members of an elite group of eastern Anglo-American intellectuals who intended to “reconfigure the national identity” in ways that separated the nation from its European ties and claimed American Indians as “the first Americans” and as the creators of the “original American culture” (170).

The organizers were very clear in wanting to present Indian art as objects with aesthetic value rather than just displaying the objects as ethnographic artifacts. Mirroring political isolationist sentiments, they wanted to specifically challenge the prevailing belief that the designation of fine art was any object derived from European traditions. They believed that these indigenous objects should be included in fine art museums, particularly those devoted to Modern art, such as the newly established Whitney Museum. In a letter from Sloan to White regarding the possibility of entering similar objects into the later 1939 World’s Fair, Sloan wrote, “I agree with you that we must not go into the World’s Fair unless they will show the collection as Art and I do not feel that they will” (qtd. Mullin 173). In a similar tone, in the Exposition catalogue Introduction to American Indian Art, Sloan encouraged patrons and viewers to exercise their good taste to distinguish the fine art forms as intrinsically different from trinkets collected by travelers and tourists (174). Despite White and Sloan’s fears, the overall the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts was very successful and became a traveling exhibit. The show opened at the Grand Central Galleries in Manhattan, and then traveled for two years to many major cities in the East and Midwest, as well as to Venice for the XVIII Venice Biennale Internazionale d’Arte, 1932 (Rushing, “Spiritual” 273-274).

Critics reviewing the Exposition contributed to the popularization of the anesthetized native art object. One journalist described the Exposition as bearing “designs so dashingly
modern that one can scarcely believe they were woven into a blanket by an Indian woman who never heard of Paris” (qtd. Mullin 173). The Providence Sunday Journal, 1933, ran an article “She Learned from the Corn, the Rain and the Buffalo” praising the artist Tonita Peña for her inner artistic genius (qtd. Mullin 176). Such critics promoted the idea that there “might be systems of aesthetic value existing independently of the core of the modern world system and the historic capitals of fashion” (176). The aesthetic view of the Indian-made object was also promoted as highly fashionable in the popular press. White’s own collection of Pueblo Indian art objects was featured in newspaper and magazines such as House and Garden and House Beautiful (176). Inspired by the exhibit, the Junior League of New York City staged a fashion show that showcased Navajo Indian jewelry. The Associated Press report covering the show published a review stating such facts as, “Miss Challis Walker, a prominent debutante, wore a gown of sheer black velvet with a jet and turquoise necklace, a silver belt... all made by Navajo Indians” (qtd. Mullin 176). The exhibit successfully reframed Native American art objects as fine artworks with great aesthetic significance. Not only ethnographic, but aesthetic views of American Indians and their arts were prolifically disseminated, contributing to the Indian-episteme or a new collective consciousness from which Pollock and others were “thrown” into and drew upon, either actively and consciously or subconsciously.

The aestheticizing efforts of Sloan, White, Ickes, and others were successful and this era became marked by a drastic rise in collecting and exhibiting American Indian arts. For example, from its inception, the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, New Jersey was devoted to Native American art. The museum has in its collection objects in a wide variety of media: weaving, pottery, wood carving, jewelry, and textiles, some of which date to the early
eighteenth century. The collection represents the aesthetic achievements from seven major US regions—the Pacific Northwest Coast, California, the Southwest, the Plains, the Woodlands, the Southeast, and the Arctic. From 1930-32 Dorothy Miller worked at Montclair as curator of painting, working on cataloging, researching and installing the museum’s collection of American Indian. Influential in the dissemination of the aestheticized Indian, Miller left Montclair to join the staff of MoMA in October of 1934 as Assistant to the Director (and critic), Alfred H. Barr, Jr., where she continued to curate American Indian objects. At MoMA Miller was likely involved in the blockbuster American Indian art exhibit held there in 1941 which so fascinated Pollock (Vaillant 167-169). The exhibit was officially arranged under the direction of René D’Harnoncourt, who at that time was Director of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board of the Department of Interior. The review by George C. Vaillant indicated that the collection was drawn from museum collections across the United States as well as from current Indian artists and craftsmen. Rather ethnographic in its portrayal of art and Indian, the exhibition hosted live artists and artisans, some of whom demonstrated the technical processes for creating the otherwise holy Navajo sand paintings. Pollock visited the exhibit several times over, viewing an extensive collection of Inuit masks and witnessing demonstrations of Navajo artists making sand paintings on the gallery floors. Pollock watched how the artists held colored sand in their hands and with deft precision poured the sand onto the ground to create, through a combination of controlled and free motion gestures, precise outlines of mythic half-human and half-animal composite creatures.

These and many other museum exhibits attracted a wide viewership. According to Melissa Ho, Barnett Newman and his wife Annalee visited the Peabody Museums in Salem and Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1943 to view exhibits on Northwest Coast Indian, Pre-
Columbian, and African artworks. Furthermore, the Museum of the American Indian, the Heye Foundation, the American Museum of Natural History, the Montclair Art Museum, the Field Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, the Whitney Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art all exhibited their extensive and permanent collections which supplied information and inspiration for New York painters including Richard Pousette-Dart, Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock and others. The world of Pollock, his contemporaries, and teachers was replete with images and imagery, exhibits, articles, and reviews that along with public art and murals, contributing to a collective awareness of the American Indian from a variety of political and aesthetic viewpoints. The ubiquitous Indian-on-view was part of a nationalist agenda that was supported by bureaucrats, intellectual elites, and artists alike. Under their social reform agendas, the traditional way of representing the American Indian in ethnographic ways was exchanged for an iconic view that equated the American Indian with notions of nationalist nascent origins. The American Indian became assimilated into the power structures of framing and disseminating knowledge through New Deal politics and modern and Regionalist arts in a type of Indian-episteme that personified the new national identity, distinct and separate from any visual ties to Europe. New Deal government support programs were widely embedding the ethos of the American Indian nationally, Regionalism and public murals were painting indigenous views, and museums and curators were disseminating visual information about the American Indians. The subject of the American Indian is so widespread along cultural and political disciplines that we can claim that the era is one of an Indian episteme because the phenomenon of the Indian is not exclusive to one discipline only. Rather it is entrenched within the socio-political-aesthetic discourse of the time.
During the same period several regional art schools and museums were also advancing the same Indian-epistememe for the artistic and general public. As a result, it was not long before artists in New York, Santa Fe, Seattle and elsewhere began interpreting the aestheticized American Indian arts into hybrids of modern forms in paintings and sculptures and wrote about the new art for gallery exhibits. As we will explore in this section, the work and influence of several key individuals impacted Pollock and others to absorb into their work the motifs and spirit of the American Indian, with the end result that modern art was transformed. Clearly this vogue for indigenous arts, subjects, and forms was not limited to just a few abstract artists. Fueling the fashion for the modern indigenous, three primary schools of art sponsoring and promoting Native American art styles and aesthetics arose, namely the Santa Fe, the Pacific Northwest Coast, and the New York schools. Through the schools’ individual leaders, all were intricately interconnected through links to the burgeoning community of artists in New York. We will outline each in turn: first the Santa Fe school, and then the Pacific Northwest Coast and New York schools.

As has been previously mentioned, John Sloan, one of the leading members of the Modernist Ashcan School and one of Pollock’s instructors at the Students Art League, had more than a curious interest in the arts of the American Indians. Working with Amelia Elizabeth White and his wife Dorothy on the 1931 *Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts*, Sloan was particularly fascinated by the Pueblo Indians and what he saw as aesthetic freedom in their arts. In order to paint with the freedom he found in Santa Fe, he bought an adobe house on 314 Garcia Street in 1920, where he spent four months each year until 1954 (Fig. 11).
As mentioned above, White founded her Gallery of American Indian Art in New York in the 1930’s, and Sloan’s wife Dolly served as gallery manager. Like White and others of the Santa Fe art school (such as Mary Colter, 1869-1958, founder of the Santa Fe architecture and interiors style, and Dorothy Dunn, who founded the Santa Fe Studio School in the 1920s), Sloan believed whole-heartedly that the arts of the American Indians were works of fine art rather than ethnographic objects, a viewpoint espoused by White and the purpose of her Indian Art Exposition. Sloan was also one of the earliest advocates of indigenous art as aesthetic objects and was influential in disseminating this aesthetic approach not only in his association with White, Colter, Dunn, and various anthropologists and Santa Fe intellectuals, but also through his work with the Indian Art Exposition and other exhibits like it. In 1920 he arranged for the first exhibition of Indian paintings to be shown (along with Mable Dodge Luhan’s collection of contemporary paintings) at the Society of Independent Artists exhibit at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York.
John and Dorothy Sloan, through their involvement in the Art Exposition, creating an art center in Santa Fe focused on American Indian arts and portraits, and their associations with politicians, bureaucrats, social reformers, and intellectuals contributed to the popularization and dissemination of new views on the indigenous. Sloan’s work was also influential in motivating a new generation of artists at the Student Arts League, where he taught from 1916 until 1937. Pollock took Sloan’s life drawing class at the League in 1933. Both of Pollock’s instructors (Sloan and Benton) were involved in the dissemination of an artistic agenda that included new views of the American Indian as indigenous, and in terms of regionalism and nationalism, thereby contributing to the episteme of the era.

While Pollock associated more with Benton and Sloan, he also knew Mark Tobey and other members of the Pacific Northwestern Coast School. The Pacific Northwestern Coast School of indigenous inspired modern art interpreted the indigenous aesthetic in vastly different ways. The school included a group of confirmed and devoted artists, namely Mark Tobey, Guy Anderson, Morris Graves, and Kenneth Callahan, who all celebrated the aesthetic properties of indigenous arts (Fig. 12). They also greatly contributed to the episteme of the American Indian through a new aestheticized view of the indigenous in their art, although this view was distinctly modern and abstract. But given the national agenda and spirit of the times, it cannot be said that their subjects were entirely autonomous from political agendas. They believed that art was a type of metaphysical pursuit and the core values they sought to express were universal brotherhood, commonality of world’s religions,
primacy of the laws of nature, and art as a universal language (Junker 10). Tobey expressed the notion of universality in this way,

The root of all religions, from the Baha’i point of view, is based on the theory that man will gradually come to understand the unity of the world and the oneness of mankind. It teaches that all the prophets are one – that science and religion are the two great powers which must be balanced if man is to become mature. I feel my work has been influenced by these beliefs. (Hess 60)

The artists of the Northwest school sought to express metaphysical harmony through the appropriation of the rich cultural traditions of the Pacific Northwest’s Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Scandinavian and European immigrant populations. Tobey, Graves,
and Anderson were also avid collectors of Northwest Coast indigenous art and artifacts and they observed the dances and rituals of the Swinomish people at a longhouse near La Conner, Washington. They were intrigued and inspired by Tlingit totem poles and other Native American art objects (Junker 10). In fact, Tobey had escorted Dorothy Miller, the previously mentioned curator of paintings at MoMA, to see J. E. Standlye’s extensive collection of tribal arts which he kept in his Ye Olde Curiosity Shop on the Seattle waterfront, a store that boasts of its selling curiosities since 1899 (Junker 53). Within these influences and those brought home from their many travels abroad, the artists of the Pacific Northwest School drew upon pan-cultural myths and symbols for the foundations of their visual style. For example, Graves Eagle of the Inner Eye, 1941 evokes the spirit of a totemic warrior veiled within an opaque mountainous landscape (Fig. 13).

Figure 13  Morris Graves, Drawing for Eagle of Inner Eye, 1941
Pollock and others of the New York school knew Tobey and would have seen Tobey’s all over compositions and calligraphic white writing style at the Willard Gallery, New York City, in 1944 and also at the 1946 survey show at MoMA titled *Fourteen Americans*. The primary differences between the Santa Fe and the Pacific Northwest Coast schools lay in their representation of the particularities of the American Indian and his/her way of life, and the portrayal of universal ideals within idealized modes inspired by American Indian arts.

The New York school, like that of the Santa Fe and Pacific Northwest Coast schools, was the recipient of the same influences and modes of representation (ethnographic, iconic, and aestheticized), as a prevailing ubiquitous presence. Artists and students of art in New York City had access to many influential gallery and museum exhibitions and catalogues that explained the purposes and techniques of Navajo sand painting, mask making, and other Indian art topics. Pollock and Richard Pousette-Dart were both influenced by Navajo sand painting and Sloan’s students Pollock, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman were intrigued by Indian masks. We get a notion of the type of lessons Sloan would have taught his students by reading what he wrote in the catalogue for *The Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts*, mentioned earlier. As Sloan explains, “I believe Amer-Indian art will have more influence in America than the appreciation of African art has had in Europe…We want to help American consciousness to include this American art” (qtd. Rushing, “Native” 102). The insertion of the Indian-episteme in political and artist circles was deliberate and widely influential, particularly in the New York school of art. As we shall see by the end of this study, Pollock assimilated a variety of artistic ideas in his recuperation of the spirit of indigenous art, drawing upon the episteme of the American Indian which all aforesaid artists, critics, curators, bureaucrats, and politicians contributed to and helped to shape.
In addition to being fueled and promoted by art colleges and art schools, American Indian topics were promoted by artists and students. After the 1943 spring semester, students of the Art League continued their studies in one of the professors’ vacant lofts (probably Sloan’s, who left New York for Santa Fe every summer), which they called the Studio 35. The Studio conducted a series of twelve Friday evening seminars where various artists were invited to lecture. John Cage gave one of those lectures on Indian sand paintings, and it is believed that Pollock was in attendance (Breslin 263 and Sandler 27). While Pollock was a most avid follower of indigenous arts and culture, he was not entirely unique in his interests. Teachers Benton and Sloan brought iconic views and political agendas to the many Art League’s students. By the time that Pollock’s work was gaining traction in the New York art world, the artistic climate in which he was interacting had been greatly impacted by the wide variety of prevailing historical, cultural and political influences that we have been discussing in this chapter. From political and art centers in Washington D.C and New York City, to the West Coast and Southwest, the American Indian was portrayed in a multitude of ethnographic, iconic, and artistic ways. Artists from New York, Santa Fe, and Seattle experimented with ways to portray the American Indian either in portraits or by appropriating or aestheticizing their art forms, or the spiritual qualities embedded in their cultural practices and rituals. Politicians and curators promoted the portrayal and display of the indigenous in murals and exhibits throughout the cultural and political landscape.
Political Art Criticism

Art critics and art radio programs also popularized indigenous themes and subjects. Through art, art criticism, exhibition, and art education, the aestheticized view of the American Indian helped to plant the iconic-aestheticized American Indian within the Indian-episteme and prevailing national identity. The subject of the Indian permeates throughout the various disciplines of the socio-political-aesthetic discourse of the era. However, few have studied the role of the representation of the American Indian in Regionalism and Modern art styles although period critical theory supports our description of the national agenda and Indian-episteme. The Regionalist style is in every way as politicized and iconic as the WPAP murals and iconic views of the American Indians. In the practices, style, modes, subjects and techniques of Regionalism, we see the assimilation of New Deal politics and socialist resistance. It may seem we are diverting from our topic of how Pollock recuperated the spirit of the indigenous art. We might ask, how does Pollock’s aesthetic differ from contemporary views of the indigenous American Indian as it was being featured in political murals, exhibits, and the Regionalism of his mentor Thomas Hart Benton? The aestheticized viewpoints within art, art criticism, exhibition, and the art education community contributed to the ways of the iconic-aestheticized American Indian became entrenchment within the prevailing political and social Indian-episteme. A review of Regionalism through art criticism and theory helps to further establish this notion of the American Indian as both iconic and ubiquitous, and as a prime influence in Pollock’s work. Because a few key art reviews underscore the role of the ubiquitous iconic American Indian, we will investigate the role of art criticism in defining the Indian-episteme.
In a *New Republic* article written just months after the October stock market crash of 1929, Edmund Wilson urged artists to return to the painting of the portraits of an authentic American life. He wrote, “I wish that he [the artist] would study the diverse elements that go to make the United States, and give us their national portraits” (qtd. Westphal and Dominik 391). Arising out of the socio-political era between the wars, Regionalism articulated and reiterated a set of values grounded in notions of geography, land and location. It sought to establish a collective among the diverse and spread out expanses of the nation. Artists, politicians, writers, and apologists crafted an American cultural identity grounded in rural communities outside the modern urban centers. This is particularly important to our understanding of Pollock’s affinities with indigenous arts since Pollock’s primary teacher, Thomas Hart Benton, was one of the three primary and leading artists working in the regionalist style. What is important at this present juncture is to describe the art world of Pollock and his teacher Benton in order to better ascertain Pollock’s sympathies towards regionalist and Indian subjects.

Regionalism arose initially in the 1920s as a critical response to modern urbanization, industrialization and the standardization of mass culture. The movement was strengthened as a result of the Great Depression, when its subsequent unstable economy and social dislocations furthered the need to craft a sense of stability and place. Regionalism seemed to satisfy a “part of a desire for security of place amid the disorder and stress of the great depression [that] permeated all levels of American society” (Steiner 443). Regionalism became a politically charged national style brazenly opposed to European modernism through the pen of the influential art critic Thomas Craven, who wrote for the influential *The Dial*. Craven was consistent in his critique of modernism and his promotion of regional
aesthetics and his writings underscore the political context and overtones that informed both his and later critics’ assessments of art. In his 1929 essay, *The Curse of French Culture*, Craven penned, “Go back, my friends, to your own people, and develop the rich materials of your own land. Art is not produced by culture. Art is the child of new understandings and fresh appreciations of common things, and it is beyond the reach of those who are slaves to the impulses of others” (Craven, “Curse” 63). Later Craven added, “We have in America a number of painters who are not fooled by European conventions” (Craven, “American Men of Art” 266). Craven was adamantly in support of a new and uniquely American style of art.

Ironically, Craven’s words are later echoed by both Greenberg and Rosenberg who, after the victories of WWII, were seeking for the next wave and the re-centering of the avant-garde. For not long after Craven touted a superior American art, Rosenberg wrote a politically charged critique of the fall of the school of Paris. He writes in 1940, “Despite the fall of Paris, the social, economic, and cultural workings which define the modern epoch are active everywhere… [but] no one can predict the future of this new phase [of modernism]” (Rosenberg, “Fall” 543-544). Rosenberg, acknowledging Paris’ once held position as the cultural center, was now looking for its new resettling. By 1948, Greenberg claimed that the cultural center had arrived in the American school, writing that, “much to our own surprise, the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power” (Greenberg, “Decline” 572). Far from apolitical, Craven and later Rosenberg, Greenberg and others were seeking to separate American art from the French school. Long before Pollock’s first critical review, art (like the emblematic American Indian) was a political tool for nationalistic purposes. In this
view, Pollock’s work becomes a nexus point wherein social and political contexts, a myriad of art influences, and politically charged criticism meet.

Within the politics of art criticism, and particularly in the works of Pollock and others working within an inquiry into American Indian aesthetics, the importance of indigenous aesthetics began to be completely lost. Just as quickly as New Deal politics embraced the iconic American Indian, highly politicized art criticism (primarily by the pens of Craven, Greenberg, and Rosenberg) ignored it and omitted it from the discourse of art. The omission of the importance of the indigenous as epistemic and critical to art is what is in vital need of recuperation. While we have looked somewhat at the political agenda, there is still more to glean from the workings of Regionalism, where we can see more fully the pervasive indigenous American.

Craven was particularly supportive of the Regionalists Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood. Grant Wood’s pamphlet *Revolt Against the City*, published in Iowa City, 1935, echoes much of Craven’s sentiments and shows the political agenda of the style. Wood declares that,

Painting has declared its independence from Europe, and is retreating from the cities to the more American village and country life. Paris is no longer the Mecca of the American artist. The American public, which used to be interested solely in foreign and imitative work, has readily acquired a strong interest in the distinctly indigenous art of its own land. (“Revolt” 435-436)

Quantifying the anti-European sentiments of the nation, Wood explains the tenets of Regionalism as being pro-American, isolationist, and indigenous. He wrote that the “germ”
of the movement began with the WPA and its structural emphasis on regional centers and its inclusive and isolationist tone (435-436).

Such reformist art was not limited to dissemination through the plastic arts alone, but also through the unifying acculturation delivered via radio and other mass media. Leo G. Mazow in his article “Regionalist Radio: Thomas Hart Benton on Art for Your Sake” details the way in which Regionalism and the program for reform was circulated by radio and various print media, such as reproduction lithographs, short film, television, and print media (101-122). Mazow begins his article with a summation of the geist of the period, “If modernism, broadly conceived, can be defined as a quest to understand, via paint, prose, and other media, one’s experiences in an ever-modernizing world, then Benton’s sonic sensibilities help to locate his work within an American modernist canon” (101).

Benton, Pollock’s painting instructor at the Student Arts League, mentor, and lifelong friend, was unequivocally the spokesman for Regionalism. The National Broadcasting Company radio program, Art for Your Sake, 1940s, aimed to clarify the ideological foundations of modern art as a “national interconnectedness” from region to region (Mazow 102). In the spirit of mass communication and art for the masses, NBC instigated a type of mass consensus and stability during the Depression and New Deal years. For a time at least, artist and broadcaster were united in a crusade to create a notion of the national identity and Americanism. Airing for the first time on January 6, 1940, Art for Your Sake presented an elaborate dramatization of Benton’s art and life over the NBC network stations. This was not, however, Benton’s first experience with the medium. His hometown radio debut was in a March, 1938 broadcast from the Kansas City library, where he appeared with fellow Regionalists (and Craven’s favorites) Grant Wood and John Steuart Curry. A copy of this
typescript is in Miller Nichols Library, University of Missouri-Kansas City. He also spoke on art in broadcasts on April 1939 and September 1940. Just as Roosevelt's fireside chats were successful due to the direct dialogue the president had with tens of millions of his listeners, the notion of a national identity and its communicability in art was shared across the nation through these live broadcast programs and speeches. Highly politicized art criticism, along with social reformers and a network of artists, all contributed to the new and prevailing national identity which embraced and disseminated the iconic-aestheticized Indian-episteme.

**Trickle-Down Aesthetics**

Thus far we have described the topic of the American Indian in political agendas and art programs. But it was not only favored in politics and artistic production, it was ubiquitous throughout popular culture as well. In a sort of trickle-down aesthetics, from politics to art, art display, and art criticism, to the wider popular culture, the Indian-episteme was ubiquitous within all social sectors, including that of the consumer culture. A brief look at literature, radio, film, and consumer culture help to establish our view that the Indian-episteme was fashionable in all domains.

So embedded and ubiquitous was the Indian-episteme that even foreign authors took notice of it. The British novelist D.H. Lawrence wrote a detailed account of the diverse tribes of the Southwest in his essay, *New Mexico*. He observes that from “the Indian who sells you baskets in Albuquerque” to one “who slinks around Taos plaza”—two popular venues for “sightseeing and buying souvenirs”, the popularization and commercialization of the region was the main threat to the indigenous lifestyle (Lawrence, “Hopi” 138). In Lawrence’s essay
The Hopi Snake Dance he describes how thousands of tourists were entertained by the performance that took on the air of a native “circus performance” (138). In the essay Lawrence describes “the process by which tribal customs and ceremonies are converted into the stuff of ethnological spectacle” (Snyder 663). Lawrence also depicted reservation life and the pueblos of the Southwest in his novel, St. Mawr, 1925. His description paints the era as a sort of “ethnological theme park” (664). Lawrence’s friend Aldous Huxley also wrote about the American Indian in his novel Brave New World, 1932. In the novel Huxley envisioned a modernistic “evolved” society far removed from moral influences reflected in the simple and stable elements of the southwest Indian pueblo population.

Radio programs also popularized the subject of the American Indian. The Lone Ranger, featuring a Texas Ranger and Tonto, a devoted but subservient Indian sidekick, ran for 2,956 episodes beginning in 1933 (Hoffman 6). The popular Rin Tin Tin, 1930-1933 was a program about Rusty and his dog, the only survivors of a hostile Indian raid. I Was There, 1935 included American Indian characters. The popular Red Ryder, 1942 featured Little Bear, the Navajo ward of the hero Ryder. Because radio reached mass audiences, such programs popularized the Native American as a household subject, albeit one that promoted ethnocentric stereotypes and iconic representations. Most programs modeled New Deal agendas at assimilation but maintained traditional (and stereotypic) hierarchies wherein the ethnic white male dominated society or cared for the indigenous, while others maintained Manifest Destiny sentiments and the need to subdue hostile and unpredictable Indians who resisted expansionism and assimilation (Hoffman 6-14).

Novels also popularized the American Indian and promoted hierarchies and stereotypes. The Pioneers, The Last of the Mohicans, The Prairie, The Pathfinder, and The
Deerslayer, published and reprinted from 1823-1941 celebrate and commodify the wild, uncivilized, proud, and wise iconic Native American (Hoffman 33). American Indians were commonly mentioned in Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Little House on the Prairie, 1935 and Walter D. Edmonds The Matchlock Gun, 1942. Many films adopted the stories and compositional strategies from these and other novels making the American Indian a consistent topic for films. From the beginning of the development of motion pictures, the Western played a major role in Hollywood as an entertainment staple. In fact, Edwin S. Porter’s 1903 silent movie The Great Train Robbery was so commercially successful that in 1908, just five years later, the Western genre was firmly established and was listed in movie distributors’ catalogues as a distinct category (Slotkin 231). Before the onset of talkies, Pollock and his contemporaries would have seen some of the eighty-nine films that featured American Indians out of some two hundred silent films which were made, including The Silent Enemy, which was made in 1930, a year after Pollock began art classes at the Students Art League (Hoffman 22). Although somewhat interrupted by the advent of talking pictures and the tough years of the Depression, the theme again regained importance in the years 1938-39, when the studios experienced a Renaissance of the Western (Slotkin 256). In the 1930’s-1940’s, the golden age of the big-budget Western films, audiences were given a consistent view of life on the frontier and the polemic between “untamed” American Indians and gun slinging settlers. John Ford’s Stagecoach, 1939 was one of such popular Western film. In an interview, Ford declared, “Y’know, I’ve killed more Indians than Custer, Beecher, and Chivington put together” (qtd. Hoffman 41). Like Raoul Walsh’s The Big Trail, 1930, Cecil B. DeMille’s The Plainsman, 1936, and John Ford’s My Darling Clementine, 1946, Fort Apache, 1948,
She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, 1949 and many others, the presence of the American Indian is portrayed either a “vicious savage” or as an iconic Indian (43). Souvenir shops like Ye Olde Curiosity Shop in Seattle, Ickes’ Indian Craft Shop (located on the first floor of the Department of the Interior Building), and a myriad of souvenir shops that dotted the highways of the West and Southwest sold art objects made by living Indian artists. These art objects found their ways into average American homes. These objects were sold as authentic ethnographic art objects, retaining a sense of ‘nativeness’ and wonder, curiosities for travelers and bibelots (Phillips 6). Even roadside gas stations and cafes displayed Cigar Store Indians, relics of Old World personifications appropriated as icons for the tobacco industry that had also become national emblems of an appropriated American heritage. Likewise, songs, poems, advertisements, commercial packaging, and posters drew upon American Indian themes and icons. Many WPA posters featured American Indians, such as in the 1938 poster for the Federal Art Project exhibition, Index of American Design, held at the Federal Art Gallery, 50 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts, and the Poster for the Indian Court Exhibit held at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco in 1939 (Fig. 14). Beyond the marketing of Indian wares, the commodification of the indigenous included touristic views on tribal performances of rituals and ceremonies. For example, companies such as the Harveycar Indian Detours Company (Fig. 15) invited tourists to visit Indian pueblos and see “live archaeology” (Snyder 664).
Figure 144  1939 WPA Artist Projects poster

Figure 15  Harveycar Courier. Image from Indian Detour Brochure. Caption says: In 1926, there were three of us. Now we are many more
Stemming from the political New Deal culture which claimed national independence and power, the larger political paradigm was one of the United States cultivating an indigenous national identity based on political independence and isolation. Social reformers and artists likewise promoted the Indian-episteme for political and aesthetic purposes. Further, Regionalism with its ties to nascent self-consciousness found its maturity in political propagandist radio broadcasts and from critics like Craven. The political and art agendas were much more aligned than perhaps we have excavated in our post-Cold War perspectives. For as Craven stresses in his praise for Benton, “He knows his politics, his America, and his technical history of art” (qtd. Doss 98). Such a view renders the critique of MoMA’s 1941 American Indian art exhibit prophetic. George C. Vaillant wrote of the exhibit, “The visitor becomes keenly conscious of his Indian heritage, of the presence of a truly continental American art, one which we may hope someday to rival” (Vaillant 167-169).

Conclusion

The ongoing accumulation of Indian arts and crafts displayed in various museum collections and shared in exhibitions contributed to the development of the myth of a nascent and indigenous political heritage. But the impact on Regionalism and artists in the West, the Pacific Northwest Coast, and particularly the Desert Southwest (where Pollock grew up) is clearly much larger than traditional or mainstream art reviews reveal. The iconic American Indian was epistemic, woven into the domestic and national paradigm. The use of mass media and entertainment to sustain the mythic elements of the American West and the Native American as a cultural icon witnesses the degree to which this episteme was entrenched in the social fabric of what Foucault calls the “positive unconscious of knowledge” (Foucault, “Concepts” xi). Ultimately the appropriation and adoption of the iconology of Native
American art as being an important source of inspiration for modern abstract art is evident in the Northwest and New York art schools. All these visual and cultural venues disseminated in concert a rich view of a stereotypic indigenous spirit which affected both the general cultural milieu of the United States and ultimately the individual personal expression of many artists of the mid-20th century.

Within this political and artistic landscape we find the indigenous, the primitive, the ethnographic, iconic, and the symbolic American Indian, and the aestheticizing of the indigenous spirit in the hands of several key artists, the greatest of which was Jackson Pollock. Most important in our discussion of Pollock’s work is the fact that the American Indian was a significant icon in the political and artistic culture of his formative years as a child, in his youth, and his early years as an artist. Pollock studied with Sloan and Benton, both artists who popularized regionalist and indigenous views of American life. Pollock’s fine and commercial arts world was inundated with ethnographic, stereotypic, and at times valorizing images of the American Indians. Additionally, he saw American Indians up close, while playing near Indian reservations in Arizona in his childhood. He was, with his brothers, an avid collector of literature about the arts of the American Indians, including copies of Wolfgang Paalen’s journal *DYN*, John Graham’s *System of Dialectics* and article “Primitive Art and Picasso”, and twelve volumes of the *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Indian Sand Painting*, and fifteen volumes published by the Smithsonian on American anthropology.

Like Pollock, other artists from Santa Fe and Seattle to New York were also drawing inspiration from the arts of the American Indians and these sentiments were expressed in the many exhibits featured in art and natural history museums and galleries during the later
1930s and 40s. Rather than locating a single influential source for this phenomenon, we can identify an interrelated web of influential sources seeking to represent American Indians and their arts as subjects and icons. We find a network of nexus points between federal agents and agencies, artists, critics, curators, galleries, museums, and popular culture which witness to an increased and enduring interest in the arts of the American Indian, with a resulting increased production of a wide selection of books, articles, exhibitions, radio shows, movies and TV programs. In an effort to redefine a national identity, much of this interest in American Indians and art was fueled by the United States government. Whether in terms of the ethnographic, politicized, iconic and aestheticized representations, it is clear that the American Indian was a ubiquitous cultural feature, an integral part of the episteme and visual discourse of the early to mid-twentieth century United States which heavily influenced and impacted the social and artistic focus of many artists, including Pollock’s subconscious and conscious mind. Because this is the world in which Pollock and others found themselves, our review of Pollock’s work must include this wider view of the existing cultural context. But this view is not the view that has been described in art critical and historical discourse. As we will see in Chapter Two, the formalist and psychological critiques of Pollock respectively either fail to recognize or largely minimize Pollock’s assimilation of the ideography of the Native American experience. With this reality in mind, our subsequent discussion will retrace the way in which Pollock embraced, recuperated, and re-envisioned the indigenous American aesthetic. The result will require a recasting of the politicized critical response to his work during his lifetime and the current characterization of his work, neither of which fully acknowledges Pollock’s engagement with, and debt to, the iconic American Indian’s ethos, ritual, and spirit.
In conclusion, the ideological-iconic-aestheticized American Indian permeated all cultural sectors, from politics to merchandising, and from fine art to popular arts and culture. The new iconic and aesthetic representations of the American Indian and its arts differ from traditional ethnographic depictions of the Indian and witness to an important mid-twentieth century epistemic shift that appropriates the American Indian for nationalistic and artistic purposes just preceding and after the end of World War II, and as modernism began to take root in the New York school. It is in this multilayered social and political context that artists (like Pollock) drew upon ancient indigenous American traditions, themes and symbols to create a powerful and distinctly American modern art.
Chapter Two

Modern Critical Divisions

Introduction

We have seen that the representation and iconology of the American Indian was present in all socio-political and aesthetic domains of the formative years of Pollock’s youth and artistic maturity. So ubiquitous was the subject of the American Indian that we can claim an Indian-episteme was operating during the era. We have also seen that art criticism was far from neutral during the socialist and anti-socialist years of the time, when politicians, social reformers, artists, and art critics turned to the indigenous as a symbol of Americanism. But this fact of American art has been neglected in the critique of Pollock. Thus the intent of this chapter is to continue to analyze the relationship between art criticism and the prevailing socio-political episteme in order to identify the two prevailing polemical interpretive theories on Pollock’s work; namely, the modernist and the psychoanalytic-Jungian critiques. Through this analysis we will further come to see the political undertones within the art criticism of the era and the reasons for which this criticism has overlooked the presence of the Indian-episteme in politics and art, particularly in the works of Pollock. We will first consider the problem of art criticism and its tendency to create and contribute to art mythologies. Second,
we will analyze the basic tenets of the modernist and the psychoanalytic critiques and identify how each perpetuates myths about Pollock’s work. Third, we will analyze both critiques as polemically divided in their assessments of Pollock’s work and question the degree to which each critique speaks to the socio-political episteme of its time while ignoring the topic of the indigenous and its role in Pollock’s work and the larger art world. Through this analysis we will see that the theories regarding Pollock’s work are divided and highly political representations that speak to the politics of nationalism and subjectivity, and in so doing, contribute to the mythology of Pollock while ignoring the issue of the political and artistic appropriation and iconology of the indigenous. Further, this analysis demonstrates the need for theorists to find a unifying tenet that can resolve the polemic between the modernist and psychoanalytic critiques, move beyond mythologizing Pollock, and account for the indigenous spirit of art in his work.

First and foremost, art criticism conforms to the prevailing socio-political episteme of its time. But in our case, art criticism has failed to recognize the importance of the iconic Indian-episteme. In the case of Pollock’s work, this art criticism follows two distinct but opposing views, the modernist or abstract viewpoint, and the psychoanalytical or Jungian critique. While drastically different in approach, both viewpoints contribute to the myth of Pollock as being the quintessential hero of the art world during a time when the notion of the American hero was emblematic of the isolated modern man. The art critic Hilton Kramer, writing for the *New Criterion*, identifies the ways in which art criticism conforms and contributes to prevailing epistemic knowledge and to the mythology surrounding Pollock’s life and work. Kramer’s review of the 1989 MoMA retrospective on Pollock’s work demonstrates the way in which the modernist view conforms to epistemic knowledge while
promoting and extending paradigmatic knowledge through the conclusions it draws. The retrospective, exhibit featured an extensive and splendid array of drip paintings, drawings, and photographs of Pollock at work (Fig. 16).

The visceral power of Pollock’s canvases was utterly spell binding; the effect was magnified by the scope of the show, with over two hundred works on view. The exhibition was organized by Kirk Varnedoe, then curator at MoMA, with the help of assistant curator Pepe Karmel. Varnedoe wrote the main exhibition catalogue essay while Karmel wrote an essay that focuses on the films and photographs of Pollock that were taken by Hans Namuth. Combined, both essays focus on Pollock’s methodology and his mature work, his allover, non-hierarchical, “structured drip paintings”. Varnedoe organized the retrospective to demonstrate how Pollock’s work was a “consistently sublime achievement” moving from
early experimental works to his mature drip style (Kramer 12). As Karmel explains in the exhibition catalogue,

> Coming to artistic maturity in the early 1940s, Pollock was drawn to an art of the sign rather than an art of primordial sensation. His early work derives with almost painful obviousness from Picasso and Miró, but, astonishingly, within a few years he had discovered a way to go beyond his masters. Pollock’s achievement, in his pictures of 1947-50, was to transform graphic flatness into optical flatness – to show that by piling layer upon layer, sign upon sign, you could generate a pictorial sensation equivalent to that of the primordial visual field. (Karmel. “Comet” 132)

From its inception to its catalogue descriptions, the show was designed to highlight Pollock’s abstract drip style. The show positioned Pollock as being not only the heir of Picasso and Cubism, but also victorious over Miró and Picasso, giving New York artistic supremacy over Paris. According to Kramer, who reviewed the show, Varnedoe organized the show to frame only Pollock’s drip paintings, excluding any work that suggested a contrary narrative. Furthermore, Kramer vehemently insists that in their extensive essays both Varnedoe and Karmel exploit the characterization, even the mythology, of Pollock being an action painter. Kramer’s review of the MoMA show and the catalogue essays provides a model for our analysis of the larger divided review at stake in the overall critique of Pollock.

For Kramer, a critical mythology has existed for decades and it goes something like this. The modern critique proclaims that after dabbling in the unconscious and various approaches Pollock arrived at his mature works, or rather his pure abstract drip paintings,
those which according to Varnedoe, were for the modernist at least, “the only important pictures he ever created” (Kramer 12). The modernist review suggests that the only work worthy of mention are Pollock’s drip paintings, and it disregards the body of his earlier and formative works, claiming that they were mere dabblings along the way to his true mature style. Kramer’s summation of the MoMA exhibit (and the larger modern critique of Pollock) characterizes it as being predominantly preoccupied with the formal (abstract) and material qualities of art while ignoring other prevailing theories that do not conform to modernist tenets, such as the psychoanalytic-Jungian approach (which opposes it), as well as any account of the indigenous elements in Pollock’s work. While we have seen in Chapter One that the Indian-episteme was an important element in the broader cultural-political spectrum, the modernist critique lost view of this fact in its rush to embrace the new and abstract qualities of the New York art scene, and the psychoanalytic-Jungian approach lost sight of the larger relationship between Pollock and the socio-politics of the time in order to perpetuate ideas regarding subjectivity. While differing in approaches and findings, both critiques reveal multiple epistememes at work even while focusing on Pollock’s persona and contributing to the Pollock mythologies. In the following analysis, therefore, we will first review the politicization and polemic within a divided modern criticism. We will review the modernist critique that claims Pollock is an abstraction painter fulfilling the demands of abstract pure form, and we will also explore the Surrealist, Jungian, and more psychoanalytic approach to Pollock’s work. Then we will consider this polemical-modernist-critique within the context of its being part of a larger divided critique that overlooked the indigenous Indian-episteme within American Modernism, and more specifically in Pollock’s work. As Foucault noted, “in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one
episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice” (Foucault, “Truth” 168). But as our analysis will reveal, while art criticism has operated within the political confines of knowledge, in so doing it has also failed to account for the waning political promotion of the Indian. History is an accounting of a perpetual series of waning and emergent epistemes. As one episteme comes into play with its collection of acceptable knowledge and discourse, another episteme fades into the background. In hindsight, we can recuperate the influence of the indigenous American spirit of art which fell out of favor to the critics even though it still remained pertinent to the artists of the time.

**Mythologies**

The modernist critique claims that Pollock is a uniquely abstract painter whose abstractions fulfill modernism’s claim to pure form. In the August 1949, Life Magazine article “Jackson Pollock; is he the greatest living painter in the United States?” Pollock at work was featured in a short one-page spread with feature photographs taken by Life photographer Martha Holmes. The article stated that “Recently a formidably high-brow New York critic hailed the brooding, puzzled-looking man shown above as a major artist of our time and a fine candidate to become “the greatest American painter of the 20th Century. Others believe that Jackson Pollock produces nothing more than interesting, if inexplicable, decorations. Still others condemn his pictures as degenerate and find them as unpalatable as yesterday’s macaroni. Even so, Pollock, at the age of 37, has burst forth as the shining new phenomenon of American art” (Seiberling 42). By the time that the article was published,
Pollock’s work had already been collected in five US museums and forty private collections. Pollock was exhibiting in New York, Italy, and had had a one-man show in avant-garde Paris, where he was “fast becoming the most … controversial U.S. painter” (43). With the Life article, Pollock’s notoriety expanded beyond the art word.

The Life article describes several distinct issues that arose in Pollock’s so-called drip paintings. First, the article questions the appearance or characteristics of Pollock’s work that marked a distinct change from the Social Realism of his teacher Benton. Second, the article questioned Pollock’s method of making art. Pollock mixed enamel paint with sand, which he then poured out directly onto flat canvases stretched out on the floor or ground. He dripped the paint onto the canvas with stir sticks. Dispensing with the easel and paint brush, Pollock’s method questioned the very nature of art by way of its means of manufacture. Third, Pollock supposedly dispensed with the appearance of subject matter, creating entirely abstract works. Life Magazine highlighted the fact that some viewers thought Pollock’s paintings looked like mere “piles of spaghetti” and were confused at the lack of recognizable subject. Not recognizably Regionalist and not entirely abstract critics and the larger public grappled with how to characterize and think about Pollock’s drip paintings. But one pertinent and primary thing is obvious to us today. The review of Pollock was not at any time neutral nor objective for when the article headlined, “is he the greatest living painter in the United States?” the article was really questioning the status of American art in context with the larger world of art. Though Regionalism waned for abstraction, the need for a purely American style of art did not. Americans wanted an American art. The question the article begs is whether or not Pollock could be the most “American” of the New York School.
When Life Magazine ran its feature article on Pollock in 1949, Pollock became nationally recognized, surpassing the recognition awarded to his friends and fellow artists in the New York school. His notoriety expanded from well beyond New York art circles to the popular media. But both art and popular reviews focused on the cultivation of his public persona as being first and foremost American, and secondly as an icon of post war angst and existentialism. As Dennis Raverty points out, Pollock inherited a quintessential American “aura of a pop-existential hero: a lonely, sensitive, misunderstood genius, not unlike contemporaneous movie idols Marlon Brando or James Dean” (Raverty 337). Pollock’s tragic and untimely accident and death, like that of James Dean, became a symbol of a “romantic apotheosis” that contributed further to a mythic persona and positioned him as “an American icon” (337). Barbara Rose positioned the myth of Pollock beyond popular media to suggest that he filled a need for American heroes which was no longer being fulfilled by soldiers in the more peaceful post war years.

In the immediate postwar period, the American people were understandably casting about for heroic figures to fill the shoes of those who risked their lives in combat. With no suitable political figure such as de Gaulle to fill the void, the country was ready -for the first time- to acclaim a cultural hero. (qtd. Raverty 337)

Like Benton, Pollock was portrayed in the media as a hard-drinking, chain-smoking, quintessential hyper-masculine, tough American man. Pollock represented a new type of Americanism. The issue of Americanism is primary here, but as we have discussed in Chapter One, Americanism can take different forms, such as identification with the indigenous and the authentic as in the years following World War I. But in fact, even in his
earliest reviews, the literature on Pollock tends to emphasize these two key political points: his masculinity and his Americanism. Descriptions and biographies, critiques, and reviews tend to begin with some reference to Pollock, the American from Wyoming, conflating images of the masculine and wild west with patriotism and politics. Such references aim at distancing Pollock from what is thought to be his European influences in order to claim him as an American icon. An early example of this type of writing is the review of his 1943 show at Art of this Century Gallery published in *Art News* that said, “A former student of Benton and a denizen of Wyoming, California, and Arizona, his abstractions are free of Paris and contain a disciplined American fury” (qtd. Raverty 340). Americanism here denotes the wild-untamed, masculine, and authentic West, which ironically, is not too great a distance from the idea of a nascent American Indian heritage.

This type of appropriation of art for politics’ sake has a long precedence in American art criticism and the irony is that American critics who came to wholeheartedly embrace modern abstraction, like Meyer Schapiro and Clement Greenberg, also in some form had earlier recommended Regionalism and the aestheticized view of the American Indian during the New Deal years. Later, after World War II and the ascendance of New York as the new center of world art leadership, America’s status as a global superpower transformed their critical discourse into something quite different. Critics moved away from lauding Regionalist and American Indian or Primitivist influences in Pollock’s work in order to identify with the new and emergent postwar socio-political sphere. As a result, critics glossed over or abandoned entirely a key element in Pollock and other modern artists’ work – the Native American indigenous spirit. For example, we see epistemic shifting art criticism in the writings of Schapiro. Promoting Regionalist art in the essay, ‘The Social Bases of Art’, which
was presented at the First American Artists’ Congress in New York in 1936, Schapiro applied the traditions of Marxist critique in order to establish a social basis underlying representational (and regional) art. He began the article defining modernism as the reduction of the social to the condition of the “anti-individual” – one who is separated or divorced from social relationships. But for Schapiro, no artist can truly be disengaged from life’s social and political strata, and because of this an entirely disengaged, disinterested art is unachievable. The rare exception to this condition would be the truly free artist, one who is, according to Schapiro, financially and socially independent and able to preoccupy him or herself – exclusively in art. This type of autonomy would be an uncommon circumstance, if ever even possible. Schapiro explained, “Artists who are concerned with the world around them in its action and conflict, who ask the same questions that are asked by the impoverished masses and oppressed minorities - these artists cannot permanently devote themselves to a painting committed to the aesthetic moments of life, to spectacles designed for passive, detached individuals, or to an art of the studio” (Schapiro 510). An artist who is detached from life’s concerns and able to work for pure enjoyment and consumption (even aesthetic consumption) is an artist who is detached from life with its attachments to society, nature, and history. While this artist may become more attuned to “possibilities of feeling and imagination” the artist is no longer free to participate cooperatively in the social tasks of producing solutions to the urgent and pressing concerns of the day. For Schapiro, true freedom, like art, is an activity within the social and political sphere. By its very nature, then, art for Schapiro is political.

Echoing Schapiro’s views on the political nature of art, and in part also echoing the concerns of the German left, Greenberg formulated a positive critique of Regionalism veiled
within a theory of the dialectic politics. For Greenberg, social political decline results in a breaking up of cultural traditions into diverse forms and academicism. He writes,

> It is among the hopeful signs in the midst of the decay of our present society that we - some of us - have been unwilling to accept this last phase [of art] for our own culture. In seeking to go beyond Alexandrianism, a part of Western bourgeois society has produced something unheard of heretofore: - avant-garde culture. A superior consciousness of history – more precisely, the appearance of a new kind of criticism of society, an historical criticism – made this possible. This criticism has not confronted our present society with timeless utopias, but has soberly examined in the terms of history and of cause and effect the antecedents, justifications and functions of the forms that lie at the heart of every society. (‘Avant-Garde’ 530-531)

This avant-garde culture is defined by Greenberg as one having the benefit of historical criticism in which to critique the conditions of the present age. Rather than an expression of an ‘eternal natural condition of life’, the present can be seen as the “latest term in a succession of social orders”. Art for Greenberg is political in that art participates in the social political sphere as a form of criticism and “superior consciousness” (531). Like Schapiro, Greenberg claimed that artists were ostensibly dependent on society for their support and that the task of art was not a repudiation of society, but an expression of society as well as a means by which art could move forward in the “midst of ideological confusion” (530). For Greenberg, like Schapiro, art is political and ideological and from this view, any critique of Pollock’s work depends upon surveying the social-political and ideological context with some accuracy, aware of potential blind spots unseen by virtue of specific ideological
viewpoints. Just as artists and politicians appropriated the Indian-episteme among other ideas, critics like Schapiro and Greenberg come to art as cultivated viewers, with leftist sentiments and feelings that heralded Regionalism as a free expression of the masses. This is not to suggest that any one particular paradigm (such as the Indian-episteme, Regionalism or abstraction) was or ever is unilaterally endemic; rather, it is important to recognize that multiple paradigms often exist simultaneously, overlapping, transitioning, and transforming one another. Thus we can see that the critique of Pollock’s work is mixed and divided, illustrating the nature of art criticism as being rooted in prevailing ideologies and epistemes and sub-epistemes that both illustrate nationalist politics while minimizing politics that had embraced the indigenous. The distillation of what was a myriad of indigenous themes, subjects, representations, and icons has become the prevailing discourse of American modernism. But much has also been lost or cast out; namely, the epistemic role of American Indian aesthetics and arts. Looking closely, however, we can recognize the phenomenon of multiple paradigms at work when we compare early and late reviews of Schapiro and other critics. Rather than a complete epistemic shift of truths, postulates, and knowledges, we see a gradual emergence of multiple domains of thought, some waxing more prevalent while others wane. In this specific case, we see how art criticism emerges within the discourse of socialism while neglecting the Indian-episteme and its relations to an indigenous nationalism.

We also see multiple paradigms at work in Greenberg’s highly political Marxist essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” published in the Partisan Review in 1939. In the essay he claims that “high art” describes the values of the bourgeoisie and the extreme right, the Nazis and Communists for example. But this is problematic for art because, as Greenberg notes, avant-garde abstract art preoccupies itself with the forms of art while arising from the ruling class
to which it belongs and depends upon for its financial survival. The paradox for avant-garde art is that it depends economically upon a dwindling ruling class which in its autonomy no longer illustrates. He writes, “But today such culture is being abandoned by those to whom it actually belongs - our ruling class. For it is to the latter that the avant-garde belongs” (533). By rising above culture, avant-garde art is experiencing its own economic decline.

Paradoxically, the same (increasingly bourgeois) society which produces formalism or the avant-garde also produces kitsch art, which belongs to the masses. Kitsch is a type of “predigested” art which requires no effort or reflection on the part of the spectator, yet it supplies the same satisfaction for the newly literate working classes (as for the bourgeoisie) with its appetite for readily available forms and narratives. Thus, kitsch is neither autonomous art for the elite class nor art for the masses. In traditional culture class taste is distinguishable by its forms. But modern culture has blurred the lines between the classes and has subsequently made cultural and artistic dichotomy less noticeable.

In his subtle and yet ironic review, Greenberg reveals three paradigms at work, autonomous and abstract art in decline, kitsch art for the masses, and his proposed solution to the problem, namely, socialism. Greenberg summarizes,

Capitalism in decline finds that whatever of quality it is still capable of producing becomes almost invariably a threat to its own existence. Advances in culture, no less than advances in science and industry, corrode the very society under whose aegis they are made possible. Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture - as inevitably as one will
Greenberg’s concern for elite culture and avant-garde art is paired with his socialist leanings, demonstrating or showing how art criticism is not only political, but can also reveal how multiple epistememes or paradigms of thought can exist in the same review. From this point on, Greenberg will lean away from Marxist criticism to favor autonomous art, or at least to see art within the frame or lens of modern abstraction. What is clear (in Greenberg’s essay and Schapiro’s early writings) is that both critics had socialist leanings and both viewed art from this point of view, at least during the heyday years of Regionalism. In the case of Greenberg, his socialist and modernist leanings witness to the existence of two differing ideals within one review. Art criticism is epistemic and it can reveal multiple epistememes, even within singular or individual essays.

What is also imperative to recognize here is the way in which both Schapiro and Greenberg concurred: that art is epistemic, born out of the social-historical culture even though both critics neglect to perceive the Indian-episteme as definitive to that social-historical culture. Proving this theory is the way in which both critics radically altered their socialist views on art after the New Deal era to embrace abstract art and the importance of the formal properties of art or formalism. Noting the shifting epistemic tide, both critics yield to the new emerging discourse and discontinue consideration of the Indian-episteme (which had waned in predominant political discourse and programs but was still at play in the aesthetics of Pollock and others). The very notion of the socially engaged artist is a far cry from Schapiro’s later views on modern and autonomous art. In his 1953 essay “Style” and
with a detached indifference, Schapiro defined modern art itself as indifferent and disconnected. He wrote,

One result of the modern development has been a tendency to slight the content of past art; the most realistic representations are contemplated as pure constructions of lines and colors. The observer is often indifferent to the original meanings of works…The radical change in attitude depends partly on the development of modern styles, in which the raw material and distinctive units of operation – the plane of the canvas, the trunk of wood, tool marks, brushstrokes, connecting forms, schemas, particles and areas of pure color – are as pronounced as the elements of representation. Even before non-representative styles were created, artists had become more deeply conscious of the aesthetic-constructive components of the work apart from denoted meanings. (Schapiro, “Style” 148)

Schapiro’s embrace of abstract art and his focus on form and media belies his earlier Marxist appraisal of 1930s realism. Schapiro now identifies the student of style as being separated by discipline. The archaeologist looks at motive or pattern, the historian investigates historical formation and change. The philosopher of history or culture looks at collective thinking and feeling with its attendant forms. But style itself does not conform readily to such designations and divisions. For Schapiro, style has come to be an ahistorical distinction which embraces all creative activity, from art, even the “drawings of children and psychotics” (148). Art and style is now, for Schapiro, a manifestation of the “basic unity of mankind” rather than an epistemic social and historical condition of its time (148).
In embracing abstract art and a new modernist episteme, Schapiro also claims that art has come full circle. He explains that contemporary styles “recall primitive art” because modern artists were “the first to appreciate the works of natives as true art” (148). Schapiro also embraced the “primitive” or indigenous spirit in American abstract art while repudiating epistemic theories of art and style, and this repudiation belies the new epistemic moment which Schapiro and the later writings of Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, and a host of other critics incorporated. The new episteme is one of a divided modernism, a polemic in the critique of modern art that repudiates content, particularly content related to American Indian themes, while embracing primitivist abstract form as sources of inspiration. We see this new episteme in the critical writing of Schapiro, Greenberg, and even in the *Life* magazine article on Pollock, where as an iconic American he is as important in the article as the review of his work. Evidencing the new modernist episteme with its emphasis on individuality and personal expression, Pollock the myth is synonymous with Pollock the artist. The point we are stressing here is that art criticism, like art styles and political thought, shift and change. Art criticism, far from objective, reveals prevailing socio-political contexts with their collected body of knowledge and power. Our job is to excavate and recover that which becomes lost in changing viewpoints.

We might note that Greenberg’s change in thought is no less overt than what we see in Schapiro’s writings, for Greenberg’s works are consistently aligned with the progressions of the avant-garde and politics. What was a critical review of avant-garde movements within cultural conditions (in Greenberg’s early kitsch essay) becomes a highly charged political statement that aligns, more closely than at any other time, the New York avant-garde with a new post-war national identity. For example, in a January, 1948 review of Pollock’s one man
show at the Betty Parson’s gallery, (one year before the Life article) Greenberg wrote that Pollock would soon be the greatest American painter. Greenberg writes, “Since Marin – with whom Pollock will in time be able to compete for recognition as the greatest American painter of the twentieth century – no other American artist has presented such a case” (Greenberg, “Review” 62). A few months later, in his review in the Partisan Review, 1948, Greenberg wrote that the avant-garde had left Paris and had reached the shores of the United States. As Greenberg explains, “then the conclusion forces itself, much to our own surprise that the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power” (Greenberg “Decline” 549). The essay was overtly political, evidencing a new modernist episteme wherein art and politics now focus on issues of supremacy. Just as the United States had recently become the world’s foremost military and commercial superpower, with its epicenter in Washington, DC, the new center of the art world was to be located in New York City. In the hands of Greenberg, Schapiro, Rosenberg, and others, art criticism is no longer an interpretation of art as an expression of a collective Americanism, but rather art criticism as an assertion of the global positioning and agenda of a world superpower. Having emerged from the war with a renewed economy and a sense of global power, the United States needed a new art that manifested its new domestic and international character. By critical declaration, art, and most especially the American Abstract Expressionism movement, became the abstract manifestation of a new national identity. The myth of Pollock, as the existential hero, lonely, sensitive, and misunderstood, echoed prevailing social isolation sentiments under cold war politics. But the truths of Pollock’s engagement with indigenous aesthetics are not fully recognized, much less understood.
Greenberg’s political leanings have been analyzed in more detail in other works but a short review only stresses the point that his art criticism is rooted in the episteme of its origination.\textsuperscript{19} Despite earlier socialist leanings, Greenberg joined the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, and became one of the organization’s executive committee in 1950. He was also an outspoken supporter of McCarthyism. In 1951, Greenberg charged a former colleague at \textit{The Nation} of being pro-Soviet (Frascina 76). When preparing his collection of articles in \textit{Art and Culture: Critical Essays}, 1961, Greenberg altered many of his earlier essays to reflect his newer political views. “The Pasted-paper Revolution”, 1958, was relabeled “Collage” and substantially altered. His “Modernist Painting” was also altered as were many other essays (69). During a time of New Deal and isolationist politics and cultural nationalism, Greenberg was fully aware of the inward subconscious glance of mid-30s politics. His later alterations speak less of Greenberg’s political leanings and more of the changing political climate that his updated views reflect. In the years after the war, Greenberg’s earlier sympathies towards social art waned in his enthusiasm for an art that would be primary in not only New York, but the global art scene as well. Before Greenberg declared Pollock the posterchild of American abstraction, he was seeking a national hero – one with ties to the national frontier, the collective American, but yet a refined cosmopolitan – Greenberg was clearly waiting for Pollock. Through the writings of Schapiro, Greenberg, and others we see that art criticism is epistemic, based on shifting paradigms of thought and politics. Being so, art criticism has inherent blind spots which can be identified only in hindsight. But this fact is only one of the points to consider when reviewing the collective review of Pollock’s work. For though art criticism is paradigmatic, it also follows multiple paradigms, some of which occur simultaneously. In the review of Pollock’s work, we have
two predominant viewpoints: the modernist view, and the hybrid psychoanalytic-Jungian critique. Both theories are part of the story and the mythology of Pollock and his work.

The Critique of Abstract Modernism

Before Life Magazine questioned the viability of Pollock’s work, Greenberg had appropriated Pollock as both an abstract and a quintessential American artist. Writing predominantly for the New York publication *The Nation*, Greenberg was one of Pollock’s greatest supporters during his lifetime. It was Greenberg who situated Pollock within the modernist tradition as early as 1943, at the time of Pollock’s first one man show at the Peggy Guggenheim Art of This Century Gallery, writing that Pollock “has gone through the influences of Miro, Picasso, Mexican painting, and what not, and has come out on the other side at the age of thirty-one, painting mostly with his own brush” or rather his own ‘American’ style (Greenberg, “Art” 51). Two years later at Pollock’s second solo show Greenberg further stressed that Pollock’s victory over European art “establishes him, in my opinion, as the strongest painter of his generation and perhaps the greatest one to appear since Miró” (52). Consistently and from this point on, Greenberg claims Pollock’s supremacy as an abstract American painter who succeeds over European artists. In 1947 Greenberg declares Pollock’s victory in appropriating and surpassing French Cubism to a London audience, writing that, “…Pollock’s strength lies in the emphatic surfaces of his pictures, which it is his concern to maintain and intensify in all that thick, fuliginous flatness which began – but only began – to be the strong point of late Cubism” (Greenberg, “Prospects” 20-30). With this and other writings, Greenberg declares that Pollock had resituated the center of
the art world from Paris to New York City. In the essay *The Crisis of the Easel Picture* (1948) Greenberg emphasized Pollock’s work in purely formal tones. He coined the term “all-over” and described the work as “decentralized” and “polyphonic”. He wrote that Pollock’s work was “…a surface knit together of a multiplicity of identical or similar elements [that] repeats itself without strong variation from one end of the canvas to the other…” (224). Greenberg emphasized that, having no clear subject, the picture dissolves into “sheer texture, sheer sensation” (224). Greenberg’s art criticism was ever tinged with his personal politics, which predisposed him to overlook the influence and representation of American Indian arts and subjects in Pollock’s works. To be fair, however, Pollock often hid these elements well, at least in his drip paintings. But without reference to Pollock’s earlier works and the preponderance of Pollock’s representational qualities, Greenberg co-opted Pollock as the point of both the arrival of American modernism and its departure from European antecedents.

As early as 1940 and drawing upon the influence of the quintessential modernist Hans Hofmann, Greenberg articulated his modernist agenda for the objectivity and purification of art in his essay *The American Avant-Garde*. Greenberg wrote that, guided by a “notion of purity… the avant-garde arts have in the last fifty years achieved a purity and a radical delimitation of their fields of activity for which there is no previous example in the history of culture” (Greenberg, “Avant-Garde” 529). Purity or rather formalism is a way of describing the attributes of art, such as perspective or its lack thereof. Hofmann claimed that the highest aim of art was to preserve or articulate the two-dimensional picture plane. In Hofmann’s words, “The essence of the picture is its two dimensionality. This law connotes at once: the picture plane must achieve a three dimensional effect (as distinguished from illusion) by
means of the creative process. These two lawful principles apply both to color and to form” (Hofmann, “Aims” 356). Rather than create Renaissance-like illusionistic and perspectival space, the painting must always acknowledge its limitations as being a two dimensional object. Any sense of perspective within the painting must not be illusionistic, but created through the means by which paint is applied to the canvas. Greenberg had taken Hofmann’s lecture courses at the Art Students League and was highly influenced by him. For Greenberg (like Hofmann), purity is the acceptance of the limits of any given art medium. Greenberg does not, in any of his writings, acknowledge that he saw or understood Pollock’s representational qualities and references to indigenous forms, for after his turn from socialist views on art for the masses, Greenberg was always predisposed to promoting the tenets of modernism, which he learned from the master of modernism, Hofmann.

Greenberg’s interests are not just on the pursuit of abstraction. for he also evokes the episteme of late modernism that claims autonomy for art as a respite from national politics. We have already analyzed Greenberg’s socialist sentiments in his essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”, where he believed socialism would redeem art from its decline. In his shifting politics, Greenberg had in fact been waiting for Pollock (or at least someone like Pollock) who would redeem American art, saving it from the materialistic values of the bourgeoisie, not for socialist aims of art for the masses, but for modernist aims of autonomy from politics. For Greenberg, abstract art held progressive values that resonated with “something deep-seated in contemporary sensibility” that “corresponds perhaps to the feeling that all hierarchical distinctions have been exhausted, that no area or order of experience is either intrinsically or relatively superior to any other” (“Avant-Garde” 532). Abstract or avant-garde art held promise for the redemption of art from art’s decline in changing social classes.
By Greenberg’s own admission, he was disposed to abstract art for personal and political reasons. Whether writing epistemically for the left or the right, he found abstract art a constant in changing times. For Greenberg, supremacy and autonomy became the only viable solution for art and politics. He concludes his sentiments writing that, “The arts lie safe now, each within its ‘legitimate’ boundaries” or rather, abstraction (557).

Greenberg saw the hope of abstract art in Pollock’s work. By 1948, just as Pollock had developed his mature drip style, Greenberg heralded abstract art as “the only vital style of our time” and this was to be best expressed through Cubism. He considered Cubism the
best means by which contemporary feeling could be conveyed (which we can describe as an autonomy of art in an age of supremacist politics) and he predicted that Cubism would continue to serve as the primary style for the modern world. But even more important, writing epistemically, Greenberg considered Cubism’s immigration to the United States to be a sign that “that the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power” (“Decline” 572). Greenberg was looking for an American Picasso, which he found in Pollock’s drip paintings with their layers of color that produced surfaces of non-illusionistic space and even all-over masses of entanglement that produced no focal point. In Pollock, Greenberg found the epitome of Manet’s project of overcoming illusionistic space and subject which he described in The Crisis of the Easel Picture, 1948, and emphasizing the materiality of art which he explained in Towards a Newer Laocoön, 1948. Before Pollock, Greenberg was predisposed to seeing European style Cubism and Modernism take firm root in American soil. For the United States to become a unitedly superpower, it had to claim supremacy in art and not just politics. Although representation of Indian symbols and allegories are inherent in Pollock’s early paintings, Greenberg chose to overlook this subject matter in favor of a formal materialist view that mirrored supremacist politics.

Following Greenberg’s valorizing of abstract form, later theorists and critics like Michael Fried and T.J. Clark, and most recently John Golding in his book Paths to the Absolute, and Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel, curators for the blockbuster MoMA retrospective, Jackson Pollock, uphold notions of pure form with its affinities to absolute order and timeless beauty. In rather formal terms, Clark argues in favor of a modernism without representation. For example, in a review of Pollock’s Number 32, 1950 Clark
explains that modernism is comprised of a “convolution” of signs and metaphors, offering an occluded totality that might stand for a world but simultaneously annihilating that representation’s intelligibility” (Harris et al. 101). He also explained that, “If a painting is to be abstract at all – this seems to me the drip paintings logic – then it ought to be so through and through, down to the last detail or first gestalt: it ought to be made into the opposite of figuration, the outright, strict negative of it” (101). Clearly Clark missed the nuanced and allegorical references to Native American art.

Michael Fried in *Three American Painters* admitted that critics have almost completely failed to understand Pollock’s work. He claims that Pollock had taken figuration to a new mode of representation but still touted this new aesthetic as purely “optical”. Fried negates the impact of figuration for a form of pure visual effects. He describes Pollock in purely formal terms, noting the line which is neither contour nor edge, and where each part of the canvas is to be discerned in conjunction with its other parts. Contours and shapes “have been purged of figurative character” - no longer *contour*, no longer the *edge* of anything (101). It does not, by and large, give rise to positive and negative areas: we are not made to feel that one part of the canvas demands to be read as figure, whether abstract or representational, against another part of the canvas read as ground. This is tantamount to the claim that, “line has been freed at last from the job of describing contours and bounding shapes – that it has been purged of its figurative character… the illusion established in these paintings is not tangibility but of its opposite: as though the dripped line, indeed the paintings in their entirety, are accessible to eyesight alone, not to touch” (101).

From the earliest reviews of Pollock’s work, we find a mixture of differing perceptions and agendas. Some reviewers focus on the material forms in Pollock’s work.
Others look for markers reflecting the social tides of the era. Art criticism, like art, is entrenched and embedded in its time. During Pollock’s era, many critics such as Craven, Schapiro, and Greenberg favored an indigenous art that iterated the values of an isolationist ideology. Based on nascence they also sought to include the Native American within regionalist working class politics which included, among other things, farming communities and industry. But Schapiro and Greenberg, sensing the pulse of changing political agendas, grew to tout modernist values based on formalism at the expense of subjective content.

It is important to note that the abstract modernist view continues to be the most widely accepted interpretation of Pollock’s work, found in art history books, and widely reiterated in retrospective shows. Returning to MoMA’s 1985 retrospective show in light of the modern critique, we can see that Varnedoe and Karmel’s retrospective exhibit promotes this quintessential modernist-abstract frame of Pollock’s work, which was first articulated by Greenberg. Even in a recent biography on Pollock, Tom and Jack, the Intertwined Lives of Thomas Hart Benton and Jackson Pollock, Henry Adams endorses the modernist-abstract critique and situates it more fully and formally within the analytic Cubist tradition while overlooking the epistemic socialist and nationalist politics of Greenberg’s theories. In the book Adams puts forth a convincing argument for the role Cubism (through Benton) played in the development of Pollock’s abstract-modernism. According to Adams, Benton served as a link between abstract and Pollock’s drip paintings. His claim, based on formal technique and principles of abstraction seeks to answer the question as to why Pollock abandoned content (references to indigenous art and other representational elements) for pure form. In order to better understand the question of representation or mimēsis, and the significance of Pollock’s representational content, this question of pure form needs to be analyzed. It is
helpful to see the current problem through Adam’s review which summarizes earlier monographs and articles, (such as many just cited), within the abstract-modernist conclusion. Because this viewpoint promotes and even seemingly secures the modernist view, it is helpful for our studies on Pollock as something to consider in all our questioning. Further, the polemic between modernist abstract form and the psychoanalytic-Jungian interpretation is illuminated by Adam’s keen observations for content.

Few American artists had direct association with European modernism, or more specifically Cubism. Pollock’s teacher and mentor Thomas H. Benton was one of those artists, along with his friend Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Macdonald-Wright’s brother Willard Wright, and Morgan Russell. Working in Paris during the height of the Cubist era, Russell and Macdonald-Wright cofounded Synchronism, a style that hybridized a Cubist technique of fracturing form with a theory that investigated rhythmic arrangements which they found in the works of the old masters such as Michelangelo and Titian. For them, color becomes a means for expressing rhythmic sequences imbued with spiritual significance. Abstract or semi-realistic compositions are born out of luminous spirals, targets, and faceted prisms in primary hues, as seen in Benton’s 1917-8 work Constructivist Still Life (Fig. 17).
During Benton’s brief stay in Paris he worked with MacDonald and adopted Synchromist theory and style. Benton helped to promote Macdonald-Wright’s Synchromist show at the Carroll Galleries in New York in March 1914. When the Macdonald-Wright brothers returned to the United States, Benton continued to associate with them, showing Synchromist work with them in the 1916 Forum Exhibition, the first comprehensive exhibition of American modernist works. By 1919, however, Benton had moved beyond using exclusive prismatic color, but his work retained compositional sequences of rhythmic form. Benton’s advocate, the art critic Thomas Craven, wrote that, “For the development of a complete rhythm extending through large masses of sculptural forms, modern art has uncovered no gift like that of Thomas H. Benton, a painter who seems to belong neither to his own department nor to the domain of sculpture” (Adams, “Tom” 54). In Craven’s article, “The Progress of Painting,” featured in two installments in the Dial, in April and June of
1923, Craven declared that art’s progress from Massaccio to Benton had been a consistent trend towards the mastery of form. Cubist artists returned form to its position in the hierarchy of formal properties, saving form from its dissolution in Impressionism. Extending this trend for form, according to Craven, was Benton. It was evident that Benton had translated the complex Synchromist rhythmic forms derived from Cubism into “masses of sculptural forms” returning abstract form back to volume, weight, contour and figuration.

Though Benton turned from purely abstract work, he continued to adapt Synchromist rhythm in complex swirling compositions of urban and rural American life. In Benton’s composition *People of Chilmark*, 1923, forms spiral upward, morphing into foliage, hills, and clouds that swirl around a central theme that envisions the small town on Martha’s Vineyard (Fig. 18).

Figure 17 Thomas Hart Benton, *People of Chilmark*, 1920
Swirling, expanding, and pulsing compositions became Benton’s hallmark style, evident in even his most complicated ten panel mural, *America Today* (Fig. 19).

![Figure 18 Thomas Hart Benton, America Today, City Activities with Subway mural panel, 1930-31](image)

The mural was commissioned by Alvin Johnson for the boardroom of the New School for Social Research in New York. It’s interesting to note that this mural was commissioned while Benton was still teaching Pollock and other art students at the Art Students League. Pollock was very familiar with this work as he served as the model for many of the male figures in the painting. Filled with swirling, undulating, and elongated figures, Benton breathed Synchromist principles of formal technique and abstract form into inventive scenes.

Adams explains that Benton formulated his Synchromist-inspired technique into the pithy epigram, “the hollow and the bump” (Adams, “Tom” 302-3; Emmerling 12). This idea ultimately derives from the great nineteenth-century sculptor Auguste Rodin who described sculpture as “simply the art of depression and protuberance” (Adams, “Decoding”...
1). Rodin’s secretary, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, used a similar phrase, “lumps and holes,” to describe Rodin’s working method. From Rodin to Matisse and from Matisse to Macdonald-Wright and Benton, the notion of lumps, protuberances, and bumps with their recessions, holes, and hollows passed to Benton. He adopted this method fully during his stay in Paris, learning to apply it to small scale sculptures which he used as models for his paintings. Further, Benton diagramed surface designs that described compositional flow and movement. He reduced figures to abbreviated stick figures in order to analyze how surface forms might emerge from the center of these figures. He envisioned volumes as cubes to formulate volume and mass. Just as the qualification of three-dimensional space and volumes enervates Rodin’s sculptures, Benton’s “hollow and bump” method gives his work, after his Synchromist years, its rhythmic ebb and flow.

This new “hollow and bump” way to envision and enliven form had become an irreducible feature of Benton’s work by the time he repeatedly taught this methodology to art students, including Pollock, at the Art Students League. In Benton’s art classes students analyzed all types of art forms from Chinese brush paintings, Persian miniatures, Indian sculptures, to Baroque and Mannerist painters. Marianne Berardi compared notes from Pollock’s drawing books with Benton’s article “The Mechanics of Form Organization in Painting” which he wrote for Arts, 1926 (1). She identified precise correspondences between Pollock’s drawings and Benton’s article, demonstrating how influential Benton’s theory of “the hollow and the bump” is in Pollock’s artistic training. Benton’s “hollow and bump” technique of analyzing rhythmic volumes is was also a means of expressing them. From Macdonald-Wright to Benton, and from Benton to his students (and especially Pollock), the “hollow and the bump” came to mean much more than technical applications of paint. It
came to signify a unifying modern and universal principle for art. We see Benton’s influence as an early tendency in Pollock’s painting, *Going West*, 1935 (Fig. 20).

![Figure 19 Jackson Pollock, *Going West*, 1935](image)

Clearly Pollock interpreted Benton’s swirling vortex, his undulating landscape, and his wandering self-absorbed figures. The technique of applying paint to canvas in swirling and rhythmic ways appears to be a commonality between Benton and Pollock, and from Cubist shattered forms to Synchromist rhythms and Benton’s “hollow and the bump” methodologies, the modernist interpretation of Pollock’s work appears to be secure.

But this interpretation is problematic in three ways. First, this passing of the pulsating torch from Benton to Pollock credits Greenberg, Lee Krasner, and Hofmann for Pollock’s mature style. Second, it contributes to the mythology of Pollock as a monumental icon of Americanism or alternately of being ill and emotionally unstable, a myth that Kramer accuses both critiques of creating. Third, it conveniently bypasses the issues of *mimēsis* and
indigenous American Indian forms in Pollock’s works by focusing on the new and prevailing modernist episteme rather than observation and analysis of indigenous elements in Pollock and others’ works of the time. According to Adams, after leaving the Art Students League, Pollock worked at negotiating a means in which to aestheticize or reiterate Native American symbolic content, but this was merely a phase. Adams extends the abstract modernist claim that Pollock’s later drip paintings are not mimetic reiterations of indigenous forms, but a sort of return to the ebb and flow of art that was initiated under Benton’s tutelage at the League. According to Adams, Pollock abandoned his teacher’s ideas until he met Lee Krasner. Through Krasner’s influence, and particularly her training with Hofmann and her friendship with Greenberg, Pollock ‘came to himself’ like the prodigal son and returned to Benton’s “hollow and the bump” system a wiser and more mature artist.

Krasner and Pollock met in November of 1941, six years before his first drip painting. Krasner, a student of Hofmann, had embraced Cubism as the foundation of modern form. Krasner admired Matisse, Picasso and Mondrian. She was devoted to abstraction and could not understand how anyone “could take Benton seriously” (Adams, “Tom” 239). As Adams explains, “The art critic Barbara Rose, reflecting a widely held view, has declared that Krasner helped Pollock escape “Benton’s narrow provincialism and develop a more international, sophisticated view of art” (243). One time, after the couple began living together, Krasner picked up a brush in order to show Pollock how to paint, presumably in a more cubist manner. She naively believed that all Pollock’s ideas had come from a provincial Benton. But in fact, as Adams explains,

Benton for his gruff pretensions, was a thoroughly cosmopolitan figure. He could read books in foreign languages; he had lived in Europe; he had traveled
widely in the United States; his friends included leading intellectuals and artists, not only painters but poets and musicians; he read philosophy and aesthetics; and he had studied art history from top to bottom, including things that are often left out, such as Persian miniatures and Hindu sculpture. (242)

Despite Benton’s sophisticated knowledge of art and its diverse forms, Krasner considered him to be archaic. She disregarded the figural traditions in Western art and art history in favor of the abstract art of her teacher Hans Hofmann. Her disregard for Benton was overtly expressed and according to Adams, effective in convincing Pollock to feel the same way. But when attempting to teach Pollock a better way for making art, Pollock became furious. He stormed out of his studio and felt resentful for months afterwards. Krasner and Pollock were so diametrically opposed in their approaches that they did not talk about art, nor did they attend museum and gallery exhibits together (242). Yet despite their artistic differences, Adams believes that Krasner was largely responsible for Pollock’s shift to what seems to be complete non-representational art in 1947 by exposing him to Hofmann’s influential ideas.

Hofmann was very influential in the promoting Cubist and abstract formalism in his work at the Student Arts League and elsewhere. Bavarian born, Hofmann studied in Munich at Heinrich Wolff and Ernst Neumann’s school for graphic arts and became a full-time resident of Paris by 1905. In 1930, Hofmann accepted the invitation of his former student Worth Ryder to come to the University of California at Berkeley. Hofmann began teaching at the Art Students League in 1933, two years before Benton left the League to paint a mural for the Missouri state capitol building and to work as the head of the painting department at Kansas City Art Institute. By 1934 Hofmann opened his Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts,
located at 137 East 57th Street where he taught Krasner, the critics Greenberg and Rosenberg, and a long list of confirmed abstract expressionist painters.

Like Benton’s “hollow and the bump” theory, Hofmann was also (according to Adams) influential in Pollock’s work. By 1942 Hofmann had experimented with dripping paint as in his painting, *The Wind* (Fig. 21).

Figure 21 Hans Hofmann, *The Wind*, 1942, Oil, duco, gouache and India ink on board, 43 7/8 x 27 3/4 in. (111.4 x 70.5)

He, in a way similar to Benton, developed a color theory based on “push and pull” which greatly influenced Mark Rothko’s meditative panels. Hofmann’s method was based on the interdependent relationships that occur between form, space, and color. But taking account of his general oeuvre, we see the cubist grid which provided an underlying structure in his work, like in his *Still Life Interior*, of the same time, 1941 (Fig. 22).
In *Still Life Interior* we see how Hofmann aligned his structures and forms evenly and methodically along a vertical and horizontal grid creating a matrix of structure to forms along xy quadrants. Krasner’s work also forms upon a structured cubist grid that holds the all-over compositions together in even rows and columns, easily identified in her *Untitled* 1949, from her *Little Image* series which she began soon after she and Pollock moved to Long Island from New York City (Fig. 23).
Even in her looser compositions, such as *Gaea*, 1966, with its sweeping broad strokes of paint and tightly controlled forms, the grid forms an underlying organizational structure (Fig. 24).

![Figure 24 Lee Krasner. *Gaea*. 1966](image)

An obvious articulation of this tightly formed grid is absent in all of Pollock’s painting; however, recent restoration on Pollock’s work *Alchemy*, 1947 does in fact show an underlying grid upon which Pollock structured his work (Belcher) (Fig. 25). The painting, having hung on the wall of Peggy Guggenheim’s palazzo on the Grand Canal in Venice, had collected sixty years’ worth of dust and cigarette smoke from visitors to the gallery and Peggy’s many parties. During the restoration, the conservator Lucian Pensabene found very light delicate outlines in white, forming a loose grid, or what is “comparable to a grid” on the canvas upon which Pollock organized, with balance, intention, and precision his splatters and lines of paint (Belcher). The recent and past evidence, from a long line of critics (even those preceding Greenberg), would agree with the prevailing theory that Pollock’s work took a drastic turn from figurative to non-representative between the years 1942 and 1947.
The only explanation seems to be a return to Benton’s “hollow and bump” or an embrace of Hofmann’s “push, pull” in a sort of to and fro technique that arrived to Pollock through Krasner’s influence. In this modernist argument Pollock’s work is divided into three primary phases. First, Pollock looked to Benton and Benton’s friends like Ross Braught or José Clemente Orozco. Second, Pollock looked to John Graham and synthesized a sort of Picasso-esque primitive style replete with symbols and imagery based on Jungian theories of the unconscious. Third, and lastly, Pollock turned to abstraction which gave him a freer mode of expression that was heavily influenced by the abstract art of Hofmann through Krasner. This viewpoint suggests that Pollock’s artwork was fluidly influenced by his friends and associates at differing times of his artistic output, ultimately culminating in an all over abstract style. But this explanation overlooks mimèsis to suggest a sort of regression from Benton’s original influences to an experimental phase, and then to Hofmann’s ideas.
This critique has an obvious blind spot that discounts Pollock’s engagement with American Indian themes and mimetic figuration. In an interview with Dorothy Strickler for the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art, Krasner reported that she had brought Hofmann home to meet Pollock and to see his work in 1949. Hofmann was intrigued and asked Pollock, if he worked from nature as there were no still lifes or models to be seen in his studio. According to Krasner, “Pollock replied, ‘I am nature.’ And Hofmann’s reply was, ‘Ah, but if you work by heart, you will repeat yourself.’ To which Jackson did not reply at all” (Strickler). Even if Pollock had adopted this new mode of abstraction, he apparently was not very interested in Hofmann even though he was the foremost authority on abstract art in America at that time. With further analysis we can find a solution to the problem of Pollock’s “disjointed” artistic phases and his seemingly turn to abstract form through an investigation into mimêsis as a means of recuperating an indigenous American spirit of art.

Second, Adams contributes to the mythology of Pollock. He promotes the idea that Pollock was an impassioned but simple man. Often, he cites Pollock’s personality, alcoholism, and intelligence. For example, Adams explains the reason for Krasner’s influence on Pollock, writing that, “we learn that the creature most dangerous to man is not some reasonably brainy primate but the slithering crocodile, with a brain the size of a poker chip, which because it has few thoughts is singularly successful in turning thought into action” (Adams, “Tom” 244). He continues, “Krasner’s strength – and one could say this of Pollock as well – was not sophistication but a more primitive instinct.” (244) Like writings that posit Pollock as the western equivalent to James Dean, judging Pollock’s intelligence as primal and instinctive looks to fables and hearsay more than art. Adams concludes his commentary on Pollock to say that,
The real problem was that Pollock was very sick. While mediations now exist for bipolar illness, they did not exist in Pollock’s lifetime. Surely the real problem that Pollock encountered at this juncture was not that he somehow failed as an artist but that he suffered from a then incurable disease – a depression so crippling that it often made him unable to work at all. What is remarkable is that despite this disease, which incapacitated him most of the time, he nonetheless produced such a memorable body of achievement. (352)

The point is not that Pollock was an alcoholic or may have suffered from depression or bipolar personality disorder, or any other number of conditions authors cite. Rather, dwelling on Pollock’s personality and personal life, in this case, overshadows the deeper concerns we have for his work, namely, his ability to take the socio-political epistemes or paradigms of his time, particularly the Indian-episteme to create a body of work that evidences in often concealed and covert ways.

Third, although Adams extends the modernist critic of pure form, he more profoundly (and inadvertently) acknowledges the underlying representational and mimetic qualities in Pollock’s work. For he shows that the art historian Marianne Berardi has found some key aspects of Pollock’s drip paintings which suggest that Pollock never fully committed to non-objective art (Adams, “Decoding” 56). Adams points out that the assumption that Pollock’s earlier drip paintings such as Autumn Rhythm or Lavender Mist: Number I, 1950 were entirely abstract and non-figurative may be incorrect. In actuality, there are elements of figuration in his drip paintings. For example, x-ray analysis has disclosed a dark figure beneath an intricate web of splotched and interlaced paint lying at the bottom of Pollock’s Fathom Five, 1947 (56). Furthermore, Berardi discovered that Pollock also concealed his own
name in his first monumental painting, *Mural*, 1943. For Smithsonian Magazine, 2009, Adams wrote that it was discovered that Pollock had written his name on the painting *Mural* in big bold letters, not as a signature, but as a structural device. Adams concludes that the use of his name served as a compositional technique. Pollock organized the painting around his name according to a compositional system—vertical markings that serve as the loci of rhythmic spirals—borrowed directly from his mentor, Benton (Adams, “Decoding” 56). This may certainly have been one reason that Pollock included his name on the painting, but Sue Taylor found that Pollock hid a myriad of symbols, including letters, figures, and even numbers in his paintings. Recent x-ray analysis of many of Pollock's paintings confirms that he did indeed embed a myriad of representational elements into his drip paintings. In addition to letters, symbols, figures and numbers these include body parts, birds, faces, swastikas and other indigenous symbols (qtd. in Adams, “Decoding” 57). These along with the figural elements in Pollock’s earlier and latest paintings suggest that figuration was an integral part of Pollock’s intentions. Pollock even said as much in 1945 when he stated that “I choose to veil the images” and in 1956 declared that “I'm a little representational all the time. But when you're painting out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge.” In conclusion, Adams perpetuates the notion of modernist form in his ‘hollow and bump’ thesis but concedes that Pollock was a representational, figurative painter. He admits that Pollock, “seems to have been disclosing [in his black paintings] what he was doing in the understructure of his earlier paintings” (Adams, “Tom” 349). Adams has hit upon the very key point of this study, that Pollock’s work is highly representational and mimetic. This is not to say that his work embodies the notion of *mimēsis* as being an exact or faithful copy of a thing, but that it represents in some way, be it figurative or symbolic, and thereby Pollock transgresses the
notion of modernist non-representational form. Chapters 3-6 will analyze mimēsis in its various forms, functions, and modes. But for the present, Adams notes that Pollock’s work is representational and figurative, and I claim that this fact is most pertinent to our understanding of his engagement with indigenous arts. While the modernist analysis prevails today, Adams and others are beginning, in analysis and hindsight, to acknowledge the presence of the spirit of indigenous art, representation, mimēsis, and alternative paradigms of thought or epistemes at work. Because of this, we need to recognize modern art criticism as epistemic rather than infallible. In Adams review we see the extension of the modernist critique in three ways. First, it promotes a trajectory of art from Cubism to Benton and from Benton to Pollock through the influences of Krasner, Hofmann, and Greenberg. Second, it perpetuates the mythologies of Pollock’s personality which tend to overshadow his accomplishments. Third, the critique overlooks the importance of the many figurative elements in Pollock’s work and the issue of representation and indigenous influences and the significance of these hidden representational and figurative elements.

The modern critique, from Greenberg to Clark, Fried, Kraus, Adams and many others, seeks to position Abstract Expressionism, and particularly Pollock, within the history of Western art with a single trajectory from Manet to Picasso, from Picasso to Pollock, from Pollock to the Color Field painters, setting up a logical foundation to bridge the apparent gap between the two fields. The purpose of this brief retrospective on the history of modern criticism in America is to situate the criticism of Pollock within the larger problem of art criticism itself. For just as the nation was seeking a new authentic identity apart from European culture and precedents, art criticism also looked to separate itself from European
styles and to demonstrate American efforts to extend the trajectory of Cubism and Western art.

The relationship between Cubism, Synchronism, and American abstraction seems to be a logical, visual, and even a foregone conclusion. First, as Caroline A. Jones demonstrates in *Eyesight Along, Clement Greenberg’s Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*, Greenberg’s style of art criticism developed from an assorted array of influences that account as much for Hofmann’s aesthetics as for his own political agenda. From Hofmann, Greenberg inherited a love for the orderliness of Pantone colors and color charts and surface flatness, and analytic Cubism (Jones, xxiii, 181). But Greenberg’s engagement with art criticism has a long and complicated politically driven history and just as quickly as Greenberg proclaimed Pollock’s supremacy over Parisian antecedents, the broader Indian-episteme and search for a nascent national identity was discarded for one of supremacy and power. Like Pollock, Greenberg witnessed two distinct epistemes in the art and political worlds. Both were caught between two distinct and powerful thought forces. It is in the gap between Regionalism and Abstract Modernism that Pollock and Greenberg formulated their artistic beliefs. Rather than a smooth transition between one form to the next, the gap or distance between the two is much wider than anticipated. The modernist critique claims that Pollock is a uniquely abstract painter whose abstractions fulfill modernism’s claim to non-representational form. But Pollock’s engagement with the Indian-episteme and the recuperation of *mimēsis* forms an underlying theme that the modernist critique has overlooked. However, before analyzing what might be missing in the critique, we need to analyze the psychoanalytical critique as well.
The Psychoanalytic Critique

The psychoanalytical-Jungian critique of Pollock’s work is no less problematic. When Hilton Kramer critiqued the MoMA retrospective of Pollock’s art, he asked one primary question: why did the curators Varnedoe and Karmel omit the psychoanalytic critique of Pollock’s work by showing only works that appeared to lead up the drip style, particularly when a large body of art criticism on Pollock adheres to the Surrealist, Jungian, and more psychoanalytic approach to Pollock’s work? Because the critique of Pollock’s work is polarized between two opposing interpretations, both views need to be analyzed. The psychoanalytic-Jungian critique claims for itself three primary conditions: first, Pollock went to three different Jungian analysts for therapeutic purposes; second, he gave his first analyst Joseph Henderson, a collection of drawings which Henderson interpreted as being based on Jungian archetypes; and third, art historians claim Pollock’s work is inspired by Surrealism, which is to say based on impulses and imagery derived from the unconscious. In this section we will first consider the origins of the Jungian critique in Harold Rosenberg and others’ reviews of Abstract Expressionism and how these are rooted in Jungian principles. Next, we will analyze the images Pollock gave to Henderson and note the references to American Indian arts within them, and finally, we will look at more recent theories stemming from the Jungian critique which equate American Indian motifs with ideas about shamanism.

Unlike Greenberg, Rosenberg acknowledged the issue of performativity in Pollock’s work. He coined the descriptive term “action-painting” to emphasize the motional or gestural quality of Pollock’s making. In his essay, American Action Painters, he writes,
At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act - rather than as a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter. (Rosenberg, “American” 581)

For Rosenberg, the Action Painters, (Pollock and DeKooning, for instance) were expressing something deeply personal and subjective, a type of allegorizing of personal experience. They were painting the actions of their subjective experience, responding to pure instinct and automatism wherein the artist was “pouring” out an “essence” of himself in the painting (581). Further, Rosenberg explains that, “A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist. The painting itself is a ‘moment’ in the adulterated mixture of his life – whether ‘moment’ means the actual minutes taken up with spotting the canvas or the entire duration of a lucid drama” (582). Art was no longer objective. “The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life” (581). For Rosenberg, art now was an act that translated and transcended the psychological experience. Rosenberg’s issue of self and personal experience constitutes the basis for the psychoanalytic-Jungian approach to Pollock’s work.

Rosenberg claims that action painting, and more specifically Pollock’s drip paintings, are based on a process of self-discovery and self-creation. Pollock’s abstract drip paintings are summarized as the spontaneous and purgative expressions of the modern existential man. As Rosenberg explains “the act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist’s
existence” (583). Even in the view of modern abstraction, Pollock’s work is seen to the result of a tortured artist aiming to express the avant-garde’s profound desire to transcend the particulars of history and search out universal values (Rushing, “Ritual” 292). As Michael Leja observes, overall Rosenberg’s critique describes the Surrealist technique of automatic writing or painting from the unconscious. Rosenberg posed himself as a “new, mystifying theorist and defender of modernist abstraction’s origin and involvement in the individual soul, spirituality, and interiority” (Leja 36). This connection between Surrealism and Rosenberg’s critique of the canvas as now being a place for the “artist to act” is not accidental. Rosenberg’s involvement with Surrealism was profound. He contributed regularly to the View, the Surrealist magazine which was founded by Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford in 1940 (36). The View printed Rosenberg’s Surrealist poetry as well as a dialogue between Rosenberg and André Breton in 1942. Rosenberg also created a series of answers to a Surrealist survey. Rosenberg’s Surrealist review of Pollock put the issue of subject and the constitution of the subject through art firmly in the oeuvre of American political criticism. Art is political, and the subject is composed through art.

To begin with, one of the central issues in the Jungian critique is the issue of the subject. While the abstract modern critique, with its ties to epistemic nationalism that embraced modernism as an antidote to socialism, focuses on the forms of art, Rosenberg’s critique argued that European modernism was surpassed through the American subjective experience and that art criticism now required a response something akin to “psychoanalysis” (Kramer 12). This very idea that Pollock’s drip paintings, and for that matter his entire oeuvre serves as some type of medium for the development of the human psyche comes to us through Sigmund Freud’s theories on art, and that of his successors (Jacques Lacan, Carl
Jung, and others) who speak on the unconscious. First, Freud’s theories consist of defining the unconscious mind and second, he proposes methods for accessing it. The unconscious is that part of the mind which constitutes processes such as thought, impulses, memories, motivations, and the imagination. These processes may not be accessible to objective introspection but form the substrate upon which human conscious thought depends. As Freud writes, “Properly speaking, the unconscious is the real psychic; its inner nature is just as unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly reported to us through the data of consciousness as is the external world through the indications of our sensory organs” (Freud 121). Demystifying the unconscious through the analysis of dreams and art is, according to Freud (and Jung), vital for understanding the unconscious and conscious mind.

We think of the era as one in which nationalism prevailed and for which a modernist aesthetic, without references to the working classes or the indigenous, was most suited. But other emerging theories were coming into play, notably here, the psychoanalytic critique and its emphasis on individuality. For Freud, and Jung, imagery from art or dreams provides the images that can reveal to us the unconscious mind or more specifically the relationships between human nature and thought. Through the interpretation of dreams or art the mysterious inner life or substrate of all consciousness, upon which conscious thought depends, is available to us. As Freud explains in The Interpretation of Dreams, the arts are primary modes for expressing the unconscious and its constancy over time. To understand the unconscious, we need to access it through dreams and art. There is a certain visual language which reveals to us the nature of the unconscious. But the visual field needs to be translated into verbal language in order for us to understand it. Art is a window into our souls
or natures, serving as an illustration of the inner substrate of conscious and unconscious thought. Psychoanalysis is needed in order to access the meaning of the images, whether they appear in art or dreams. As W. J. T. Mitchell explains, “psychoanalysis is a science of the laws of expression that govern the interpretation of the mute image. Whether that image is projected in dreams or in the scenes of everyday life, analysis provides the method for extracting the hidden verbal message from the misleading and inarticulate pictorial surface” (Mitchell 1108). No matter the source, visual imagery must be decoded, or translated into words that we can understand and talk about. Translating or analyzing the visual field is a means by which the messages of the unconscious can be viewed through the conscious mind, the center of verbal language and thought.

Freud’s ideas are expanded upon by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who describes the unconscious in terms of the individual and the collective. The collective unconscious is the universal unconscious which is shared by all species. It is also the repository of universal images or rather symbols and mythologies which are shared and understood by all humans. Jung explains that archetypes are iconic images that represent “typical situations of great and vital importance, which have repeated themselves in the course of history innumerable times” (qtd. Lu 21). These ancient symbols and myths, passed from one generation to the next, constitute archetypes that form the foundation of all conscious thought, shared by all individuals, present and past. As Jung further explains, symbols and myths reside in the unconscious of all individuals and form the basis of their cultural traditions in diverse and creative ways. Accessing the history or evolution of each culture yields a record of the human psyche.²⁴ The arts of primitive man are, in Jungian thought, as relevant to art and thought today as in times past, for they reveal what it is to be human. In Jung, this notion that
art is a means to access the unconscious is a fully developed theory. Art is not only revelatory of consciousness, but all art, whether in the individual or as understood in bygone or ‘primitive’ cultures, is scientifically relevant. From this idea of the collective conscious and its expression in archetype imagery found in art, Pollock’s drip paintings, and for that matter his entire oeuvre serves, in the psychoanalytic critique, as some type of medium from which the developing human psyche is made known to us. Pollock’s symbols and subjects are interpreted as signs of the consciousness of an eternal past and present.

Rosenberg removed Pollock from the epistemic discourse of modernism and its grounding in Cubism, transcending modernism by evoking the notion of individuality and subjectivity, claiming it to be “some exalted realm of existential ‘action’ wherein the human psyche is not questioned, only represented” (Kramer 12). He explains that, “guided by visual and somatic memories of paintings he had seen or made – memories which he did his best to keep from intruding into his consciousness – he gesticulated upon the canvas and watched for what each novelty would declare him and his art to be” (Rosenberg, “American” 583). Rather than pure form, the psychoanalytic model views Pollock’s works as being spontaneous expressions of his unconscious mind.

Rosenberg was not alone in his evocation of experience over thought. Over a decade before Rosenberg’s essay, Greenberg cited experience, and particularly the irreducible elements of experience, as being the second development in the avant-garde’s progression (with the departure from ideals as being the first). He explains that in departing from expressing ideals, each art discipline expands “the expressive resources of the medium in order to express with greater immediacy sensations” (“Avant-Garde” 556). Communicating sensation can only be perceived through the “sense through which [the sensation] entered the
consciousness” (557). While Rosenberg emphasizes artistic subjectivity and experience, the sensible and perceptible qualities of art are key elements for both critiques.

Other critics found Surrealist elements in Pollock’s work. Robert M. Coates wrote that Pollock’s style was “a curious mixture of the abstract and the symbolic” being “almost wholly individual” and based on the influence of Picasso (Coates 97-98). Another author compared Pollock’s work to Surrealist automatic writing, saying “Pollock still uses an automatic technique, pushing totemic and metaphorical shapes into swirling webs of pigment” (Anon., “Reviews” 55). Perhaps the Surrealist critique was most succinctly written by an anonymous critic who wrote,

Chaos.

Absolute lack of harmony

Complete lack of structural organization.

Total absence of technique, however rudimentary.

Once again, chaos.

But these are superficial impressions, first impressions…Each one of his pictures is part of himself. But, what kind of man is he? What is his inner world worth? Is it worth knowing, or is it totally undistinguished? Damn it, if I must judge a painting by the artist it is no longer the painting that I am interested in… (Anon., “Chaos” 70)

While confused about how to interpret the work, the critic admits to the links between the subjective experience, self-creation, and art. Like Rosenberg, each critic drawing upon Surrealist tendencies emphasizes some element inherent in the psychoanalytic view such as
symbolic elements, intense emotion, the inner (unconscious) world, automatic writing, and the individualism. Rosenberg and other likeminded critics saw Pollock’s work through a particular episteme that makes up the flip side of the modernist theoretical coin.

While some critics saw archetypal and unconscious elements in Pollock’s work, this critique reached a fuller theoretical ground much later than did the critique of abstract modernism. In fact, this critical view gained followers after Pollock’s death. Shortly after Pollock’s untimely and tragic death theorists such as William Rubin, W. Jackson Rushing, and Stephen Polcari and others began to look at Pollock’s work with a new criticism based on the formative elements from Pollock’s early childhood. Being the youngest of five sons, Pollock is said to have been born within a dysfunctional family with an overbearing mother and a disinterested father.25 Between 1934 and 1937, after having studied at the Art Students League, Pollock suffered from some type of emotional or psychological situation and began drinking heavily. In 1939 he began treatment with Dr. Joseph Henderson, a Jungian psychoanalyst in New York City. Henderson wrote that Pollock was not particularly responsive to analysis, but he was highly engaged and enthusiastic when discussing art. Henderson requested that Pollock bring his drawings in for them to discuss during his therapy sessions. Henderson would critique Pollock’s drawings according to Jungian archetypes and principles. As Henderson reflected,

I wonder why I neglected to find out, study or analyze his personal problems in the first year of his work… I wonder why I did not seem to try to cure his alcoholism… I have decided that it is because his unconscious drawings brought me strongly into a state of counter-transference to the symbolic
material he produced. Thus I was compelled to follow the movement of his symbolism as inevitably as he was motivated to produce it. (qtd. Wysuth 14)

According to Henderson, Pollock was diagnosed as schizophrenic with periods of “violent agitation” wherein he could produce no clear imagery. He also suffered from periods of withdrawal and isolation. Henderson used his expertise in Jungian analysis to critique Pollock’s work evidencing unconscious imagery related to such things as sacrifice, psychic energy, figurative archetypes, composite animals and birds, and embryonic forms.

Henderson’s notes, along with the observations of Surrealist critics, contributed to a broader Jungian report on Pollock’s work and psychological state of mind. His childhood struggles with peers and his later battle with alcoholism have been carefully scrutinized, such that Pollock’s artwork has more recently come to be described as a type of ritual healing wherein his tortured unconscious self found solace in art.

In an unpublished lecture, “Jackson Pollock: A Psychological Commentary” (1968) Henderson explained the purpose of Pollock’s drawings and his progress as a patient.

Henderson admits that much of their communication was about Pollock’s art. Accordingly Pollock’s ‘inability’ to express himself appears to have been arrested when he discussed art. Henderson’s account suggests that Pollock saw these sessions as a type of research, a type of one on one investigation into unconscious archetypes and their manifestation in art, dreams, religious imagery and myths, a consistent art dialogue with a Jungian representative. Had Henderson described Pollock as opening up his innermost feelings about his mother and father, or his early childhood experiences, we might consider these sessions as deeply moving psychological excavations. But with careful reading, we see in Henderson’s statement that Pollock attended his weekly sessions as faithfully as he attended Benton’s art
classes. He not only attended, but brought in his finished homework, drawings and sketches that he had made, mostly beforehand, for review and discussion. Further, according to Henderson, Pollock did not practice free association based on his own drawings and was ‘intolerant’ of any ‘real objectivity’ toward them. When Henderson suggests that, “I had to be content with saying only what he could assimilate at any given time, and that was not much”, we see that Pollock was learning Jungian thought, but only in terms of his own works of art, and only to the degree that Pollock felt Henderson’s commentary applied to them. This fact is further underscored by Henderson’s report that, “Most of my comments centered around the nature of the archetypal symbolism in his drawings, I never could get onto a more personal level with him, until after he stopped bringing the drawings.” Clearly Pollock’s interest in discussing art was all encompassing, enough to fill the time spent in weekly sessions between early January or early 1938 until September, 1940 when Henderson moved out of New York and referred Pollock to see the analyst Dr. Violet Staub de Laszlo.

Henderson’s original diagnosis was that Pollock suffered from schizophrenia. As to Henderson’s diagnosis of Pollock’s mental condition, what we can know from letters written by Pollock and his family members indicate that Pollock suffered from alcoholism, and possibly a mood or mental disorder or imbalance. Once Pollock started to see the Dr. Staub de Laszlo, he was treated for alcoholism, not schizophrenia. Whether Pollock suffered from schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, or any number of conditions related or unrelated to his upbringing and early childhood experiences is beyond the reach of any researcher. But what is at stake in the psychoanalytic critique is the degree to which Pollock’s health determined his artwork, and to what degree his artwork reflects his health and wellbeing at any given time during the timeline of his creative output. The entwining of Pollock’s work
and his mental health is part of the myth that makes it necessary for us to seek a more objective way to analyze his work.

Henderson’s monograph *Jackson Pollock: Psychoanalytic Drawings*, 1970 was written to demonstrate a theoretical association between Pollock’s drawings and his psychological state. The title is misleading as it emphasizes not art but psychoanalytic processes (Wysuth 42). Along this vein, Henderson described Pollock’s drawings as though they had been constructed along a progression towards healing, even though the drawings were undated and there is no clue as to their actual chronology. The timeline of the drawings is entirely unclear. Further Pollock did not make the drawings in Henderson’s office nor were they created for psychoanalytic purposes. Nevertheless, in his lecture, Henderson organized Pollock’s drawings along thematic lines, beginning with images of violent agitation, slides showing paralysis or withdrawal of vital energy, and finally works indicating (according to Henderson’s interpretation) a pathological form of introversion (Wysuth 42-43). Along these lines, Henderson used the drawings and sketches to show progress in his patient, Pollock. In a lecture based on his book, Henderson explains, “Following a prolonged period of representing human figures and animals in an anguished, dismembered or lamed condition, there came a new development in the drawings Pollock made during therapy” (qtd. Friedman, “Energy” 42). Henderson pointed out symbolic elements that demonstrated Pollock’s improvement in assimilating a symbolic repertoire that evoked the workings of his unconscious mind. For example, Henderson’s interpretation reveals Jungian themes on unresolved familial tensions. He described one image as having, “Those pathetic upper limbs reaching upward toward an unfeeling purely schematic female torso must denote a problem left unsolved and perhaps insoluble, a frustrated longing for the all-giving Mother” (qtd.
Wysuth 42-3). As a Jungian, Henderson sought to interpret art along various Jungian topics including mother-father archetypes. Henderson’s point of view predisposed him to seek for and find signs and to order these within a theory of self-disclosure and healing. Hence the cross, circle, square, mandala, axis mundi, and other symbols suggested integration between Pollock’s particular mental condition and more universal vibrations. Opposing elements in Pollock’s work were seen to be increasingly unified in harmonious articulations of the archetypal dominations of circle and square, even though no direct ordering of such symbols exists in the overview of the undated drawings (qtd. Wysuth 43). Henderson’s psychoanalytic view, in opposition to Greenbergian notions of non-representational form, has contributed to the theory that Pollock’s unconscious mind is an entwined and inseparable, irreducible component of his drip paintings. Being a component of the unconscious, Pollock and his artwork are then mythic, as mysterious as the unconscious mind itself.

But careful scrutiny of what we can know helps us to disentangle the myth from the man. For example, different biographers have suggested that Pollock was not particularly well read and that he spent a lot of time brooding. But contrary to these and Henderson’s findings, evidences to the contrary suggest that Pollock was eager to discuss art and other topics with friends, critics, and family members. He was particularly passionate in his art discussions, suggesting that Pollock had a clear point of view from which he argued. Other accounts confirm that Pollock was avidly involved in sharing his passion for art with his friends and colleagues. For example, one of Pollock’s friends, Harry Jackson, reports on an evening with Pollock at height of Pollock’s career. Jackson notes that,

It’s a lot of crap about Jack not talking much; he talked ….. one long night, drinking beer in the kitchen. Jack brought out Cahiers d’art and analyzed
Tintoretto in great detail, explain the composition of this and that; what he was doing was bringing me pure Tom Benton: Venetian Renaissance to Tom Benton, Tom to Jack, Jack to Harry. He talked especially about composition that night, and Lee Krasner came down several times to say, ‘Jackson, come to bed – you’re going to be so tired and you’ve got this and that to do.’ But we went on until dawn, with Jack describing Tintoretto and weaving a spell: “See, it goes back over there, and then over here, and it never goes off the canvas.” (Adams, “Tom” 309-310)

Pollock had many friends and supporters that he associated and talked about art with: Lee Krasner, Willem de Kooning, Ashile Gorky, David Smith, Reuben Kadish, Benton, and Axel Horn are just a few that biographers mention. It seems clear from varied sources that Pollock discussed art passionately and frequently with artists and non-artists both. Henderson claims that Helen Marot, another of Pollock’s friends, called to report on her association with Pollock. She reported to Henderson that, “I saw Jackson Pollock last night and he talked for hours in a stormy but fascinating way about himself and his painting. I don’t know but it seems to me we may have a genius on our hands” (qtd. Wysuth 43). Whether at the Cedar Tavern associating with other artists or with Benton or his family members, Pollock was eager to talk about art. From Henderson’s account, his discussions about art accounted for the bulk of his therapy sessions with Pollock, suggesting that Pollock was an avid talker, depending on his audience and the topic at hand.

We can conclude that Henderson’s assessment (and especially his lectures and book), though highly influential in fashioning Pollock into a mythic archetype, was based on his own paradigmatic experience, a subset of the larger evolving 1970s consciousness toward
individuality within a new social and collectivist paradigm. This trend for psychoanalysis was manifest in the various societies for Jungian thought in New York, such as the Analytical Psychology Club of New York, which was founded in 1936, and the Medical Society for Analytical Psychology - Eastern Division which was established in 1946. Henderson contributed to the Jungian episteme by taking his part in the highly influential New York Jungian Analytical psychology community, and by perpetuating its precepts in his writings, and particularly in his lectures on Jackson Pollock and his drawings. As such he contributed his part to the episteme that attributed to Surrealism the artistic manifestation of Jungian thought and existential views on selfhood. Further, we know that at least three close personal associates or family members thought answers could be found in Jungian theories and each (his brother Sande, and his friends Helen Marot and the artist John Graham) urged Pollock in his pursuits of Jungian thought. This is not to say Pollock sought healing or even felt he needed healing. Nor is it to adamantly describe Pollock as Jungian. But rather this is to say that it is clear that Pollock spent over a year discussing art in private sessions with a Jungian professional. But what drove Pollock to seek counseling was not his artwork but his alcoholism, which Henderson failed to treat.

The psychoanalytic view also suggests that Pollock’s work rests upon a relation between art and psychotherapeutic art analysis and gives Henderson much credit for directing Pollock’s work along Jungian theoretical tenets. In his review of Pollock’s drawings, Wysuth explains, “Indeed the causes of Pollock’s response to Surrealism and psychic automatism are to be found in the nature and effect of his mental crisis of 1938-1940, and particularly in Henderson’s emphasis on the psychological relevance of visual symbols” (Wysuth 44-45). The psychoanalytic interpretation contributes to a host of Surrealist critiques of Pollock’s
work that misses the finer details of Pollock’s work. Viewing Pollock within a mythology of complicated influences between unconscious art influences, impulses, family tensions, and artistic choices, the psychoanalytic critique, like the abstract modernist review is epistemic or historically contingent. But outside of either critique, we can conclude that Pollock was an avid researcher, an investigator into Native American arts and symbolism that informed his inquiry into the authenticity of art. Rather than a passive vehicle absorbing all the emotional and aesthetic influences around him, we must see Pollock as actively and intentionally networking, and consciously making choices in his own life and art. The result of analyzing the psychoanalytic and the abstract modern critique is that we see art criticism as paradigmatic and historically contingent, ignoring or deemphasizing key elements that caused each to miss the significance of the indigenous elements in Pollock’s work.

We have already reviewed the abstract modern narrative that defines the stages of Pollock’s work and ultimately leads to a descriptive conclusion about abstract form in Pollock’s drip paintings. Proposing a contrasting timeline, Francis O’Connor establishes a fundamental approach to the stages of Pollock’s work that credits Henderson with Pollock’s radically changing approach to art. For O’Connor, the phases of Pollock’s work coincide with the times and events of his hospitalization, or treatment for alcoholism. The first phase of Pollock’s work encompasses the time from Pollock’s studies at the Art Students League until his mental crisis and subsequent hospitalization in 1939. The second phase O’Connor proposes begins with Pollock’s first one-man show at Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century Gallery, 1943 and encompasses works believed to be inspired by Benton, Diego Rivera, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Surrealism, and psychic automatism. Wysuth adds to this timeline and even stresses that within this phase, Henderson was a key influence in Pollock’s
work and helped to establish the trajectory Pollock’s work would take in subsequent years. Wysuth suggested that in working with Henderson, “Pollock became keenly aware of the psychological relevance of visual symbols and was forced to adopt a new aesthetic vocabulary with which to articulate a new need” (Wysuth 12). O’Connor credits Henderson with guiding and teaching Pollock Jungian aesthetics. O’Connor emphatically states that, “The radical change in Pollock’s art at this time… reflecting as it does the influences of Surrealism and psychic automatism – must be seen in conjunction with the fact that in about 1940-1 Pollock was undergoing Jungian analysis. His whole personality was undergoing a radical change” (qtd. Wysuth 19). Wysuth and O’Connor agree that in this stage, Pollock’s work has affinities with Surrealism but Pollock departed from such to formulate his own unique style which they claim is based on Jungian psychology, influenced by Surrealist automatism, and inspired by social activism of Benton and the Mexican muralists from which Pollock confronted his own need to express an inner reality in the last phase of his work. Thus, according to this psychotherapeutic frame, Pollock used Surrealist automatism to form a deliberate and new vocabulary for expressing the unconscious.

The final stage in Pollock’s art, according to O’Connor’s review, was the period of Pollock’s drip paintings, from 1947 until his death. This stage, according to the Jungian critique, was marked by fundamental changes to Pollock’s earlier style and approach. This phase, like that proposed by Adams, is marked by an all-over drawing, with deep compacted compositions that fit within specified borders or even the edges of the canvas. For both timelines, automatic drawing is used to elicit unconscious imagery, and imagery is obscured or veiled until it is at last non-existent. Although Adams and others now demonstrate that imagery was not entirely abandoned but rather is more expertly covered over as a “presence
of obscure images lurking in shallow webs of over-painting” (Wysuth 19-20). This fact of Pollock’s figurative work is not new, however, for William Rubi, writing in 1959 and later, acknowledges Pollock’s continued inclusion of figuration. He says, “As we study these key transitional works [Shimmering Substance, Eyes in the Heat] we become aware that fragments of Pollock’s earlier totemic presences are covered by the rhythmical linear patterns of white paint… these presences have not been wholly “painted out” but lurk mysteriously in the interstices of the white lines” (Rubin, 15) (Fig. 26). Careful scrutiny of these paintings, particularly Eyes in the Heat, reveal faces which are both concealed and revealed within undulating lines of paint in pulsing colors that recede and advance.

But in O’Connor’s timeline, rather than being the pinnacle of Pollock’s oeuvre, his drip paintings are interpreted as symptomatic automatic drawings that digress from true art. As O’Connor explains, this type of drawing is interpreted as being consistent with the ways in which schizophrenics draw, and “proves” what Henderson and subsequently Wysuth, and others contend: that Pollock’s work is primarily a window into his mental health (Wysuth 10). This pursuit of reasoning, that connects art and sickness, forms the foundational outline of Pollock’s work which has been followed in diverse degrees by Ellen Landau, Leonhard Emmerling, Stephen Polcari, Sue Taylor, and others with some variations which explain Pollock’s work in terms of revealing or searching for the unconscious, or in terms of healing from the position of the ill and ill-minded.
Figure 26 Jackson Pollock, *Eyes in the Heat*, 1946, Oil and enamel on canvas, 54 x 43 inches, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 1976

The French exhibit *Jackson Pollock et le Chamanisme* 2008 was designed to highlight this view. Polcari, in the catalogue accompanying the exhibit, claims that Pollock’s end phase works, his drip paintings, were the result of a shamanic healing ritual in which Pollock sought to heal his wounded self through art (Polcari, “Chamanisme” 6). Polcari also claims that Pollock departed from his inauspicious and humble beginning as a student of Benton and devotee of the Mexican muralists. Polcari writes that, “These artists were anti-Modern and Pollock seemed to have little with which to grow. But from these modest beginnings, the future of American art flowered” (6). Polcari suggests that Pollock’s work
took a more radical departure from his tutor Benton, and in seeking Jungian archetypes, Pollock’s work became intertwined with key principles of shamanic ritual practice. Polari outlines specific themes found in shamanic ritual practice, such as sacrifice and death, fusions of human and animal and male and female, germination and birth, and pictographic imagery that confirm shamanic elements. Polcari perpetuates the mythologies of Pollock, such as how alcoholism and strained mental health led him into a ritual shamanic practice. Under the theme ‘sacrifice and death’ Polcari suggests that “Shamanism is a form of religious ecstasy in which the participant undergoes ritual alteration of his identity. The growth of his alcoholism, the approach of war, the years of psychotherapy with the and the rise of interest in American Indian art and culture fueled a turn toward a concept that promised to heal him and society” (22). Polcari explains that “Transformation is not a just question of subjects. Pollock sought to develop a style that would directly convey if not reenact shaman ecstasy” and that “in shamanism, all does dance and celebrate its ecstatic power” (22). Outlining various beliefs of transformational shamanism, he draws upon psychoanalytic mythologies to connect Pollock’s work ritual sacrifice, loss of self-identity, merging identities within specified nature, and the transformation of self through dance. Most importantly however, is the fact that Polcari concludes the exhibit catalogue with a statement on Pollock’s mental health, reinforcing the myth of art and man, beauty and unconscious drives and forces. He writes, “Before he drove himself off the road, Pollock’s last art recapitulates his constant subjects and images, indicating that he never gave them up even if they disappeared for a while under linear webs. Pollock’s late work redoes his earlier work and search, suggesting that it was never completed” (22). Thus, through stressing shamanism Polcari also (inadvertently) reinforces our understanding that Pollock remained committed to
figuration, recuperating the spirit of the American Indian through mimēsis. The Paris exhibition featured key artworks that were carefully chosen to be juxtaposed with indigenous masks and carved weapons and amulets to stress these relationships. In the way that MoMA’s retrospective was a spin in favor of the modernist abstract view, the Paris exhibit intended to frame the Jungian interpretation of Pollock’s work. No two exhibits could be more different. In light of both views, Pollock remains a mythic enigma.

No doubt Polcari drew upon a discourse which began shortly after Pollock’s death wherein Pollock was compared to the shaman. First, the anthropologist Mircea Eliade’s 1959 text, The Sacred and the Profane, described the sacred space as the place where the transcendent comes together with the everyday, with ritual acts wherein the shaman enters an ecstatic state. Further, when Namuth first released his photographs of Pollock painting, the Abstract Expressionist Robert Goodnough described Pollock’s studio as a ‘sacred space’ (qtd. Raverty 343). Robertson furthered the connection between sacred and profane when he wrote that,

Pollock was conscious of this [Indian] iconography… but he was even more influenced by the practice of Indian sand painting. This form of art is part of a ritual. Its conception is opposed to the modern European idea of art as a separate activity for its own sake, with no magical properties and with no part to play in ritual. The act of painting itself had become for Pollock a semi-religious activity. Everything he felt and experienced was unleashed into it…. The search was ended, the great gesture was made, and the exorcism was complete. The effort killed him. (qtd. Raverty 343)
Overall, the description seems to fit not only with Pollock’s last paintings and death, but also with Jungian notions of universal archetypes and rituals, and the larger Freudian and psychoanalytic concerns with the unconscious and the construction of the psyche. Goodnough’s description tends to continue to perpetuate the myth of Pollock more than it reveals a formal understanding of his work and his commitment to indigenous iconography and aesthetics. More importantly, in Goodnough’s analysis, the overarching theme of American Indian arts competes with psychoanalytic sentiments and this point reminds us that both the psychoanalytic critique with its emphasis on subjectivity and the modernist critique with its emphasis on nationalism answer to prevailing epistemes more than excavate a clear picture of Pollock’s work. Both critiques appropriate Pollock’s work for the purposes of distinct socio-political agendas. Both critiques acknowledge the presence of the influence of indigenous art, but neither critique can answer to that presence. We are at an impasse with the polemical-modernist critique of Pollock. We need to find an objective theory that focuses on the importance of these American Indian art elements and connects this theory to the larger problems of philosophy and aesthetics.

**Epistemic Art Criticism**

The central issue in the scholarship on Pollock is the divide between two politically entrenched critiques, the modernist claim for non-representational form and the psychoanalytical interpretation that focuses on subjective content which is generally reviewed within a Surrealist critique with its myriad reflections on Pollock’s mental states of mind, a search for the unconsciousness, and correspondences to Jungian archetypes,
figuration, and more recently, Pollock as shaman. However, a careful review of Pollock’s work reveals a lifelong commitment to figuration related to indigenous content from his earliest drawings to his final drip paintings. While a large body of art criticism on Pollock adheres to the Surrealist, Jungian, and more psychoanalytic approaches, these (like the modernist view) tend to overlook these indigenous elements in Pollock’s work. The critical review of Pollock’s work is thus divided along two primary diverging lines of critique: a modernist review and a hybrid Jungian review. Both views are perpetuated in current scholarship and art exhibitions, even though the critique overall is based upon a polemical-modernist episteme, divided between formal properties and psychoanalytic content that fail to see Pollock’s art in the light of his indigenous influences.

Rosenberg’s outlook was no less political than Greenberg’s. In 1940 Rosenberg wrote an essay on the decline or fall of modern art in Paris. He wrote, “At the stroke of the Hitler gong, the last tremors in art, literature, science, politics, cease as if at a signal”. Rosenberg considered America to be the only safe harbor for the expression of free artistic-speech. Rosenberg said that the fall of Parisian art hegemony gave way to American dominance as the world’s “vanguard culture” (Rosenberg, “Fall” 541). Like Greenberg, Rosenberg was certain that American art was rising to preeminence. Rosenberg envisioned a purely American aesthetical moment apart from Parisian influences and intrusions. But in the critique of Abstract Expressionism and Pollock’s work, while Greenberg focused on the issue of paint on canvas, Rosenberg concentrated on the gesture of painting itself. For Rosenberg, the moment of painting, the action, the emotion, the gesture in its immediacy was this pure American moment.
Critics in the 1940s were concerned that American painters were losing sight of the subject as abstract modernism began to overshadow the achievements of Regionalism. Without subject or figuration, American modernism was at risk of becoming mere “wallpaper”. As Rosenberg articulated, having left the easel, mural paintings that exclude the spectator become “a wall decoration” (Rosenberg, “American” 581). Kramer explains that, decoration — “wallpaper,” as Rosenberg derisively characterized it — was an issue that was deeply troubling to virtually all of the painters of the New York School (Kramer 12). This preoccupation with subject and its loss, particularly in light of the larger dialogue with European modernism, was at the heart of the divided critique and of the American modernist movement. Robert Motherwell also articulated this preoccupation, saying that “Every intelligent painter carries the whole culture of modern painting in his head. It is his real subject, of which anything he paints is both an homage and a critique, and everything he says a gloss” (qtd. Kramer 12). Pollock was equally aware of this competition to create a significant version of American Modernism. In *Answers to a Questionnaire*, Pollock’s statement on art, Pollock said that he felt “the problems of modern painting [could] be solved as well here as elsewhere” (Pollock, “Answers” 560). This competitive avant-garde agenda triggered multiple American variations on the notions of art over life, art-for-art’s sake, and significant form. This ever-present burden to surpass European modernism was felt to have been accomplished by Rosenberg’s notion of action painting, which confirmed and articulated the subject of the self. We recall Rosenberg’s claim that “the canvas began to appear… as an arena in which to act – rather than as a space in which to reproduce” (Rosenberg, “American” 581) Formal concerns such as composition, color, and draftsmanship were replaced with a fundamental expression of an event. The canvas was now
“an arena” for action rather than a space for form. But Rosenberg’s critique did not successfully reposition Pollock’s work from the critique of pure form. Rather, Rosenberg’s critique posed a division in the interpretation of Pollock’s work.

This divided critique adheres to a larger separation which encompasses a divisive, polemical-modern-episteme. Knowing this larger polemic helps us to situate Pollock’s work within a new theory of the indigenous elements, even the Indian-episteme within American Modernism. In order to more clearly see through the myth of Pollock, and to emphasize the polemic within the discourse of modernism, let us return to Kramer’s review of MoMA’s retrospective exhibit. For Kramer’s criticism is twofold. First, he is concerned that Rosenberg’s critique is self-serving. Secondly, he criticizes the curators Varnedoe and Karmel for promoting a mythic view of Pollock, rather than showing exclusively that Pollock was inherently always abstract. First, in his criticism of Rosenberg, Kramer considered the very idea of action to be “sheer nonsense”. He explains that Rosenberg’s critique was intended to promote his own socialist and Surrealist agenda under the guise of art criticism.²⁷ Kramer recognizes Rosenberg’s views as Surrealist and acknowledges that the abstract modernists inadvertently conflate Rosenberg’s notion of action along with its inherent ties to Surrealism, with non-representational form.

Kramer’s second concern regards Rosenberg himself. For, according to Kramer, Rosenberg capitalized on Pollock’s notoriety, particularly after Pollock’s painting methods were emphasized in Namuth’s film. Rosenberg, who was known to have despised Pollock and his work, “shamelessly exploited Pollock’s notoriety without according him appropriate recognition or even mentioning his name. He turned his private mockery of Pollock’s painting into a bogus manifesto for the entire Abstract Expressionist movement” (12). This
mythology, as Kramer sees it, has continued to inform the review of Pollock, and was overtly present in MoMA’s retrospective, and this was Kramer’s primary concern with Karmel’s account of Pollock’s work. For in Karmel’s essay, he focuses on the act of painting and references Namuth’s photographs of Pollock at work. Thus Kramer is concerned that Karmel perpetuates the myth of action painting even while promoting the notion of non-representational form, combining and merging both sides of the modernist theoretical critique (Modernist and Jungian) into one nicely contained explanation of Pollock’s work as being a conflation of both action and pure form. Though not explicit, such action implies a theoretical challenge to modernist claims for the irreducible flatness of painting upon a modernist grid. The irony is that Karmel’s essay, rather than establishing a criteria for understanding Pollock’s methodology for painting as action, merely reiterates the modern trope. Pollock’s mature works, regardless of how they are dripped and splattered, fail to achieve high modernist non-representational form, a fact that Varnedoe also substantiates and promotes in his essay (Varnedoe, Kirk, “Comet” 17). In all his criticism of Varnedoe, Karmel, and Rosenberg, Kramer demonstrates that it is the modernist (Greenbergian-Hofmann) view of Pollock that he subscribes to. We might deduce that Kramer’s point of view, though not explicit in his critique of Rosenberg or Varnedoe, is more concerned that the idea of action painting and gesture threatens to proscribe an alternative theory to the modern trajectory of purity in art. The notion of gesture is tantamount to removing the location of painting from its material structure to the body of the artist.

This is the dilemma at hand. Having two opposing interpretations, both of which have political undertones and agendas, subsequent theorists (and as we have seen, curators as well) need to either extend or reconcile the oppositions in art criticism. Just as Varnedoe and
Karmel inadvertently attempted to unite the modernist and psychoanalytic critiques in the MoMA retrospective of Pollock’s work, Rosalind Kraus subsumes the psychoanalytical critique within a claim for formalism in her essay *The Optical Unconscious*. But Kraus intentionally mediates between formalism and theories of the subconscious when she contends that Greenberg and later Fried focus on the formal and optical aspects of modernist works while neglecting the unconscious source of art. For Kraus, the artist is not a master of creation as much as he or she is the medium from which unconscious drives and desires are brought forth. Kraus explains that this merging of Surrealist urges into form was brought about by artists being “tyrannized and depressed by the psychologizing whine of ‘Existentialist’ criticism”, and thus these unique artists explored the limits of their experience within the confines of their medium until they reach an autonomy that surpasses even self-reflexivity (“View” 953). Kraus attempts to redeem Pollock and Abstract Expressionism from a purely abstract Greenbergian (and company) rhetoric by hearkening to Rosenbergian views on automatism, subjectivity, and artistic presence that she articulates by combining Surrealist impulses with modern abstract form. Kraus’ conclusions are not far from those laid out clearly in William C. Seitz’s dissertation in 1946. Seitz claimed that Pollock’s drip paintings were based on a rectilinear structure where “the irreducible unit of his style, despite rectilinear structure, was the individual stroke, though its identity was apt to be lost in the total textural maelstrom and the optical pulsation effected by variegated color” (qtd. Kramer 12). Seitz’s early dissertation focused almost entirely on modernist form, which he conceded was a structure upon which Pollock’s “passion” was poured into non-objective abstraction.
Ironically, for all his criticism of Rosenberg, Varnedoe, Karmel, and the MoMA exhibition, Kramer’s arguments, like Kraus’s essay and Seitz’s dissertation, reveal the fissure in modernism which remains hidden even to modernist criticism. For within the polemical-modern critique we have both a theory of experience and a theory of form. In the MoMA show, and Kraus’ reiteration, experience becomes subsumed within form. In Pollock, the myth of the self with its psychology, unconsciousness, and automatism becomes reconciled in pure form. The subsequent critique of Pollock, which is most evident in the MoMA retrospective and Varnedoe’s review, that has formed and been reiterated by Michael Fried, T.J. Clark, Kramer, and others since Greenberg’s first accolades, has typically been the articulation of the unification of the mythologized unconscious existential subject through Surrealist automatism within the autonomous upon an irreducible rectilinear grid. On the other side, the Jungian view, as developed by Rosenberg, Wysuth, O’Connor, Polcari, and others claims for Pollock a theory of experience and self-development that, through archetypes and American Indian imagery, culminates in a ritual of self-healing.

The divided critique of Pollock’s work attests to a larger schism within the modernist critique, divided between subjective experience and objective form. The divided critique also witnesses the epistemic nature of art interpretation. As Kraus explains, “we can no longer fail to notice that if we make up schemas of meaning based on history, we are playing into systems of control and censure. We are no longer innocent” (“View” 951). While seeking to be objective, the modernist account of Pollock’s work appropriates it in order to perpetuate the narrative of modernism, and while coming from a different direction, the psychoanalytic interpretation does the same thing. Art criticism belongs to its own narratives and epistemic structures. As Kraus explains, “If the norms of the past serve to measure the present, they
also serve to construct it” (951). Failing to see the epistemic nature of art criticism, or rather to say its own historical narrative is to contribute to that narrative. Upholding a narrative of the past is to make it coercive, or at least epistemic. Abstract and psychoanalytic interpretations perpetuate the myth of Pollock and his works. Knowing this larger polemic helps us to resituate Pollock’s work within a new theory, even an Indian-episteme that accounts for the indigenous elements throughout his work. For Pollock ought to be seen neither as an abstract modernist nor a Jungian, but as the hinge, nexus, or apex of American art before it achieved its primary status as quintessentially “American” in all the epistemic interpretations of what “American” means in any given era.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the interpretation of Pollock’s work is bound up within two competing narratives. Through a close analysis of both the modernist and the psychoanalytic critiques, a critical relationship between art criticism and prevailing socio-political epistemes is revealed. Both interpretations also have essential blind spots that cause them to perpetuate narratives and mythologies about Pollock and his work that are intertwined with the pervasive socio-political epistemes of the times. Before Pollock’s death, and especially afterwards, Pollock’s personality (or alcoholism and illness) was publicized along a variety of art and popular channels. *Life Magazine* described him as “brooding” (Raverty 342). Later *Time Magazine* called him, “Jack the Dripper,” conflating art with madness and violence (342). As Raverty explains, “These pop-existential and tragic-romantic references proliferated after his death, when this aspect of the myth crystallized” (342). For
example, Brian Robertson wrote that, “As a man, Pollock was taciturn and contemplative by nature, though he was drawn to violence by fatality and, at last in his death, by its finality” (qtd. Raverty 342). These allusions to Pollock’s personality and mental states are repeated ad-nauseam in the many succeeding biographies and histories of Pollock. Like Benton’s radio broadcasts, popular media helped to fix our notion of Pollock within prevailing epistemic conditions. Before his death, the myth of Pollock included the notion that, unpretentiously dressed in blue jeans, Pollock was approachable. His ties to the great American West, untainted by European manners, furthered the notion that he was just a regular “one of us” type of guy that anyone could talk to if they encountered him at the Cedar Tavern. This view, as well as the redundant view of Pollock as the self-tortured iconic artist, has since been popularized in the popular and critical media. Additionally, the mythic reputation of Pollock was fueled by many postwar factors that the art and popular media unwittingly drew upon. One of these factors includes the belief that Pollock was following a myriad of influences that explain his jump from figurative work to his abstract drip paintings, a jump that took him from Benton to Masson. In between these two points, historians and critics site a long list of influences in Pollock’s life that include everyone from Pollock’s high school art teacher, Benton, the Mexican muralists, the work of David Alfaro Siqueiros, Picasso, Masson and the Surrealists, Graham and even Krasner, Greenberg, and Hofmann among others. Another element in the myth is the notion that Pollock was the quintessential existential (and mentally unstable) romantic hero of postwar angst in search of the unconscious. But in hindsight, this is a very limited view of a more complex social, political, and artistic time with its respectively influenced artists.
The critical review on Pollock’s work, which began during Pollock’s early career and continued henceforth, largely takes two opposite paths: the view of Pollock’s work as Abstract Modernism or the Jungian critique along with its hybrid version of shamanic healing. Both theories agree that Pollock made a drastic shift in style when he began working on his drip paintings. Unfortunately, neither theory has found a viable explanation for this shift, though modernists claim he solved the problems of modern art by pursuing non-representational form, while the Jungian critique believes Pollock found the unconscious through automatist drawing. During Pollock’s time, the rather mixed reviews of Pollock’s work were largely based on the tenets of abstract modernism, which looks for flattening of pictorial illusion and space, structure based on the Cubist grid, and abstract and non-representational form, and largely stresses the abstract free forms of his later drip paintings. Greenberg’s influential writings helped to define this American modernist aesthetic based on the European values taught by Hofmann and promoted by others. The modernist view oversimplifies the problem by focusing on purely formal characteristics of the work such as the attributes of paint, color, and gesture.

On the other hand, the Jungian review mainly draws upon the works that predate his drip phase, stressing Pollock’s inner experience and search for archetypical symbols and the content of Pollock’s unconscious mind evidenced by an outpouring of psychological energy in his mature works. This later review has more fully emphasized a psychoanalytic view of Pollock’s personality, which view has continued to be stressed in biographies and subsequent monographs. Rosenberg’s theory of action and the expression of the inner psyche is an important point in the Jungian review, but in many of these theories such views ultimately morph into theories of shamanism and self-healing.
While both critiques have a significant following, the modernist critique continues to prevail as the mainstream response to Pollock’s work in art history textbooks, major retrospectives, and theory anthologies. Overall, the review of Pollock focuses on abstract and symbolic form but largely ignores references to indigenous forms and representational content. Some theories however merge these opposing views into one in which primitive, indigenous, Surrealist and Jungian elements are subsumed into an ultimately abstract and formal end. This divided view amounts to a critical polemic which Kraus and others attempt to resolve in terms of abstraction in Pollock’s later drip painting with theories of the unconscious providing clarity for Pollock’s earlier work and the motivation for his later drip work.

Thus far we have seen that Pollock lived and worked during a time of rapidly changing political views that embraced notions of nationalism and nascent identity that were suddenly changed for a self-concept of national hegemony wherein the United States became the industrial and military superpower of the world. After the great Second World War, Americans sought to demonstrate to the world that they had taken their rightful place as the leader of the cultural, military, and economic world. Pollock fit nicely within this world and its needs. As Raverty writes,

The art of the Abstract Expressionists itself was too complex, too esoteric to become a shibboleth to represent American superiority in the realm of culture for a general audience. Only Pollock among them had the combination of rugged American character, misunderstood tragic genius, and mystical transcendence around which could be woven a myth that would transform him into a popular icon. (Raverty 345)
Being at the apex of the complications of nation building during a turbulent inter-war and postwar period, Pollock himself became iconic to the times. His work has been viewed from a variety of perspectives. Highly political art criticism has found in Pollock the virtues of an apolitical, ahistorical, transcendent modernism based on pure form. Surrealist and later Jungian critics have also found in Pollock the quintessential and existential modern man, seeking to express the inner world of the human psyche (Leja 37). But to be clear, the New York art world was far from homogenous. Mixed together in a sort of melting pot, one could, during the late 1930s and early 1940s, find an assorted mix of Regionalism and New Deal murals, abstract modernism, Surrealism, and interests in the calligraphic, the indigenous arts and Primitivism, as well as Cubism. The artists of Pollock’s generation considered themselves Intrasubjectives at one point, and Abstract artists at another. If the times experienced shifting national and cultural identities, so too did the art world. American artists were experimenting with what it meant to have purely “American art” and so were art critics and theorists. In fact, at some point even Pollock concluded that,

The idea of an isolated American painting, so popular in this country during the thirties, seems absurd to me, just as the idea of a purely American mathematics or physics would seem absurd. And in another sense, the problem doesn’t exist at all; or, if it did, would solve itself: An American is an American and his painting would naturally be qualified by the fact, whether he wills or not. But the basic problems of contemporary painting are independent of any one country. (qtd., Ross 138)

With all the experimentation of the era, and the swiftly changing notions and identities of art and politics, it is clear why the review would also be mixed, varied, and polemical. The
aesthetic indigenous spirit that informed Regionalism and promoted the inclusion of Native American subjects and forms in art waned before postwar optimism and the cultivation of a more homogenous national identity. Just as quickly as the national identity abandoned the notion of the iconic Indian and the Indian-episteme, Regionalism and Realism waned for Abstract Modernism. Contemporary art criticism also, like art and politics, fell sway to new evolving ideas and Greenberg, Rosenberg, and other critics of the time analyzed Pollock’s work within post-war ideologies. These narratives have clouded our understanding of Pollock and his drip paintings ever since. But the real irony is that the modernists claimed the same articulation of a truly indigenous style that the Regionalists declared they were constructing. Greenberg, Schapiro, and others’ writings promoted a universal ahistorical Platonic form, and Rosenberg claimed existential constitution of the self through art, all within a highly charged cold war political ideology. The irony is that the very notion of the political is antithetical to the notion of the universal, for the political is always entrenched within the here and now. Schapiro, Greenberg and even Rosenberg’s claims for pure form (or pure gesture) are undermined by their politics.

We have seen that in analyzing the prevailing interpretive theories, to conduct any serious research on Pollock and his artwork one enters into an entire discourse with its own epistemic rules, hierarchies of authorities, and construction of its own knowledges. The result of our analysis on the divided critique of Pollock’s work shows that the theories witnesses to a larger division in modern art theory. This polemic demonstrates an inadequacy for either theory to adequately interpret the indigenous elements in Pollock’s work.

Most importantly, both views admit to two issues that inform this study to a large degree. First, Pollock never fully left figuration, and even made figuration explicit in his last
works. As Pollock wrote to Alfonso Ossorio and Ted Dragon in 1951, “I’ve had a period of
drawing on canvas in black – with some of my early images coming thru – think the non-
objectivists will find them disturbing – and the kids who think it simple to splash a Pollock
out” (Karmel, “Interviews” 79). Secondly and of equal importance, all authors mention
Pollock’s interest in Native American art, but how this interest served as a driving force and
unity throughout all of Pollock’s work is yet to be explained. The two issues are related.
Pollock’s interest in Native American arts is evidenced by and through the figurative and
representational elements of his works. It is through the concept of *mimēsis* that we can come
to understand both representation and figuration, and the importance and influence of
American Indian art on Pollock’s artistic output. Our job is to unhook Pollock’s work from
diverse and polemical art criticism (with its attendant ties to changing epistemes) and then
proceed to make sense of his retrieval of *mimēsis* from the indigenous within a critical view
that neither repudiates representation for pure form nor pure form for mythologies. We need
a more inclusive and unifying explanation that draws upon the actual influences that Pollock
grappled with, incorporated and expressed in his entire artistic life. Just as one cannot neatly
separate one’s life choices from the context in which they were made, we cannot separate
Pollock’s work from everything that influenced his development as an artist and as a human
being. But in the concept of *mimēsis* we will find a unifying factor that will reveal to us a
new and expanded understanding of Pollock as a complex artist who found a way to reiterate
representational and ritual elements within the painted canvas that are derived from
indigenous American Indian arts.
Chapter Three

American Primitivism: a Case for Mimêsis

I am representational all of the time.
Jackson Pollock

Introduction

Thus far we have seen that the American Indian was an important subject for political, social, and aesthetic reasons during the formative years of Pollock’s childhood and artistic training. We have also seen that despite the ubiquitous subject and iconology of the American Indian, art critics overlooked its role in the formative arts of American modernist painters. Instead, the primary critics of Pollock’s works during his life time, namely Greenberg and Rosenberg, appropriated Pollock’s works to further their own political agendas – Greenberg on behalf of a subject-less non-representational form, and Rosenberg in favor of Surrealist subjectivity. Both critics embroiled Pollock in a contest for supremacy in the art world just as American politics and culture did so, inhabiting it new role as a global super-power. The divided theory on Pollock’s work has largely overlooked the highly representational or mimetic attributes which constitute overt references to American Indian symbols and subjects, as well as hidden abstract figures, faces, birds, numbers, letters, and even Pollock’s initials and name that have been recently revealed through x-ray analysis (Adams, “Tom” 272). Both his early primitivistic and later drip paintings are filled with representational imagery that directly reference and allegorize American Indian symbolism.
and mythology, and this indicates that Pollock developed a grammar of representation.

Figuration, representation, and American Indian symbols are so prevalent that it seems certain any critique of Pollock’s work, and especially his later drip work, must include a view that takes these mimetic signs into account.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze Pollock’s representational or mimetic elements, particularly those which are inspired by American Indian art, outside of the lens of Greenberg’s theory of cubist form, and Rosenberg’s theory for subjectivity. We will look at European Primitivism and the issues of abstract form and the rejection of traditional mimêsis in order to illustrate the key differences between European and American Primitivism, particularly in terms of mimetic representation. First, we will analyze European Primitivism and identify a division between artistic form and art subjects in modern art to which Pollock and other American artists were responding. Second, we will consider how Pollock and other American artists revalidate the art subject (or rather mimêsis or representation) through the recuperation of the spirit of indigenous American art. Third, this discussion will look at how Pollock’s artwork constructs and evokes new possibilities of meaning by establishing a ground for the theoretical role of the representation of indigenous art in terms of mimêsis. We will find that from these considerations that there is a division or even schism already evident in the polemical-modernist critique, the divide between Greenbergian formalism and Rosenberg’s subjectivity. But this analysis will further illustrate how Pollock’s work marks neither the height of modernist non-representational form nor the depths of anguished subjectivity, but rather exposes and addresses the schism within modern art by revaluing mimetic representation.
European Primitivism

Our first task is to analyze Primitivism in order to demonstrate how Pollock and like-minded artists’ primitivist works differ mimetically (or in terms of significant content) from those of Picasso. This is a logical place to begin a discussion on Pollock’s representational qualities because Pollock has been compared extensively to Picasso, and most theorists agree that Pollock entered into a dialogue with Picasso in both his Surrealist and Cubist phases, thus concluding Picasso’s work within a new form of expressionism based on a Cubist grid. Greenberg claims Pollock inherited and developed Picasso’s Cubism and Rosenberg and others believe Pollock developed Picasso’s later unique surrealist tendencies (“Laocoon” 554-560). But our concern is not with Picasso’s Cubist, Surrealist, or earlier and later representational tendencies. We are merely concerned with identifying, analyzing, and providing a theory for the unique and distinctly indigenous and mimetic American elements in Pollock’s work by addressing the comparisons theorists have made between Pollock and Picasso. To analyze these indigenous elements, we need to address these elements in terms of primitivist subject matter and through a discussion on representation or mimêsis. We need to distance our view from the traditional modernist critique of pure form and irreducibility of the picture plane, and look earlier to Primitivism for it is in Primitivism that we can best understand the differing handling and reiteration of indigenous art elements. We will first look at both Pablo Picasso and Pollock’s primitivist works in order to identify and distinguish the differences between them in the theoretical terms of form and content in art, or rather to identify “significant form” from “significant content”, which forms the basis of Primitivist critical and theoretical art theory (Bell 15). This is not to make a comparison for the purposes of competition, to claim some type of American supremacy (as Craven, Rosenberg and
Greenberg did). Rather, this is to say that modern art has many forms and that Pollock’s form is representational, differing significantly from Picasso’s primitivist period. To best understand these theoretical concerns, it is helpful to examine the historical context of the traditions within the style of Primitivism and its underlying mimetic premises.

Europe’s fascination with indigenous people has taken many forms. At its core, the term ‘primitive’ denotes notions of origins with close associations between native people and the land they inhabit. The notion of the ‘primitive’ has a long tradition in art and literature, and the term itself was originally applied to fourteenth and fifteenth century Flemish and Italian works of art (which were considered authentic if made in the region of Flanders and Northern Italy). The concept came to be particularly descriptive of the arts representing indigenous peoples (Egyptian, Persian, Indian, Javanese, Peruvian and Japanese), and later included the arts of tribal cultures, such as those in Africa and Oceania, or the rural peasants living in uncontaminated small European agricultural communities, particularly within the era of exploration and colonialism (Perry 3-4).

At the basis of all of these forms of exotic Primitivism is a relation that draws upon and extends two entrenched traditions within European art which are important for our understanding of *mimēsis* and Pollock’s work. First, exotic Primitivism extends a long tradition of representing and symbolizing the foreign ‘other’ in his/her accompanying foreign land. This association between land and figure as icon has been retained throughout the history of Primitivism and is a well-established tradition that conflates the exotic female as a personification of the land. Its origins were first developed by Cesare Ripa in his *Iconologia*, 1560-1645. In the *Iconologia* Ripa developed several personifications within European Four
Continents iconography wherein exotic female types are rendered as icons that represent the land and Mother Nature (LaBarge 101) (Fig. 28).31

For example, Africa is personified by a female figure carrying tusks and dressed in a turban (Ripa 104). The Americas are personified by a female figure dressed in a grass skirt, wearing a full feathered headdress upon her head. She sits upon an iconic animal avatar that is derived from the land, such as an armadillo (as shown in this example) or in other renditions, a beaver. She also carries symbolic trade goods such as silver coins and corn that further identifies the geography, climate, and land (Fig. 29). Asia and Europe are likewise represented by female figures with indigenous accoutrements, flora, and fauna.

Figure 28 Frontispiece for Francois Valentijn’s *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indien*, 1726
In Four Continent personifications and other primitivist works there is an obvious emphasis on the trade goods, generally from Asia, Oceana, Africa or the Americas, which are being given to Europe in the form of tribute. This expression of power and domination of Europe over the “other” brings us to our second point, which is that European Primitivism denotes or visualizes a discourse of power in that it contributes to a set of ‘texts’ or the broader “complex network of sociological, ideological, aesthetic, scientific, anthropological, political and legal interests” as well as aesthetic forms which determine an episteme (Foucault, “Truth” 168). This is one of the observations that Said makes in his theory of Orientalism. This primitivist discourse denotes an episteme of European supremacy over the exotic in the form of both the viewer’s gaze and the notion of the exotic as being personified by the female figure. Even in imagery describing the earliest colonial encroachment into
foreign lands, we see the exotic and primitive within views of such power. For example, Jorg Breu’s woodcuts for Ludovico Varthema’s *Die ritterfisch und lobwürdig Ruyss*, printed by Hans Miller in Augsburg, in 1515, demonstrates an attempt to systematize ethnographic information through narrative scenes (Fig. 30).$^{32}$

![Figure 30 Jörg Breu d. Ä. zugeschrieben, Idol von Calicut, in: Ludovico de Varthema, *Die Ritterlich und lobwürdig Reisz*, Strassburg 1516](image)

Breu’s portrait of an Indian deity is created through a medieval syntax that conflates Hindu deities with the notion of demons. But in the woodcut, a female figure, inwardly focused on almsgiving, invites the male gaze that suggests power over both the female as the exotic personification of India, and the deity as the personification of a set of cultural beliefs and practices. In the earliest primitivist works of art, it is clear that the basis of primitivist art rests upon the relations between figure as a personification of both geography and cultural practices that describe exotic land and people. By framing cultural practices as demonic, European colonization and acculturalization is justified. Thus two facets of primitivist art (whether in the graphic arts of colonial travel literature such as geographies, maps, atlases,
travel accounts and ethnologies, or in fine art and paintings) combine to represent the indigenous “other” iconographically as a symbol of land and culture within a visual discourse of possession and domination. Europe’s fascination with the primitive and indigenous during colonialism is also evidenced by the plethora of sixteenth to eighteenth-century Wunderkammers (princely collections of naturalia and artificialia) and ethnographic studies.

Late colonial meanings and concepts within the notion of the ‘primitive’ draw upon traditions derived from pastoral poetry, the ideals of Rousseau’s ‘noble savage’, and Darwin-inspired social evolutionists. Primitive peoples those nearer to nature than those living in “corrupt” civilization, were perceived (particularly in the writings of Rousseau) as pure and natural, living close to nature within idealized societies. For Rousseau, primitive people were a source of knowledge and worthy of emulation and understanding. Rousseau explains, “It is still more cruel that, as every advance made by the human species removes it still farther from its primitive state, the more discoveries we make, the more we deprive ourselves of the means of [that which is] the most important of all” (Rousseau 6). The nineteenth-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder contributed to the popularization of the indigenous or rural class. In amassing an extensive collection of rural folklore, he wrote that there is a distinct connection between ‘simple’ people and notions of purity. He writes, “The savage who loves himself, his wife and child with quiet joy and glows with limited activity of his tribe, is in my opinion a more real being than that cultivated shadow who is enraptured with the shadow of the whole species” (Kedouri 57). In art or literature, to portray the indigenous was to emulate its virtues.

Emerging from the natural sciences, anthropology continues this fascination with “other” and the indigenous, particularly as it developed into the study of culture in the late nineteenth
Theoretical Darwinism (with its notion of a hierarchy of species) lent justification to African slavery and Manifest Destiny, while also encouraging the study of the indigenous “other” in a myriad of live installations on display at anthropological museums and zoos, such as in the World Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, which hosted live displays of American Indians, and the British Museum which hosted ethnological exhibitions of African people in cages, and the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris, which displayed Kanaks from New Caledonia. Such displays demonstrate the fascination with the indigenous or “primitive”. With the obsession for classifying and categorizing man as a species, anthropologists sought for underlying structures to reframe the notion of the primitive within a universal condition of all humans. The nineteenth-century British anthropologist E. B. Tylor advocated a theory of uniformity that formed the basis upon which early to mid-twentieth century anthropologists such as James Frazer, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss built theories of structural functionalism that model institutionalism and social systems, and later structuralist anthropology which looks at language and symbolic structures. Comparative studies that once analyzed physical and cultural differences, and encouraged the display of varied ethnographic types of humans, became outmoded in favor of studies which compare the structures of indigenous beliefs, myths, and rituals. Europe’s fascination with “other” became a fascination (as we see in Jungian thought) with overarching archetypes in art and theory.

Through shifting and evolving ideas, late nineteenth and twentieth-century primitivist artists sought to continue to portray the associations between land and native-ness, by portraying the naïve innocence of tribal peoples living outside of the influence of modern technologies and industry and instead living within the purity of uncultivated (or at least
minimally cultivated) nature. Thus, primitive art subjects continue to look to the forms and
experiences of rural, exotic, and indigenous peoples. This search for the indigenous also
helped to fuel nationalist tendencies to seek for local and regional histories and folklore. An
increased interest on the ‘primitive’ brought a regional life into view. In Britain, classicism
was exchanged for folk culture. This also extended to the Continent, where examples of local
and regional myths were collected, such as in the Grimm Brothers’ collection of fairy tales in
Germany, and the nineteenth-century revival of traditional regional tunes as we see in the
Hungarian Dances of Johannes Brahms, and the folk inspired compositions of Edvard Grieg,
Antonin Dvorak, Bela Bartok, and others. Likewise, many nineteenth-century artists depicted
naturalistic representations of the ‘primitive’ including Jean-Léon Gérôme, Alphonse-
Étienne Dinet, Jules-Jean-Antoine Lecomte du Noüy, all of whom exhibited at the annual
Salon des Artistes Français or the more liberal Salon de la Societé Nationale des Beaux.
Their naturalistic landscapes and portraits such as Noüy’s White Slave, Salon of 1888 and
Gérôme’s The Terrace of the Seraglio, 1886 depict naked and semi-naked women along with
exotic accoutrements such as incense burners and hookas within an Arabian palace-
compound. The painting is composed to represent an exotic setting, wherein the all parts of
the painting, from architecture, clothing, and other cultural artefacts express exotic culture
and geography (Fig. 27). Likewise Jules-Jean-Antoine Lecomte du Noüy’s White Slave
emphasizes regional and exotic differences while evoking notions of local customs (Perry 4).
The Primitive painters Nasreddine Dinet and Paul Gauguin also painted sensual, dark-
skinned women as symbols of ‘primitive’ life dressed in ‘primitive’ dress, posed in settings
in nature that depict the flora of their land of origin. The primitivist trend resulted from
increased awareness of the living conditions of foreign peoples within French colonies,
equating the exotic female with exotic locations but also evolved out of traditional French Realism and the works of Millet, Courbet and others.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 27 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Terrace of the Seraglio*, 1886, Private collection, oil on canvas

These later types of primitivist representations have several inherent problems which make them very difficult to analyze. First, they intersect the boundaries of several art styles, including not only Primitivism, but also Exoticism and Colonialism. But these art styles all share in portraying the indigenous or exotic “other” in iconic ways that retain associations with land, culture, and power structures.

Mid-twentieth century theories such as Edward Said’s Orientalism expose the power relations at play in colonial arts and literature, particularly between the “primitive” or indigenous “other” and those representing, speaking for, and governing them, particularly under the rule of Colonialism. Said’s theory particularly aims to undermine the critical studies conducted under Orientalism, because Orientalism describes native Near Eastern cultures from perspectives derive from outside viewpoints of such cultures. In doing so,
Orientalists perpetuate and reinforce such power. Complicating these matters even further is the issue of the representation of ruling classes as “other” by the indigenous. From this un-empowered perspective representation is often a component of ritual magic in the works of native peoples. This is one of the many issues explored by Michael Taussig in his book *Mimesis and Alterity, a Particular History of the Sense.* But for our purposes here, being that this dissertation is a phenomenological critique of *mimēsis*, particularly as it helps us to distinguish and theorize upon the recuperation of the indigenous spirit of art in Pollock’s work. Suffice it to say that we can only briefly mention the difficulties of these images, as there is not time nor space here to critically analyzing these various points of reference. A critique of Colonialism, Orientalism, and the problems of representing the ‘other’, while important issues at stake in our concerns with representations of American Indians and their art, is better left for a more in-depth study of these issues of “other” and appropriation. This is not to undermine the absolute importance of recognizing how American art and politics has represented the American Indian as an indigenous “other” and has done so from powered positions. Rather, this fact further underscores why it is imperative that we recognize the Indian-episteme as being in fact a pertinent part of the history of this era. For presently, the subject of the American Indian is nearly all but forgotten in today’s consuming concerns with globalization, technology, hybridity, and post-post humanist art. If we can recognize the Indian-episteme and designate it as such, we are establishing foundations for further analyzing the concerns of alterity and its representations, and for giving due recognition to our indigenous American brothers and sisters who deserve far more than our utmost respect. But for the purposes of this study, in order to look at these issues from an aesthetic and phenomenological point of view, it is important to also recognize the most elemental
relations in primitivist art which are those relations between land and people, and how such representations are mimetic, even if the representation of such is brought about from Euro-or American-centric artistic points of view.

More recently to our present concerns, Van Gogh’s early peasant scenes continue this very long standing artistic tradition that connects the female figure with geography, landscape, and culture while simultaneously experimenting with abstracted elements such as distorted figures, flattening of illusionistic space, and vivid and expressive color. Gauguin also continued the primitivist discourse in seeking territorial authenticity and ethnographic origins by looking to folk culture in Brittany and later to Martinique and Tahiti. Gauguin’s idealizing primitivism draws upon this well-established tradition of conflating the female figure with personifications of land, exotic culture and power. Gauguin’s exotic females are laid bare by his invasive portrayals, powerless against the advancing encroachment of the viewer/colonialist into their lands, values, and cultural practices (Fig. 31).

Figure 31 Paul Gauguin, *Day of the God* (Mahana No Atua), 1894, oil on canvas, 68.3 x 91.5 cm, Art Institute of Chicago.
Similarly, in previous and subsequent odalisques (be it those of Ingres, Gérôme, Dinet, and others), and the portrayals of women in customary clothing (such as those by Gauguin’s Breton women, Émile Bernard, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and others), the association between power, supremacy, gaze, the exotic, and associations with territory, geography, and land carry with them an extensive colonialist tradition based on a political and social domination over geographic locations and cultural practices.

In terms of art, Primitivism witnesses to a long tradition of first, representing the ‘other’ as it is found in colonial travel literature such as maps, atlases, travel logs, geographies, and ethnologies. Fine and graphic arts related to Colonialism perpetuate two fundamental precepts. First, such imagery denotes the underlying power structures that claim possession of the indigenous “other” and its lands, and secondly, represent the indigenous in iconic, symbolic or naturalistic ways that symbolize this broader political and social discourse (Said 203). Just as the American Indian became a symbol for nationalism, regionalism, and authentic Americanism, Europeans sought for a sense of ethnographic origins through a view of the many lands and peoples they had amassed under colonialism and these pursuits are recorded in primitivist art. As the avant-garde came to embrace the primitive in new ways, the ubiquitous indigenous was a global phenomenon, a symptom of a larger condition of colonial hierarchical ethnographies, classifications and taxonomies (“Order” 73).

Within this broader backdrop of primitivist and exotic personification and representation, Picasso’s abstract primitivist work Les Demoiselles d’Avignon, 1907 is considered a defining landmark work in the history of art precisely because it severs all traditional ties between geography, figure and nature (Fig. 32).
Based on Picasso’s interests in Cezanne-esque geometric shapes, Picasso set out to solve the problem of “the representation of the three-dimensional object and its position in space on a two-dimensional surface” (Kahnweiler 204). Picasso created the work to showcase the forms of art over the specificity of the subject and create a new syntax for prioritizing an object’s form and position in space over empirical accuracy of the representation and identification of such object. Thus, the women in the painting are neither specific women nor are they personifications of Africa; rather, they exist as a general category of their elemental forms. The abstract Congo masks help to depersonalize the women as well as emphasize and accentuate the lines and angles of the flattened and abstract forms.
The critical theory of modern abstract art, as delineated by Clive Bell, Benedetto Croce, Alexander Shevchenko, and others, declares Picasso’s primitivist works initiated a major break from mimetic art traditions by focusing on artistic form over naturalistic representation, and by focusing on form at the expense of traditional meanings tied to the personification of land and culture. It is not that Picasso’s Primitivism severs ties to representation that is most important, but that he severs ties between representation and its meanings between representation as a form of socio-political discourse. In the essay *The Aesthetic Hypothesis*, Clive Bell establishes three principles upon which Picasso’s Primitivism in its abstract formal qualities establishes an overarching theory of modernism within the oeuvre of Western art. There are three main claims Bell makes that are important for us to consider in this debate between form and content. First, he makes a claim for form over content in art. Second, Bell describes form as the universal condition of all great art. Third, he makes a case for the justification of formal art devoid of representational qualities.

First, Bell explains that modernism is the inheritor of great artworks of the past because the formal properties of art bring on aesthetic feelings. If such aesthetic feelings arise from the colors, shapes, and compositional strategies of Primitivism, then Primitivism is equal to the beautiful art of the past. For if aesthetic pleasure arises from the forms of art, rather than its content or subject matter, then form is that which underlies all great art:

There must be some one quality without which a work of art cannot exist; possessing which, in the least degree, no work is altogether worthless. What is this quality? What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin,
Piero della Francesca, and Cezanne? Only one answer seems possible - significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call ‘Significant Form’; and ‘Significant Form’ is the one quality common to all works of visual art. (15)

For Bell the primary condition of modernist art is this issue of “significant” form which is not descriptive, representational, or mimetic. The notion of “significant form” describes the formal elements of art which produce an aesthetic appreciation for the art object. Bell looks to Primitive art as an example of how this formalism does not contribute to “accurate representation” or a knowledge of what is being represented, but rather the art object itself highlights the importance of the formal properties of art, its elements and design principles, and its compositional strategies. For Bell, the issue is not whether representation is accurate, symbolical, or a means by which one object is appropriated for the sake of representation. Rather, representation of all types is relegated as insignificant in light of the formal properties of art such as form, volume, color, etc. Secondly, for Bell, formalism is not only the condition of modern art, it is the universal condition of all art:

Whether we consider Sumerian sculpture or pre-dynastic Egyptian art, or archaic Greek, or the Wei and Tang masterpieces, or those early Japanese works of which I had the luck to see a few superb examples ... at the Shepherd’s Bush Exhibition in 1910, or whether, coming nearer home, we consider the primitive Byzantine art of the sixth century and its primitive developments amongst the Western barbarians, or, turning far afield, we consider that mysterious and majestic art that flourished in Central and South
America before the coming of the white men, in every case we observe three common characteristics – absence of representation, absence of technical swagger, sublimely impressive form. (15)

Thus, for Bell, “significant form” unites all styles of art throughout all periods and is a universal principle, which provokes aesthetic feelings in the viewer while at the same time justifying them. Subject matter or the representation of nature is irrelevant because the formal properties are primary. Modern art has victoriously overcome ancient Greek and traditional imitation and representation. Third, Bell continues to explain the decline of the importance of *mimēsis* in favor of form, or *l'art pour l'art*. For Bell, representational art may portray delightful narratives and subject matter or content, but without significant form it lacks aesthetic value. As Bell explains,

> We are all familiar with pictures that interest us and excite our admiration, but do not move us as works of art. To this class belongs what I call ‘Descriptive Painting’ - that is, painting in which forms are used not as objects of emotion, but as means of suggesting emotion or conveying information. Portraits of psychological and historical value, topographical works, pictures that tell stories and suggest situations, illustrations of all sorts, belong to this class. That we all recognize the distinction is clear, for who has not said that such and such a drawing was excellent as illustration, but as a work of art worthless? Of course many descriptive pictures possess, amongst other qualities, formal significance, and are therefore works of art: but many more do not. They interest us; they may move us too in a hundred different ways, but they do not move us aesthetically. According to my hypothesis they are
not works of art. They leave untouched our aesthetic emotions because it is not their forms but the ideas or information suggested or conveyed by their forms that affect us. (14)

In other words, what makes a work of art great is not the content of the work, the narrative, mythic, or representational or mimetic qualities that illustrate the natural world or the lived experience. What makes a work of art great is the appearance of its forms, the arrangement of its formal parts (color, line, shape, etc.) within the overall composition. In Bell and subsequent theorists, we can see the decline and repudiation of mimēsis.

The British theorist Herbert Read further clarified the distinction between abstract and representational art. Writing for the symposium on ‘Revolutionary Art’ staged by the Artists’ International Association (formerly the Artists’ International) in London in 1935, Read claimed that abstract art is not derived from temporal and historical conditions. Thus it can be qualified as “pure form”, meaning that it is non-representational, non-figurative, and archetypal. Read says,

It is at least arguable that the purely formal element in art does not change; that the same canons of harmony and proportion are present in primitive art, in Greek art, in Gothic art, in Renaissance art and in the art of the present day. Such forms, we may say, are archetypal; due to the physical structure of the world and the psychological structure of man. (503)

Read’s claim to pure and archetypal form seeks to ground abstract art, including Picasso’s primitivist works, within a notion of universal or pure form without ties to ideas. In other words, archetypal forms are unchanging and not subject to the particulars of history or
subjectivity. Further, abstract art lays no claim to ideology as it is an escape into a world without ideologies (503). By Read’s definition of modern art, representations of the natural world from a phenomenal perspective, in terms of rendering objects (or figures) as viable natural forms, suggests a psychological attachment or intention that obstructs all claims to universal patterns and archetypes. In other words, mimetic works of art block the viewer’s ability to see beyond the natural world, \textit{mimèsis} prevents a viewer from focusing on the formal properties of art themselves, such as line, color, composition, etc. It is this detachment (from the phenomenal in exchange for a universal that is based on formal properties of art) which defines modern abstract art.\textsuperscript{39} Representation has become lost to art, supplanted by pure form: and a schism in art is drawn between formal and representational concerns. Picasso initiated a new mode in modern art that institutes the primacy of form or “significant form” and in so doing eschews representational content or \textit{mimèsis}, thereby separating art from long held traditions in socio-political discourse. This is an important point for both our theory of \textit{mimèsis} and Pollock’s recuperation of the indigenous spirit of art. Picasso’s break with art traditions disrupts the traditions of meaning long held within primitivist art.

Hans-Georg Gadamer acknowledges this dilemma between formalism and meaning in abstract art.

Even in those modern pictures built up out of meaningful elements that dissolve into something unrecognizable, we can still sense a last trace of familiarity and experience a fragmentary act of recognition. But is that sufficient? Can we not on reflection see that we are quite unable to understand such a picture as long as we look at it as a purely objective pictorial representation of something? What is the language of modern painting? Surely
a language in which gestures suddenly acquire momentary significance only to sink back again into obscurity is an unintelligible language. In the language of such pictures we seem to encounter the rejection of meaning rather than its expression. The concepts of imitation and recognition fail us and we find ourselves at a loss. (Gadamer 100-101)

Gadamer is fundamentally indicating that the notion of formalist art, that which depends upon significant form over content appeals to us despite its loss of mimetic presentation. The nature of abstraction as pure form is that it is unintelligible in that it does not participate in the representation of empirical objects. In repudiating representation, pure abstract art becomes a language or a code without an attendant meaning ascribed to it. Rather than relaying information in the way the conscious mind receives and processes information, formalism indicates nothing. This is not to say that nothing is unworthy of representation in a variety of delicious forms and colors, rather, it is that such form is precisely what it professes to be and therefore points to nothing outside of itself. In its pointing to itself, pure form declares the autonomy of art. But it also severs traditional associations between art and the socio-political discourse.

Though considered primitivist, Picasso’s primitivist artworks sever all ties to naturalistic representation and traditions deriving from primitivist representation such as traditional Four Continent personifications, Darwinian-Rousseauian pastoral theories, and subsequent and attendant colonial discourse and power structures. Rather than explicitly or naturalistically illustrating African masks or evoking the mythic and ritual qualities of African art or the female as territory and geography, Picasso abstracted the essential forms of the mask, which he then infused onto abstracted, unidentified, non-associated, objectified, female figures. The
figures are not intended to be read as indigenous African figures symbolic of the continent. Likewise, the masks are intended to be seen as forms of masks rather than masks that evoke African rituals. In so doing, Picasso initiated a new modality of art that appropriates exotic forms without representing them or their socio-political functions and relations. The work institutes a radical new form of primitivism which is abstract, objective, and devoid of earlier primitivist sentiments (Rubin 15). It is not that we cannot see an abstract representation of African masks and nude prostitutes in the painting. But the abstract imagery has taken on new meanings in its forms. Picasso’s Primitivism is a drastic point of departure away from representation or *mimēsis* in the specific function of primitivist art as illustrative of the relations between land and female figure personifications. Rather than extending an art tradition of meanings, *Les Demoiselles* explores instead how art is based on its own formal properties of shape and form, lines, colors, composition, etc. (Rubin 17). Rubin claims that Picasso’s primitivism “depends on the autonomous force of objects [apart from nature] – and especially on the capacity of tribal art to transcend the intentions and conditions that first shaped it” (15). Whether or not nature inspired the initial idea, Picasso’s abstractions “transcend” or surpass nature. Separated from any representational functions in meaning or ties to indigenous lands, cultures, ritual, myth, or ethnographic traditions, Primitivism becomes an abstraction or formalism, interested in the primacy of form, objective material, and geometrical two-dimensional shapes. From this point of departure, subsequent primitive artists reflect this drastic shift toward the primacy of form or structure over nature.

This emphasis on objective form is most apparent in Picasso’s *Nude with Raised Arms*, 1907 (Fig. 33).
There is a direct relationship between the forms of tribal art (and more specifically Dogon sculpture) in terms of two-dimensional geometric form, ornamental surface detail, organic color, and formal symmetry (Fig. 34).
Both European artists and connoisseurs have since prized the neo-abstract forms of primitivist works for their simple outlines, distorted figures, and repetitive ornamental patterns. Avid collectors with a distinct appreciation for the elemental forms of primitive art objects began to amass large collections of art objects from Africa, Oceana, and tribal Americas. But Picasso’s radical shift abandoned verisimilitude for promoting art’s formal tendencies. He did so at the expense of expressive content and traditional meanings, thus creating the divide or schism in art between art as object and art as signifying subject matter, a divide between form and content,

**American Primitivism**

The role of *mimēsis* as “significant content” is reinstituted in American Primitivism and continues in Pollock’s drip paintings. Nearly thirty years after Picasso’s *Nude*, between 1941 and 1944 many American artists including Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Gottlieb, Richard Pousette-Dart, Pollock and others, explored Primitivism by appropriating uniquely American pictographic forms, indigenous signs, and symbols in art. Rather than focusing on the formal properties of art, they reinstitute mimetic representation that conveys both illustration and narration in terms of pictographic and ideographic representation. In this collection of primitivist works American Artists explore the mythic and narrative content held within indigenous art forms. For example, Mark Rothko’s *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, 1942 and *Rites of Lilith* 1945 are based on pictographic imagery, as are Adolph Gottlieb’s pictograph works such as *Pictograph # 4* and *Vigil*, 1948 (Fig. 35).
In another example, Gottlieb’s *Pictograph Series* are based on recognizable American indigenous ideographic imagery and symbols that evoke Pacific Northwest Coast Tinglit culture like we see in this 300-year old Chilkat blanket, which is organized in registers that evoke language, iconic narratives and ancient mythologies represented in new forms (Fig. 36).

Rather than personifying land, flora and fauna, American artists looked to indigenous arts and iconography as the vessels of ancient myths and rituals and as the basis for a unique form of American Primitivism.
Barnett Newman first defined the nature of American Primitivism and the importance of primitivist content saying, “It is becoming more and more apparent that to understand modern art, one must have an appreciation for the primitive arts, for just as modern art stands as an island in the narrow stream of Western European aesthetics, the many primitive art treasures stand apart as authentic accomplishments that flourished without benefit of European history” (qtd. Rushing, “Native” 131). In 1947 Newman curated the show “The Ideographic Picture” at the Betty Parson’s Gallery, where Pollock and others exhibited primitivist works of art. In the exhibition catalogue Newman defined the new style as “ideographic” based on symbols, figures or hieroglyphs. He writes that, “...... there has arisen during the war years a new force in American painting that is the modern counterpart of the primitive art impulse... here is a group of artists who are not abstract painters, although working in what is known as the abstract style” (“Ideographic” 565). Like others, Pollock adapted indigenous arts into ideographic, hieroglyphic, and abstract forms, calling his artworks “stenographic” as in his Stenographic Figure, 1942 to suggest that he, like his colleagues considered the pictographic narrative to be an important element in art (Polcari, “Pollock” 6) (Fig. 37).
In light of this, how we can distinguish the ways in which the American painters differ from the abstract work of Picasso? The answer lies not in the forms, but in the content of the American painters’ works.

Richard Pousette-Dart’s *Palimpsest*, 1944 is a key work that illustrates this relation between symbol and mythic narrative content. It presents a visual structured mythology within which a myriad of mimetic events take place. A palimpsest is a tablet or writing material wherein an original text has been effaced or scratched off in order to make room for a new text. But often, traces of the original writing remain visible (Fig. 38). In *Palimpsest* Pousette-Dart reinterprets American petroglyph writings and symbolic images that were repeatedly incised on rock surfaces by ancient artists over thousands of years. Natural rock formations (like those found in Moab, Utah and other locations with the arid desert Southwest) show art as additive, with countless layers of petroglyphs, words and images being incised upon and over earlier versions over countless millennia (Fig. 39).
In the painting, Pousette-Dart evokes this sense of timeless reiteration by applying layers upon layers of forms, some partly erased, others rewritten in new forms (Rushing, “Ritual” 278).
His illustration evokes mythic messages and the passage of time within an overall composition that also structures the way in which such plays out on the canvas. In the making of the palimpsest, Pousette-Dart re-enacts the creation of mythic writing over ages. Content (the subject and act of ancient writing) is more important than the form or composition. Unlike Picasso’s primitivist works which preference form over content, the painting represents and embodies the idea of ancient narratives and the act of writing ancestral myths over the forms of such writings. Like the other American primitivist paintings, it reinforces the function of *mimēsis* as representation and illustration. This is not to say that such representation is accurate as in verisimilitude. Representation or *mimēsis* can be loosely described as imitative, illusionistic, or a form of copying the natural world. More will be said about the forms of *mimēsis* in Chapter Four. But presently, to represent is to give a faithful, suggestive, or abstract rendering of the empirical world.

Pollock, who has long been compared to Picasso and considered the heir of his Surrealist and Cubist forms, has countless drawings and paintings that directly reference American Indian arts and art forms. Pollock’s painting *Birth*, from the same era, ca. 1938-1941 continues American primitivist indigenous subjects illustrated and arranged in a frieze-like way, evoking ancient pictograms and rituals (Fig. 40).
Pollock’s primitivist paintings like this are traditionally interpreted as Surrealist. But the underlying references to American Indian arts and artifacts, and in this case Inuit masks, are clearly visible in the larger body of American primitivist works. In *Birth* for example, Pollock repeatedly illustrates such a mask from a variety of perspectives that emphasize the mask’s asymmetrical features. The painting also evokes the underlying structures of masking wherein art is used to veil one’s true visage in order to reveal something about a theatrical or mythological character. Distorted facial features are an important aspect of such indigenous character masks, and this distortion is replicated in the painting. In so doing, Pollock retains
and repeats the distorted features of Inuit mask making traditions and returns *mimēsis* to modern art (Fig. 41).

![Inuit mask, Yup’ik mask, ca. 1910, Good News Bay, Alaska, Driftwood, baleen, feathers, paint, cotton twine, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, NY](image)

The emphasis is not on the pure forms of masks, as in Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles* and his *Nude with Raised Arms*, but rather Pollock’s painting comments on the richness of the functions of masking. Where Picasso stresses “significant form,” Pollock returns “significant content” to modern art. Form is underplayed and “significant content” is magnified and repeated in the various positions of the masked forms. In an age that celebrates abstract art as primary, Pollock refutes the notion of pure form through representation or *mimēsis*.

Pollock’s painting *Number 1A*, 1948, reads very much like Pousette-Dart’s *Palimpsest* as Pollock evoked the notion of timeless return and repeat in the motion and motif of his dripped paint that conceals and discloses a myriad of hand prints barely visible beneath the tracery of paint (Fig. 42).
That Pollock’s version of the palimpsest is also his first all over drip painting, the presence of his hand prints, placed repeatedly over time beneath the repetitive dripping lines of paint, is significant. The handprints, symbolic of red handprint pictographs near Monarch Cave Ruin, in Cedar Mesa, Utah, suggest the presence of the ancient Anasazi, through mimetic representation, reiteration, and reinterpretation (Fig. 43).
The associations between Indian art and symbols and modern art is abundantly clear in Pollock’s extensive drawings and sketches. In an untitled painting we will refer to as *Frieze*, ca. 1945 Pollock illustrates indigenous American arts by referencing Eskimo masks at the very center of the image, along with pictographic figures, and geometric signs reminiscent of Kiowa shields. Both European and American primitivistic styles draw upon and reference indigenous art forms and objects, but Pollock’s *Frieze* conveys the notion of a narrative in a theatrical manner as figures are posed as if acting out a scene (Rushing, “Native” 183-4) (Fig. 44).

Figure 44 Jackson Pollock, Untitled (Frieze), ca. 1938-41, Gouache, watercolor, colored pencil, pen, brush and India ink on cardboard, Metropolitan Museum of Art

The artwork presents meaningful relationships between the symbols and figures that convey a significant narrative rather than Bell’s notion of “significant form”. Likewise in an untitled watercolor and ink study, ca. 1939-1942 in the estate of Lee Krasner, Pollock methodically experimented with Navajo symbols and masks (Fig. 45). Centrally placed in the watercolor is a representation of an Indian mask. Swastikas, emblems with directional energy arrows, and an adaptation of a thunder bird are clearly rendered in the right field of the painting. To the
left, pictographic-like markings are organized like fleeting thoughts, perhaps as if to represent the inexpressible collective memories of a historical culture, gaining aesthetic validation and recognition in the public eye. A Directional Emblem, which is another common motif in Navajo art, is placed in the upper right of the painting by Pollock (Fig. 46). In Navajo art, the symbol is made from intersecting horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines, and it serves to direct the ritual and sacred power energy of the emblem along cardinal points: north, south, east and west.

Figure 45 Jackson Pollock, Untitled Drawing, watercolor, colored pencil, pen, brush and India ink on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 46 Navajo Cardinal           Figure 47 Navajo Prayer Stick Emblem
When the emblem is portrayed in Navajo ritual sand paintings, the emblem is placed in the center of the picture frame denoting its powerful position (Newcomb 28). Pollock’s directional motif is a direct reiteration of the Navajo symbol but it is modified from the arrows, snakes, the Navajo Prayer Stick, and other symbols from which it derives (Fig. 47).

Pollock reiterates the notion of the Prayer Stick and Directional Emblem as associative energy in another untitled work made around 1946 (Fig. 48). In the painting Pollock orients the energy center to the bottom of the painting, with modified, abstracted prayer sticks retaining an outward movement along cardinal directional points. Associations with Indian emblems are still visible. But more importantly, the sacred energy explodes along these directional points. One year before Pollock’s first drip work, the painting reads like a schematized map of the very metaphysical matter of ritual in motion.

Figure 48 Jackson Pollock, Untitled Drawing, watercolor, colored pencil, pen, brush and India ink on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
The associations between American Indian signs and symbols are more than overtly evident and they reveal Pollock’s ongoing interest in the representation of concrete objects, be they emblematic or figurative. Rather than Picasso-esque pure form or psychologically laden archetypal imagery, Pollock reintroduces *mimēsis* by representing indigenous American forms and symbols in his paintings and drawings.

Pollock’s interests in Indian arts, forms, and myths were supported by several key friends and associates, particularly in his association with Wolfgang Paalen and John Graham, as well as his research in the periodicals and journals he collected (as mentioned in Chapter One). Our review could dwell on these influences at length, but our concerns depend less on the outward influences of Pollock’s imagery and more on the ways that *mimēsis* signifies the myths embedded within American Indian arts. 41 Picasso eschews content for highly abstracted forms but Pollock returns content within the veil of abstraction. Rather than continuing the modernist trend for pure form, Pollock reversed Picasso-esque form in favor of a uniquely mimetic and content laden American art.

There are two primary points to consider in our discussion regarding “significant content” and “significant form”. First, in Picasso’s primitivist works, (for this study is not concerned with Picasso’s cubist, surrealist, or later representational works), the mythic is dispensed with in exchange for form, conveying formal structure. Picasso’s *Nudes* give no reference point upon which we can ascertain any phenomenal reality of the figures beyond the form which they present. But American artists’ application of *mimēsis* to represent figurative forms evokes a myriad of meanings and associations to historically contingent realities. Rather than affirming notions of pure form, the American artists’ works transgress modernism’s
emphasis on pure form through their commitment to a tangible and perceptible representational and narrative content.

Second, European Primitivism depends upon a discourse that includes personifications of the female figure as land and territory which are conflated with issues of dominance and conquest. Picasso severs all ties to this discourse, which originates along with the earliest European colonial expansion. American Primitivism however, evokes instead the notion of ancient mythologies, forms, and symbols in a way that evidences a distinct and even new discourse (rather than colonialism) that suggests a new American paradigm based on the notions of nationalistic authenticity and self-identity. Rather than extending the female Indian as a personification of the Americans, modern American artists appropriated the forms of American Indian arts, preserving vanishing cultural traditions within a new American-Indian inspired art form that personifies the political and social climate of the Indian-episteme. While the extent and ramifications of the American Indian-episteme in art and its discourse warrant additional exploration, our present concerns address the way in which Pollock added to the paradigm in ways which reveal a broader understanding of the time, and of art’s ability to evidence and contribute to prevailing discourses. Rather than severing ties with tradition through the repudiation of *mimésis*, Pollock and other American artists recuperate *mimésis* within American Primitivism and through the representation of American Indian arts along with their associated meanings and discourses.

*Mimésis and the American Indian in the Discourse of Pollock, Graham, Paalen, and Henderson*

We have considered the broader scope of colonial Primitivism and how it differs significantly from American Primitivism and its ties to the era’s Indian-episteme. These
differences also demonstrate that American Primitivism carries forth the Indian-episteme and embodies this within a unique style that precedes the divided critique of Pollock’s work, the polemical-modern-episteme with its hierarchies and discourses. With further analysis we can look to two key figures, John Graham and Wolfgang Paalen, for their contributions to American Primitivism. We can also revisit the subject of American Indian inspired content in the drawings Pollock gave to Henderson. Within the larger view of the Indian-episteme, American Primitivism, and Pollock’s work, we can establish a scientific and theoretical ground for understanding the way in which Pollock’s work continues art principles of the Indian-episteme within the broader scope of his work.

We have already discussed (in Chapter One) the primary art schools wherein the American Indian arts and themes were aestheticized and promoted: the Santa Fe School, the Pacific Northwest Coast School, and the New York School. In New York City and American Primitivism, some of the artistic interest in pictographic, ideographic, stenographic, primitive, and indigenous was generated by the Russian-born immigrant artist John Graham. Graham had studied in Paris in the 1920s and it was there that he became a devotee of Picasso and Primitivism. When he immigrated to the United States he studied at the Art Students League with John Sloan, who we have already seen was very active in promoting Native American art in New York and Sante Fe, and Indian inspired subjects in modern art. As Rushing explains, “Graham recalled with pride that he was a student of Sloan, whom he described as the greatest teacher of any nationality he had ever known. Upon Sloan’s passing in 1951 Graham noted with great emotion that his former teacher ‘has always been to me the most inspiring person’ in art” (qtd. Rushing, “Native” 217). Graham was an artist, theorist, and art historian, expert in Prehistoric, African, Oceanic, Mexican-Pre-Columbian, North
American Indian, and Modern art. He became a well-known connoisseur and dealer in primitive art objects from Africa and Oceania, dealing especially in small sculptures at his “The Primitive Arts” gallery in Greenwich where he sold his own artwork and primitive objects he gathered from abroad (Landau 80). He became part of the essential New York avant-garde, along with Gottlieb, Newman, Pollock, Pousette-Dart, Rothko and others who believed that Native American art, with its emphasis on myth, primordial origins, rituals, and symbols, was viable as a means by which modern art could transcend the social and political issues of the era.

Graham was also a follower of Jungian thought and he incorporated Jungian ideas into his Systems of Dialectics, 1937, which was highly influential among the primitivist artists. Gottlieb, Pollock, Pousette-Dart and others all owned copies. In the System Graham stresses the belief that American Indian art most specifically continues to be a relevant art form because it connects Prehistoric art with modern and contemporary art and thereby shows the validity of its forms and subjects. He believed that “all great art is ceremonial” (qtd. Rushing, “Native” 123). He writes, “The purpose of art in particular is to reestablish a lost contact with the unconscious (actively by producing works of art), with the primordial racial past and to keep and develop this contact in order to bring to the conscious mind the throbbing event of the unconscious mind” (Rushing, “Ritual” 273-274). Graham also wrote the article “Primitive Art and Picasso” printed in the Magazine of Art, April 1937, which was influential among the New York primitivist artists. Pollock also owned a copy of this article and met with Graham in 1937, the year it was published (Langhorne 47). In the article, Graham furthered his thesis by analyzing Eskimo and North American masks, and Tlingit, Kwakiutl, and Haida carvings. But he also made it clear in the article that he was not a
follower of Picasso’s Cubism (Rushing, “Ritual” 273-274). Graham’s interest was in myths and universal content, not as subject-less pure form. After both showing works at the McMillen Gallery, 1942, Graham and Pollock became friends united in their interests in the primitive and Primitivism. In an interview about Graham and Pollock’s relationship, Willem DeKooning was asked if Graham discovered Pollock. DeKooning explains, “Of course he did. Who the hell picked him out? The other critics came later – much later. Graham was a painter as well as a critic. It was hard for other artists to see what Pollock was doing – their work was so different from his. It’s hard to see something that’s different from your work. But Graham could see it” (qtd. Friedman, “Energy” 54). Graham’s influence on Pollock was seminal and may help to explain Pollock’s continued interest in American Indian art and why he remained committed to figuration, even when it was veiled and obscured in his drip works.

It was Graham, Fritz Bulman and Pollock’s second Jungian analyst Violet de Laszlo who went with Pollock to the earlier mentioned MoMA Indian Art show, 1941. It was there Pollock had watched sand painters create and destroy paintings at its entrance. Polcari writes that, “That show had been crucial to the development of his goal of an art of ritual, generative force, and altered consciousness, and significantly, as a result of seeing it, he adopted forms from several different Native American cultures, some of which we have seen” (Polcari, “Pollock” 83). Further, Pollock studied Inuit masks like those in Graham’s article, “Picasso and the Unconscious”. Similar masks were also on display at the American Museum of Natural History and were also illustrated and discussed in depth in the BAE Eighteenth Annual Report, 1896-97, pt 1, which Pollock had collected, as well as in other Annual Reports Pollock owned. As an avid collector of American Indian arts and author and
theorist on indigenous and modern art, Graham was united with Pollock’s interests in indigenous American arts, subjects, themes and forms. Like the artists of the Santa Fe and Pacific West Coast schools, the New York school participated in the epistemic interest in the American Indian. But this interest became a long-term passion in Pollock’s work, not for its abstracted forms, but for its mimetic, representational, symbolic, metaphorical, and allegorical possibilities. In this respect, Pollock’s work amounts to a drastic departure from Picasso’s pure and later Cubist form, rather than the fulfillment of it.

Another key figure in alignment with Pollock’s interests in recuperating the indigenous spirit in art is the artist theorist Wolfgang Paalen. Paalen immigrated to New York two months before the diaspora of wartime European Surrealist refugees. Six months before the “First Papers of Surrealism” exhibit at the Art of This Century gallery, Paalen made it clear that, just as Graham separated himself from Cubism, Paalen was separating himself from the Surrealist group. Paalen wanted to initiate a new mode that would be a “synthesis of the implications of modern science [anthropology] and modern art” (Paalen and Sawin i). Paalen wrote about and collected masterpieces of Pacific Northwest Coast Indian art. His journal *DYN*, which was devoted to anthropological studies of Indian art, was distributed in New York at the Gotham Book Mart, which was a regular meeting place for New York artists (i). Paalen’s special interest issue of *DYN*, in December of 1943, focused on a variety of American Indian topics. In the preface Paalen wrote, “Occidental art had experienced an osmosis with Asia, Africa, and Oceana, and “now it has become possible to understand why a universal osmosis is necessary, why this is the moment to integrate the enormous treasure of Amerindian forms into the consciousness of modern art….To a science already universal but by definition incapable of doing justice to our emotional needs, there must be added as its
complement, a universal art: these two will help in the shaping of the new, the indispensable world-consciousness” (qtd. Rushing, “Ritual” 274-5). Paalen sought to unite the myths and images of Oceanic and African arts with those of the Americas. The journal ran for two years, publishing a total of six issues, but seven essays from the collection were republished in 1945 in the book *Form and Sense*, also by Paalen. As Martica Sawin explains, “With the dearth of forward-looking writing on art in those final months of World War II, Paalen’s modest book took on a prophetic aspect, as it set forth a program for art in a postwar world at the dawn of the atomic age. The fact that works by Pollock as well as Robert Motherwell, William Baziotes, David Hare, and former Surrealists Roberto Matta and Gordon Onslow Ford, were reproduced in the book (as well as in the last issue of *DYN*) is evidence of Paalen’s intention to claim these artists for his new movement” (i). Motherwell painted some of his earliest works in Paalen’s studio and translated Paalen’s publication from French to English for New York readers.

Pollock’s *Bird*, 1938-41 was featured in *DYN* with an accompanying article by Paalen that compared the meaning of the American Indian fire bird with that of an ancient Greek mythological bird in flight (Fig. 49, 50). The bird appears in profile, head with one eye looking outward and outstretched wings. On the bird’s chest we again see an upside down Haida embryonic motif that Pollock used in many of his drawings and his painting *Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*. Paalen writes, “The great cosmic symbolizations, through all differences of epoch and of race, remain astonishingly alike. Perhaps a new interpretation of the myth of Prometheus will reveal, by analogy, the significance of the Mexican myth” (6). Like Graham, Paalen sought to unite a burgeoning discourse on American Indian arts with
trends in European anthropology and structuralism, and both artists were aligned with Pollock’s aims at evoking American Indian arts and subjects in modern art.

Figure 49 Jackson Pollock, *Bird*, 1938-41, Oil and sand on canvas, 27 3/4 x 24 1/4" (70.5 x 61.6 cm), MoMA, New York
Given his associations with Graham and Paalen, might we entertain the possibility that Pollock entered Jungian psychotherapy analysis with Henderson for aesthetic purposes, as part of his overall inquiry into art, archetypes, and native aesthetics? Pollock entered psychotherapy shortly after he began associating with Graham, and when we consider the fact that Pollock sought Graham out, his interest in working with Henderson was also probably based on a working paradigm of the representation of indigenous subjects and forms. While Henderson gave long written explanations of archetype forms, Graham taught viscerally, in terms of imbuing artworks with magic (Rushing, “Native” 183-4). Considering the evidence of Pollock’s sketches while under Henderson’s care suggests that Pollock’s interests in Henderson may have been more artistic than previously understood. Much of our understanding of Pollock’s interests in American Indian arts comes from a study of the many drawings Pollock gave to Henderson (which are now in the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Generally used as evidence for a Jungian critique, as we have mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, the eighty-three drawings and one gouache painting that Pollock gave to Henderson reveal several key ideas regarding American Indian arts upon which Pollock experimented, with imagery related to animal figures like the bull, horse, serpent, and bird, improvisations on dancing figures and figures in promenade, signs like totems, arrows, shields, masks, birds, and primitive designs derived from North American and Mexican Indians.

Henderson believed that the drawings were evidence that Pollock was evolving into an improved psychological state in conjunction with a ‘new’ ordering of universal symbols such as the cross, circle, square, mandala, axis mundi, and other elements that were meant to
symbolize an increasingly harmonious whole. Because of this, the drawings have been cited as evidence for the psychoanalytic critique of Pollock’s work. However, the drawings were neither dated nor numbered, and they were not specifically made for Henderson (in many cases they relate to a body of work created before Pollock’s time in therapy). As mentioned earlier, Henderson arranged the drawings in a way so as to show progress in Pollock’s psychological state of mind. In a display of epistemic acumen, Henderson used Jungian thought to organize Pollock’s work in a way that confirmed Jungian ideas, subsuming new ‘evidence’ into the existing Jungian paradigm.

Drawings listed as number two and three respectively were claimed to be examples of Pollock’s periods of “violent agitation” marked by Pollock’s inability to render any clear shape or figure. His drawings during this stage of his psychological progress were marked by agitated, impulsive lines devoid of clear intentions. In a state of supposed psychological withdrawal, Pollock created tightly compacted compositions with highly articulated compartments that frame figures and forms. Henderson cited plate number ten as an example of Pollock’s introversion. Henderson wrote that, “All energy seems to have been drawn from the upper “conscious” region which appears lifeless, wooden and anguished. The life force or psychic energy is represented by a huge snake (lower center) which denotes the unconscious and upon which the human figure is completely and dependently attached” (qtd. Wysuth 10). But this plate could be interpreted any number of ways, including a view that reads the grim-reaper like figure as a type of personification that steps over the horses and their riders who have fallen to the ground. Being that they are wooden type figures, the horses take on a mythic appearance that makes one readily think of epic of Troy. Overall, Henderson saw positive progress in Pollock’s mental state in plates number thirty, thirty-six, and fifty-seven.
In these plates he believed the symbols such as Haida embryonic forms, arrows, skeletal figures, and vertical designs compositions were less tortured and imbued with psychic energy.

Following a prolonged period of representing human figures and animals in an anguished, dismembered or lamed condition, Henderson claims that he witnessed a new development in Pollock’s drawings. He writes,

This was not merely the dissociation of schizophrenia, though he was frequently close to it. It has seemed to me a parallel with similar states of mind ritually induced among tribal societies or in shamanistic trance states. In this light the patient appears to have been in a state similar to the novice in a tribal initiation rite during which he is ritually dismembered at the onset of an ordeal whose goal is to change him from a boy into a man. (10)

Henderson’s emphasis on “schizophrenia”, “states of mind”, and “shamanistic trance states” serve to interpret Pollock’s work along Jungian thought. But regardless of any other references in the drawings, we clearly see that the drawings have overt references to tribal symbolism and Native American signs and imagery. We could ask to what degree these forms indicate Pollock’s mental state, but more relevant is the question as to what evidence do the drawings contribute to our understanding of a paradigm that sought for an authentic form of American Primitivism?

Two separate drawings in India ink, watercolor, and crayon show how Pollock interpreted the Navajo thunderbird into a more universal supra-symbol, bedecked with a feathered headdress and hovering above austere landscapes. Both drawings were given to
Pollock’s second psychiatrist, de Laszlo, who began treating Pollock after Henderson left New York City. De Laszlo indicated that Pollock was “engrossed in the activity of the Navajo painters of the Singing Chant as they fashioned their images by spilling tinted sand on the floor” at the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibit *Indian Art of the United States* 1941, which we know Pollock attended several times over (Heidelberg 24). In this exhibition Pollock had gazed upon various art objects (including masks) and observed the diversity of forms, signs, symbols, and art practices such as sand painting, that allude to sacred and powerful access points to the metaphysical (Fig. 51).

![Figure 51 Navajo Sand Painters at MoMA, “Indian Art of the United States” 1941 exhibit](image)

Pollock’s obsessions with indigenous American art and particularly with Navajo sand painting is manifested through his direct the reiteration of Haida and Navajo symbols in many of the drawings he had given to Henderson.44

Looking at the studies overall, what can we conclude about Pollock’s interests and experiments in art? First, many of the studies are clearly based on Bentonesque volumes. Further, these may have some imagery that was possibly inspired by Picasso’s *Guernica*,
although these associations are fluid and circumspect rather than exact quotations and reiterations. To understand this claim it helps to know that *Guernica* was first exhibited at the Valentine Gallery in New York in early 1939 (Fig. 52).

![Figure 52 Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937. Oil on canvas. 349 cm × 776 cm, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid.](image)

Then the painting was exhibited in a retrospective of Picasso’s work called *Forty Years of Picasso’s Art*, which was held at MoMA from November 1939 until January 1940, a time that corresponds with Pollock’s visits with Henderson. Elizabeth L. Langhorne claims that Picasso had a tremendous influence on Pollock’s work. She writes, “In Picasso Pollock discovered his artistic master, the artist after whom he would strive to model himself, but from whom he would simultaneously seek to distance himself so as to clear an imaginative space in which to individuate as an artist” (Langhorne 65). Langhorne continues to show how through Jungian archetypes, mystical Yoga and American Indian art, Pollock “initiated the challenge to Picasso” rather than extending Picasso’s theories (64). References to Picasso-esque imagery can also be seen to possess Indian inspired motifs and symbols drafted within Bentonesque forms and principles. More specifically, of the sketches collected by Henderson, plates 1, 10, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 31, 48, 49, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63 and to a
lesser extent, 77 are clear studies on Bentonesque volume with modeling, shading, and emphasize anthropomorphic or totemic forms and figures. Plate 10 features symbolically colored figures piled on top of each other with one figure in ochre reaching up out of the pile, looking upward with outstretched arms and hands (Fig. 53).

The figures present us with an understanding of Pollock’s sense of compact design, monumental narratives, and experimentation on flattening volumes without losing the content of such volumes and forms. For example, he combines diverse smaller inscriptions amidst monumental myths, a figure amongst wooden horses, and a human figure draped over a coiled snake. Plate 25 contains an Escher-like labyrinth of a totemic figure folding in on itself. Each drawing gives us glimpses at the creative mind working out representation, monumentality, and mythic narratives. It’s clear Pollock mastered draftsmanship and volume.

Figure 53 Jackson Pollock, Plate 1, Untitled Drawing

196
and was looking at other means by which a story could be told in terms of signs and symbols (Fig. 54).

Figure 54 Jackson Pollock, Plate 25, Untitled Drawing

In Plate 58 Pollock experimented with the ideas of masking and morphology but not at the expense of weight, modeling, and volume (Fig. 55). In the imagery, which seems to be a mother and child, the identities of the two figures merge and morph into two-dimensional masks that obscure identity within the pseudo-identities the masks create.

Figure 55 Jackson Pollock, Plate 58, Untitled Drawing
At first glance this image seems to be a clear replication of Picasso’s surrealist works. But on further investigation, and in looking at the drawings and sketches as a whole, it is clear that Pollock treated symbolic forms with a primary sense of volume, scale, and composition. It is entirely unfeasible to suggest that he adopted Picasso’s Cubism, or Surrealism for that matter, for Pollock’s works contain strong narratives of mythic proportions. This is not to say that Picasso’s later works are not mimetic, but that the present discourse on Picasso has interpreted his Cubist and Surrealist works for their formalism. It is this precisely a refutation of abstract formalism that differentiates Pollock’s drawings from the early formal works of Picasso. In Pollock’s drawing the figures have weight and volume and powerful wide-eyed expressions on the two morphing masks and power in the mother’s outstretched hand that all suggest a narrative or myth with an intendant meaning and moral. Picasso’s formal work might have influenced Pollock’s sense of abstraction, but any lost content in Picasso’s work is supplanted by Pollock’s content-laden drawings and sketches. For they are based less on a fracturing of the surface plane and more about the creation of new mythic composite voluminous phantoms – far more related to Indian totemic composite creatures than Picasso’s reiteration of abstract form. It is impossible to conflate Pollock’s imagery with Cubist form because Pollock’s images move within the dynamic energy of unfolding narratives.

One of the most telling drawings is plate 31. In comparison to Picasso’s Primitivism, Pollock’s coiled steed expresses an intensity and emotional impact that transgresses the notion of pure form (Fig. 56). The figure appears to be on the verge of springing upward and outward in response to a dramatic narrative. The drawing, in light of the overall oeuvre of drawings and paintings witnesses a continued lack of formalist rationality, because the drawings’ abstracted forms are overshadowed by a sense of dramatic and unrelenting mythic
narrative. The steed emerges from the confines of its own block-like structure like Pygmalion’s bride arising from the stone. With bared teeth the steed flairs its nostrils. Its twisted bent neck threatens to uncoil at any moment, while the steed’s hair blows in the wind. Rather than one of Picasso’s static, fractured, and dismantled bulls of his early abstractions (and not his mimetic later works), Pollock’s steed threatens to charge. We see a myth emerging in our anticipation of the end result of this coiled energy. Yet the drawing achieves that key balance indicative of great art: the equal juxtaposition of form and representation, *mimēsis* in terms of accurate renditions of nature as narrative and in this case, nature in impending action. The drawing suggests a high level of “significant content” though not entirely without significant or rather volume-rich form.

Figure 56 Jackson Pollock, Plate 31, Untitled Drawing

In light of this unfolding argument for Pollock’s use of mimetic form it is clear that Picasso, though considered to be one of the primary advocates for pure form in art, also has a large body of mimetic works from his earliest Rose and Blue phases to the mimetic
abstractions of his latest works. This paper does not suggest that Picasso eschewed mimesis throughout all of his works. Rather this comparison takes its point of departure from only a small portion of Picasso’s extensive oeuvre, namely his experimentation with pure form in his primitivist and cubist works. However, Pollock’s critics, from Greenberg to Langhorn and others continue to compare the two artists with the result that Pollock extends Picasso’s Cubism (Greenberg) or his Surrealist works (Langhorn). To realize how divergent Pollock’s works are from that of Picasso’s, we can look at the differences between Pollock’s primitivist works and those of Picasso’s to see that before Cubism and Surrealism, Pollock had already embraced mimetic representation in terms of naturalistic (or illusionary) volumes and weight, mythic narratives, and an indigenous aesthetic.

Overall, we can see that even in creating small scale studies, Pollock had a keen interest in ordering compositions. Out of the eighty-three images, at least thirty-one drawings and the gouache painting show a definite sense of composition and completion. In these drawings the elemental parts are magnified yet tightly compacted, giving precedent to a sense of the monumental by ratio of available space to imagery size. For example, in Pollock’s twenty-one and a half by fifteen-and-a-half-inch gouache painting, four monumental figures fill the frame and appear to be larger than life. In each case, Pollock penciled in a tightly composed arrangement of juxtaposing volumes that allude to three dimensions against dynamically merging parts, all while concealing and revealing suggestions of concrete and mythic forms. Overall, images fill the given space evenly, with clear balance between the parts as well as the negotiation between negative and positive space. The images are intentionally arranged within the given confines of the borders with no apparent attempts to transgress such borders. Nearly all of the drawings suggest a sense of well-composed completion.
Similar findings are seen in Pollock’s sketchbooks presently in the permanent collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. These sketchbooks include three notebooks, labeled as Sketchbook I, II, and III by the museum. The sketchbooks date from 1937 to 1941, overlapping the supposed dates of the sketches collected by Henderson. Sketchbooks I and II indicate the type of studies Pollock learned from Benton, studies of Old Masterworks that diagramed composition, movement, and volumes. Unlike the sketches Pollock gave to Henderson, the note book sketches are dated, making timely interpretations possible. One of the problematic issues with the Metropolitan sketches is that the third notebook, or notebook labeled III, has been interpreted along the lines of the modernist tradition. They are believed to be evidence of Pollock’s departure from Benton-like forms into a transition through Orozco and the Mexican muralists, Picasso, Surrealism, and finally to abstraction, or more specifically an emotion-laden Abstract Expressionism. However, Natalie Maria Roncone has analyzed the third notebook to show the close relationship the sketches therein have to Benton’s lessons on form and composition. For example, as Roncone demonstrates, sketches like that in Plate 2r, Sketchbook III, shows strong affinities to compositional and figurative design in El Greco’s *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1608. Both compositions are pyramidal in a structure that bears sinuous voluminous albeit floating forms. In what appears to be three versions of El Greco’s composition, figures and animals become enlarged, moved, and recolored, yet retain their function as supporting casts members to a larger drama. As Roncone writes, “The agitated drawing, attenuated figures, eye-cracking tonal shifts, brittle planes and unstable spaces articulate Pollock’s expressive take on El Greco’s ecstatic devotional painting” (Roncone 29). As in notebooks I, II, and III, and as we can see in the Henderson studies, Pollock often chose to forego concrete settings, instead focusing on
placement of totemic and figurative volumes that play out mythic narratives within either open vistas or dense architectural supports.

What is most striking about Pollock’s drawings overall, however, is the fact that in each (with the exception of plate eighty-two), Pollock invents American Indian inspired imagery that plays out in mythic narratives and dramas. In some plates, this imagery is overtly Native American. For example, in plate 7, a bald eagle emerges supremely from the composite, even totemic of parts of a bull, human, and other animal parts (Fig. 57). The arrangement of the parts within a hierarchical structure, along with an emotional content which is shown on the faces of the bull, gives the composition a narrative quality. Instinctively we know we are looking, not at a formal arrangement of various unrelated parts, but rather at a complete narrative that features a culmination of drama, and a hint at resolution. Pollock’s commitment to American Indian imagery, in this case in terms of the symbolic eagle or thunderbird, is also evident in two drawings that were given to de Laszlo (Fig. 58, 59).

Figure 57 Jackson Pollock, Plate 7, Untitled Drawing
Instead of being a collection of unified Jungian archetypes or a witness to the formalism of European Primitivism, we have before us an encyclopedic investigation into a wide variety of signs and forms (many of which are experiments upon indigenous aesthetic thought), built upon Bentonesque volumes. Most importantly, this collective visual material indicates that Pollock was clearly seeking for a new vernacular in which to convey a difficult subject – not the self and its particular mental states, but a collective and universal syntax which might express the multi-epistemic exigencies of the present in a way that harmonized with past forms. The drawings given to Henderson, along with sketchbooks and paintings, demonstrate Pollock’s experimentation with mimêsis as representation and mythic drama. Pollock associated with Graham and Paalen during the formative years in which he developed his characteristic style. His sketches and artworks suggest his keen interests in representing American Indian symbols and forms. These interests were very much aligned with the pursuits in art, literature, and theory shared by Graham and Paalen. While Henderson was a
Jungian analyst who appropriated Pollock’s sketches for a psychoanalytic critique of healing, it is clear from the collective of Pollock’s sketches, that Pollock was experimenting with ways in which to evoke and even recuperate the indigenous spirit in art. Pollock’s sketchbooks indicate his strong commitment to figuration and his continued commitment to represent American Indian arts and themes. In Pollock, the Indian-episteme is seen in its fullest and most enduring representation.

**Conclusion**

There are three key points to remember in our discussion on Picasso and Pollock. First, European Primitivism derives from a long tradition wherein art envisions through *mimēsis* prevailing socio-political concerns and circumstances. But art’s envisioning functions and modes become obsolete with Picasso’s emphasis on the formal properties of art in his primitivist works. Second, American Primitivism is borne out of an enduring Indian-episteme which is uniquely American. In so doing, American Primitivism returns mimetic function to art, particularly in the works of Pollock. Third, interpretive theories have overlooked the persistence of mimetic indigenous elements in Pollock’s work, and in the works of the other American primitivist painters as well. These theories on Pollock’s work are divided between the formal properties of art and the subjective content of art as per the modernist and psychoanalytic critiques respectively. The result of Pollock and his contemporaries’ experiments with indigenous forms is that *mimēsis*, absent in Picasso’s primitivist works, is returned to art, along with its associations to envisioning socio-politics, necessitating a new way to articulate or interpret Pollock’s work as mimetic.
First, Picasso’s form of Primitivism breaks art from its traditional role of imitating the natural world. In so doing it severs art from its relationships to historical meanings and associations within socio-political paradigms. Drawing upon a discourse in art and politics, European Primitivism envisioned the indigenous as a foreign “other” personified by female figures that associate nature, land, and territory, with ethnicity. Within these associations, power and hierarchies are embedded within the image and viewer responses such as the gaze and all that it entails. But Picasso’s emphasis on form at the expense of content dis-appropriates the female figure, rendering it meaningless, without associations to place, time, people and culture. Picasso repudiates representational content or *mimèsis* (at least in his primitivist works) for a style based on pure form and the outer geometries and colors of denatured objects.

Secondly, we have seen that, in opposition to Picasso’s abstract forms, there is a specific and tangible content in American Primitivism that returns “significant content” or *mimèsis* to art, and this return has come about through the recuperation of indigenous arts along with its forms and symbols that evoke ancient myths. Figuration, representation, and American Indian symbols, are predominant in Pollock’s work, and in the work of several key American primitivist artists including Newman, Rothko, Pousette-Dart, Gottlieb, Graham, and others. With the incorporation of *mimèsis* in the form of American Indian arts into modern art, the American Primitivists return the associations of land, origins, myth, culture, and meaning to art. Operating within multiple epistemes (including the Indian-episteme and the polemical modern-episteme), art becomes again a signifying structure that personifies the meanings of socio-political discourses. Pollock was not alone in conflating the primitive as a new mode with modern art. But perhaps he experimented with these notions longer than his
contemporaries, including Newman, for even in Pollock’s last drip paintings we now know that there are both hidden and unconcealed figures that witness to his continued commitment to representation.

Thirdly, a divided theory has been at a loss to account for the existence of this pertinent style and its associations within a prevailing Indian-episteme, even though Newman identified and qualified the American Primitivist movement as, “spontaneous, and emerging from several points” as “a new force in American painting that is the modern counterpart of the primitive art impulse” (Newman 566). Neither the abstract modernist nor the psychoanalytic views can fully account for the purposes to which artists explored American Indian themes within matters of outer abstract form or what Newman called “non-objective pattern” and Bell considered “significant form”. Although Newman makes it clear in his essay “The Ideographic Picture” that American artists were returning to mimêsis as a form of signification which also re-presented American Indian symbols and themes, neither side of the polemical modern-critique acknowledges this end and how their modes and techniques clearly set them apart from the abstraction of Picasso’s Primitivism and Cubism and Surrealist autonomism. Newman explains the theory which Graham, Paalen, and the American Primitivists worked to create by saying “It is now time for the artist himself…to make clear the community of intention that motivates him and his colleagues. For here is a group of artists who are not abstract painters, although [they are] working in what is known as the abstract style” [Italics mine] (566). Clearly the division in art between formalist tendencies and mimetic content are felt in Newman’s essay and in the minds of artists working in the Primitive style. While working with abstraction, they wanted to be known for returning content to art. These issues regarding form and content, and appropriating symbols
to portray a uniquely American art were valued by artists and theorists, and combined, their works constitute a discourse of art and theory based on uniquely American paradigms which speak to American socio-politics of the era, rather than to pure form.

By appropriating indigenous forms and symbols, Pollock and American Primitivism return significant content (with its associations with land, cultural practices, and iconography) or rather, *mimēsis* to significant form. This fact has been entirely overlooked by the critical discourse on Pollock as Greenberg and others who promote quintessential modernists that repudiate imitation in lieu of pure form and abstract gesture. It is likewise ironic that both the abstract modern and the psychoanalytic critique have neglected to account for the indigenous elements as belonging to a unique and separate American paradigm. Both sides of the polemical modern-episteme have appropriated Pollock’s work for their own purposes of pure form, gesture, and Jungian-shamanistic healing. Neither critique has considered Pollock’s continued commitment to aestheticize American Indian arts within all phases of his artistic output.

We have identified the representational qualities in Pollock’s art and have labeled them as “significant content”. We have seen that these representational qualities constitute content which is drastically different from Picasso’s “significant form” or pure abstract form. We have also looked at how “significant content” establishes a ground for a theory on Pollock’s recuperation of the indigenous spirit through *mimēsis*. We have not seen that mimetic works of art need be constructed as accurate depictions of nature. Rather, in iconic representation such as in personifications, fictitious settings (such as in the works of French exotic primitivism), and in the abstract representations of Pollock, Dart-Pousette, Gottlieb and others, meaning is retained alike. That which designates meaning is the subjects and their
relations in a work of art. In Picasso’s abstract Primitivism it is precisely his intention to emphasize the formal properties of art over subjects in art that disrupts artistic cultural and political meanings. Situating the differences between pure form and representation in art, we see that the divide between Picasso and Pollock coordinates with a larger dualism in art and critical theory, and particularly in the divided formalist and Jungian theories regarding Pollock’s work. But prior to the divided critique of Pollock, the most blatant example of modern art’s disregard for *mimēsis* and the resulting schism in modern art, is found in the origins and outcomes of European Primitivism, particularly in the work of Picasso. To understand Picasso’s achievement is to first understand the schism in modern art and art criticism and second, to recognize the role of *mimēsis* in the split. Having now exposed such critical blind spots, we now can expand upon a theory of *mimēsis* to more fully analyze how Pollock recuperates the indigenous spirit.
Chapter Four

Mimēsis and its Forms

I believe easel painting to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is toward the wall picture or mural.
Jackson Pollock

Introduction

In light of American interests in claiming for themselves a nascent and developing pre and post-War self-identity, Pollock retained a commitment to the influences of an Indian-episteme while situating himself squarely within the developing politicized aesthetic contest which we have defined as the modernist-polemical theory. We have already looked at Pollock’s commitment to representation within his Primitive works and drawings and the placement of hidden figures within his drip paintings. This discussion looks further at these tendencies in terms of the forms of mimēsis in order to demonstrate the broader way in which mimēsis is at play in Pollock’s works. First, this discussion seeks to augment an impoverished definition of mimēsis as verisimilitude by looking at the ends to which mimēsis has been historically defined. Second, this discussion looks at the history of mimēsis in order to locate two primary forms of mimēsis and to recuperate the source of their decline in modern art. Third, this discussion questions how decline in the importance of mimēsis (as in Picasso’s Primitivism for example) might account for the broader polemical-modernist theory, or what we might call the schism in modern art. From these considerations we will
see how *mimēsis* accounts for both verisimilitude and idealized representation, and can thus be applied to both the figurative and abstract elements in Pollock’s paintings, even within the large context of a divisive modern art.

Central to this discussion of *mimēsis* is the notion of pointing toward. The irony is that, whether constructed in terms of abstract form or in the representation of the natural world, art points to or refers to something even when that something is itself. Art is representational and depends upon vision as well as perception, and the interpretation and agreement of meanings. Even abstract art manifests an idea, transcribing it from one form (such as in the intellect or in nature) into a system of signification along with its signs and signifiers. But as we have seen, art based on its forms points only to itself and not to the larger world of things, ideas, and the broader socio-political discourse. Robert Williams explains the nature of art as a signifier in declaring, “When a picture succeeds in creating an illusion, it can be said to point beyond itself. It points in this way when it suggests physical presence; it points further when it represents a story or an emotional state or a type of character; further still when it gives form to ideals of physical beauty or moral perfection, or attempts to express complex philosophical truths” (Williams 17). This pointing function of art is key to our understanding of how art is mimetic. It directs our attention to that which it signifies. Thus, this chapter looks at *mimēsis* beyond the modern usage of the term to uncover its forms in naturalistic and idealistic representation and in context with its historiography in modern art and philosophy.

Certainly, from our brief overview of European and American primitivist trends, we see that Picasso broke all ties to primitivist traditions through the repudiation of *mimēsis* in exchange for an art based on abstract form devoid of significant content (not in his later or
earliest works, but in his Primitivism and Cubism). But the American primitivist tradition demonstrates a commitment to return to art its signifying role, denoting a paradigmatic discourse through *mimēsis* as an engagement with (or a reaching out to) that which is mimetically represented, namely American Indian art traditions and myths. Within our present view of the Indian-episteme, socio-political epistemes, and polemical-modernism, we need to now ask how does the notion of the recuperation of *mimēsis* allow us to formulate a theory that appeals to the concerns of the polemical-modern-episteme and the divided theoretical interpretation of Pollock’s work? We will address this point in this section by looking at *mimēsis* and its origins, as well as its decline, repudiation, and final recuperation. Then we will proceed further to define the primary forms of *mimēsis*.

*Mimēsis* and Its Origins in Philosophy

Our initial foray into a discussion on *mimēsis* itself depends upon a basic understanding of the term. Greek thought establishes our concrete understanding of *mimēsis*. From the Greek word *mimeisthai* (μιμεῖσθαι), *mimēsis* is ‘to imitate’. Alternatively, *mimēsis* has been interpreted as imitation, illusionistic, verisimilitude, and the representation or copying of the natural world. Historically *mimēsis* establishes the criteria for judging art, and determines that the accuracy of art’s imitation of nature forms the merit upon which good art is based. For example, Pliny the Elder gives an account of an art contest and lavishly praises the artist Parrhasius for having won the competition. As part of the feat, Zeuxis painted a still life of grapes. The grapes were so realistic that a flock of birds pecked at them. Parrhasius congratulated Zeuxis on his great accomplishment and then took Zeuxis to his studio to see
his own masterpiece of realism. Zeuxis went to draw back a curtain to see the painting behind it only to find that the curtain was actually and indeed the painting. While Zeuxis had fooled birds, Parrhasius had deceived Zeuxis (Pliny 001:35:36). This view of *mimēsis* as a form of verisimilitude, faithful illustration or copy, and the representation of nature, has remained consistent throughout the classical era. But the definition and notion of *mimēsis* has undergone many changes and presently has many nuanced meanings. Further, we have earlier defined *mimēsis*, according to its ancient Greek origins, as representation, illustration, or the faithful copy nature (verisimilitude). This definition applies to both Pollock’s artworks and sketches, of which only a small fraction have been addressed here. But this is a bit problematic because Pollock’s form of representation returns content to art but does so through abstracted form. Our understanding of *mimēsis* must be enlarged in order to apply it equally to both the representational and what appear to be the formal properties in Pollock’s work. While this point is less important in his primitivist works, it is vital for identifying later on the indigenous elements in his drip works. Therefore, we will return to the ancient definitions of *mimēsis* as well as identify the changes and permutations of these definitions in the modern era.

*Mimēsis as Naturalistic Representation*

Aristotle supports the naturalistic view of *mimēsis* as that which copies the empirical world. He extends the ancient view that says that what is copied is implicated in a dialectic of perception of the empirical world. First, Aristotle explains that art is mimetic because it copies the natural world in the forms of mimicry, imitation, and representation. The faithful representation of nature in art enables viewers to recognize nature and the plausibility of natural consequences in art. As empirical objects and actions of the world are copied in art,
the imitation enables viewers to experience these objects and actions. This relationship between likeness and the empirical appearance of that which is being imitated, between the world and its representation, is the key element of *mimēsis* for Aristotle (Heath xii).

Aristotle also declares that imitation is the means by which learning takes place, a point which is addressed more fully in Chapter Six. For the present, Aristotle claims that nature is a means by which one learns truth and it is art which facilitates such processes. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle claims that the origin of art or at least poetry arose through natural means (Sallis 174). “Mimesis is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most mimetic and learns at first by *mimēsis*” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 1448b2). Just as children naturally engage in imitative play, and this attribute of imitation belongs naturally to human character, poetry, art, and learning grow naturally out of similar mimetic activities. Following Pre-Socratic and traditional Greek aesthetics, Aristotle unitedly defines art as *mimēsis* in terms of recognition and representation.

Socratic thought, however, adds another dimension to our understanding of the nature of representation. In articulating Socrates’ ideas, Plato is the first thinker to extensively explore art and *mimēsis* in ways which inextricably link art with philosophy. In fact, it is art’s ability to imitate which is precisely the concern Plato has with art. In Plato’s *Republic*, art deceives through imitation. Rather than showing the real ideal or metaphysical truths, art can only copy what exists in the natural world. In Plato’s hierarchy, the natural world is merely an imitation of the ideal, so if the natural world is a copy of an ideal, then art is a copy of a copy – a third rate copy far removed from the original truth (Sallis 174). For Plato, art objectifies by making a copy, thus removing it from the ontological authenticity of that which is being objectified, namely truth or the Ideals. Through imitation, art is inseparably linked to truth.
because of how it plays upon how truth is signified. For Plato, art imitates in a way that obscures our views of the ideal.

Plato explains the problem with *mimēsis* through a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon (Plato, “Republic” 607b). Socrates asks, “What is *mimēsis*?” Using an example of a couch, Socrates explains that there is the couch itself (or rather the perfect ideal) and then there are many material couches made by craftsmen. The “Higher craftsman” makes all things, including “all implements but also makes everything that grows naturally from the earth.” He also “produces all animals – the others and himself too – and, in addition to that, produces earth and heaven and gods and everything in heaven and everything in Hades under the earth.” Socrates challenges Glaucon by saying that he could also make all things by carrying a mirror about, thereby reproducing all things through imitation or likeness. Glaucon answers, “Yes, appearances but not beings in truth” (596c-e). Plato’s point is that there are real things, their imitations, and their reproduced appearances. Art images constitute a third order – the order of *mimēsis*. But such order is deceptive because is antithetical to the metaphysical truths – it is only a phantom of the real and not the real itself. “Therefore, *mimēsis* is surely far from the truth” (598b). Plato is less concerned with representation and more concerned that representation can be deceptive. It can only reproduce the appearances of things. Plato’s concern is that things, whether in art or life, are perceptible through sight and such visions can be deceptive.

Platonic thought is concerned with truth and its objective forms, which forms or ideals art can imitate but not authentically produce, whereas Aristotellean thought claims that through *mimēsis*, authentic forms of knowledge or truth arise in the experience and consciousness of the viewer. From such ancient origins, *mimēsis* has gained an extensive philosophical
tradition. Platonic opponents to *mimēsis* refer pejoratively to art’s role in copying, illustrating, imitating, and “counterfeiting” nature (Halliwell, “Aesthetics” 14). But both Plato and Aristotle agree that the mimetic is that which represents or copies another thing, generally from nature. It is easy for us to recognize the naturalistic representation in Pollock’s primitivist works, drawings, and hidden figures (even though these are often rather abstract), and this is because the figures and symbols appear like that which they imitate or represent. An abstract figure can be recognized as a simplified form of what it represents.

But such a limited view on *mimēsis* as mere imitation cannot fully address the arts’ many functions and capacities of expression and representation, technique, psychological affects, objects and modes (14). Naturalism alone fails to account for the way in which *mimēsis* is more broadly an underlying condition of art than previously supposed. If anything, *mimēsis* is more broadly applicable to all representational forms of art, accounting for not only representation but idealism as well. While our present concern has been representation, and namely the recuperation of the Indigenous American spirit in art, our concerns are also with the nature of *mimēsis* as idealism and the way these forms are situated within the broader contexts of the divisions between first, formalist and Jungian art criticism, and second, the broader art dialectic between subject-content and formalism. Thus, we need to go beyond the theories of naturalistic representation to formulate a theory of idealistic representation, as found in Plato for help in addressing these issues.

*Mimēsis as Idealistic Representation*

It is easy to identify representational elements in art, for the copy or imitation of nature is easy to identify given the way in which we see the world. But idealistic representation is a bit
more difficult to recognize. Again, we turn to Plato for the articulation of symbolic or idealistic representation. These ideas are largely outlined in Plato’s *Symposium* wherein Plato applies *mimēsis* to his arguments concerning the Ideas, explaining that the regard of beauty is obtained through the attainment of objects of desire that serve as mimetic devices along the procession towards the ideal (129). In Plato’s *Republic*, *mimēsis* is characterized as that which corrupts, but in his *Symposium* the soul comes to know and contemplate Beauty (as one of the Ideals) by first coming into contact with inferior, even mimetic forms. In the *Symposium*, a drinking party honors Agathon, who had recently won a prestigious poetry competition, and here the party guests (Phaedrus, a heroic poet, the politician Pausanias, the physician Eryximachus, the comic poet Aristophanes, and the poet Agathon) discuss the role of love, desire and beauty in life, politics, and health. 46 Socrates summarizes the guests’ sentiments and clarifies the relationship between love, beauty, and philosophy.

First, Socrates both defines and personifies Love. First, Love is a symbol of lack. It is that desire or feeling which points to that which one wishes to “have in the future” and is what one presently lacks (Plato, “Symposium” 201a- 201b). Second, Love is an object, a personification or a symbolic representation of the ideal. 47 Love is represented as a spirit. He notes, “One should first define who Love is and what he is like, before talking about his characteristic activity [italics mine]” (201c). Love then, is an ideal which is personified and symbolized. But being that Love is both lack and object, the loved is objectified as the beautiful being that is also the representation of what is lacking, which by reason must be better in some way than that which the lover who lacks. Thus a connection between lack and love are established, such that any object of desire, be it a beloved one or an object of wealth, achievement, or even wisdom, is the fulfillment of love’s desire in promise but not in
actuality. For lack impels one to move from one beautiful thing unto an even more beautiful thing, in a progression, until one arrives at an understanding of the most beautiful, Beauty itself in its unchanging and eternal nature. The *Symposium* dialectic illustrates the movement from carnal desire to the love of beauty and the arts such as music or medicine, and then from a spiritual yearning to find one’s other half to a desire for wisdom and beauty. Love is a mediating force that inspires one to seek the greatest of all knowledge, the knowledge of the Form of Beauty. Inextricably linked to the course of love are the symbolic objects of love, from objects of desire to ideas of knowledge. These objects are mimetic representations or symbols of higher or more ideal forms of the concept of love.

In this dialogue, love is relational, always pointing or directing itself to its object, whether that be another individual or towards philosophy, or even Beauty itself. As Socrates explains, one begins with a love of one beloved only to realize that the beauty of one is like the beauty of all and such a one will become as Plato writes, “a lover of all beautiful bodies” (210a). This understanding will lead one to regard the beauty in all souls and to value the achievements and good deeds of the soul. Socrates explains that one “will realize the beauty in souls is more to be prized than that in the body. If therefore someone’s soul is good even if his physical attraction is slight, that will be enough for him” (210c). This will cause one to be “compelled to contemplate the beautiful as it exists in human practices and laws” (210c). Contemplation will then lead to a view of wisdom regarding the nature of beauty itself. Socrates says, “he will turn towards the vast sea of the beautiful and while contemplating it he will give birth to many beautiful, indeed magnificent, discourses and thoughts in a boundless love of wisdom until there, strengthened and invigorated, he discerns a unique kind of knowledge” which is the knowledge of Beauty itself (210c).
Overall, love or *eros* is represented within a carefully designed argument that serves as a method for arriving at a knowledge of the Ideal of Beauty. Beauty is arrived at through movement from one mimetic object (or object standing in for meaning) to another in a progressive movement within a hierarchical model (Plato and Howatson vii). In a similar way that dialogues in Plato’s *Republic* lead the reader to knowledge of truth, the *Symposium* leads the reader to a knowledge of Beauty. Therefore, abstract concepts such as love do not supplant *mimēsis*, but rather gives *mimēsis* a new function in pointing to objects which serve mimetically as objects of desire. We will now leave this point for another analysis, but suffice it to say that Platonic thought, and its Neoplatonic forms, apply *mimēsis* within a hierarchical structure that delivers viewers (or hearers) to a transcendent plane, an arrival at a new truth beyond otherwise present understanding. The key issue to note in this dialogue is that objects as representations are mimetically implicated in a dialectic between subject and object, lack and attainment, movement and transcendence. Representational objects then are those things which symbolically point to other things.

Plato’s Allegory of the Cave also illustrates the mimetic functions of symbolic devices (in this case an allegory) that point to another thing (Plato, “Republic” 514a). In Plato’s cave, puppeteers create shadows on the cave wall. But to the enlightened one who sees the shadows for what they are, the shadows point to the puppeteers. Then the pointing goes from the puppeteers to the cave itself and then to the brighter world beyond, and from the world outside to the sunlight and from the sunlight to the form of Truth as that which illuminates. Clearly this is one of the strange ironies in Platonic thought, that Plato uses symbolic representation to illustrate his points. But Plato always has in mind the higher aim of obtaining a truth to which *mimēsis* is applied. Whether in art, object, or symbolic language,
what we have in Greek philosophy then is the attribution of *mimēsis* as that which is connected inextricably with some form of representational pointing toward the Ideals, or imitating nature in ways that transport viewers towards those Ideals. As in Aristotelian didactic functions, Platonic *mimēsis* is the means by which the perception of knowledge is attained. The issue of *mimēsis* is applicable to the function of art by accounting for not only the representation of nature (as in Aristotelean thought), but as in beauty and symbolic representation in Platonic idealism and philosophy as well. Henceforth, art and philosophy have been inextricably linked. In our study Picasso’s repudiation of *mimēsis* is both a break with European traditions in manifesting the colonial “other” and it is also a break with an extensive discourse into the very nature of art as ideal and didactic forms of attaining knowledge. This break constitutes a schism in art and theoretical discourse in that it severs art from both its signifying role as representation and its role in the symbolic mimetic language of philosophy.

*Mimēsis as Historically Defined*

Because our concerns with *mimēsis* in Pollock’s works are both representational and idealist in nature, a brief overview of *mimēsis* gives us a clearer understanding of what is at stake when we analyze and interpret Pollock’s works. For our understanding of Pollock’s works depends upon a definition of *mimēsis* along two primary forms: naturalistic representation and idealist representation. Naturalistic representation is representation that we recognize as an illustration or representation of an empirical object within the natural world. Idealist representation is a bit more complicated as it pertains to iconology, the use of signs, symbols, icons, emblems, allegories and metaphors and the like, wherein that which is seen in the painting represents something else, such as a concept, meaning, narrative story or
myth, or the like. Both of these two forms of representation have been in decline in art since the onset of the modern era. Here is a brief overview of these forms and their decline.

By the third century CE, Platonic ideas regarding art and its relationship to truth had overcome Aristotelian concerns with nature. Plotinus, the influential leader of a new school of thought known as Neoplatonism, drew upon the ideas largely outlined in Plato’s *Symposium* specifically pertaining to the beautiful and its ability to inspire and elevate the soul. For Plotinus, objects of beauty inspire viewers to feel desire and to learn to perceive beauty. In perceiving beauty, one comes to contemplate and yearn for yet a higher beauty still. In a progression from a type of natural desire, to an indifferent aesthetic appreciation of the beauty in nature and things, to finally a search for higher beauty which brings about the contemplation and comprehension of the Beautiful, Good, and True, all beautiful objects are symbolic or ideal representations of desire. As in the *Symposium*, the highest desire is beauty and all things progressively point to beauty in a hierarchical and progressive way. Beauty is what Plotinus calls the final contemplation, a unity or “world-soul” which then yields an intuition into a single idea, the “world-mind”, which is the pinnacle concept that human thought can ascertain (Williams, R. 3). But the attainment of such a unity is only arrived at through the function of objects which mimetically point to greater things, upward and onward along the transcendent journey. But in Plotinus’ thought, the symbolic representation lies less in objects and more in the beauty of those objects, such that beauty is symbolic of the Ideal of Beauty.

Plotinus notes that beauty is found in the natural world as well as in the arts, music, dance, and the visual arts. Both objects in nature and art are symbolic representations of divine beauty. In a hierarchical structure or worldview, Plotinus perceives levels of high and
low realities “in a sequence that descends from the ultimate, transcendent source of all being, the One, down through the mediating powers of nous (intellect) and psuchē (soul), to the lower reaches of material nature” (Halliwell 314). Within this model, (as in Plato’s idealist model) the lower objects of nature “constantly reach up to and strive to become like” the higher realities, each in turn pointing to even higher realities which ultimately “constitute their origins and causes” (314). Lower realities point to higher realities, and mimetically represent them erstwhile the higher realities provide telos, purpose and patterns for being, thereby drawing all lower forms upward. As Halliwell explains, “On the largest scale, Plotinus can speak of the relationship between everything and the One as a case of mimêsis: all things aspire to the eternity and goodness embodied in the first principle of the cosmos” (314). All things are thus related, point to, and are implicated in a cosmic upward moving (or hierarchical) mimêsis.

By virtue of its pointing or representational quality, beauty is also a form of mimêsis. It exists and functions in the hierarchical notion of mimêsis in its progressive form, as the destination of contemplation. Beauty is represented in the intellect (nous) or works of the imagination and the ideals of the soul (psuchē) (314). Imitations of beauty are also acts of recreation, symbols of “natural or divine creation”. In this way, any beautiful object, whether in nature or imagination, is a representation of divinity. Plotinus explains that, “If, again, we mean beauty in relation to ourselves as spectators in whom it produces a certain experience, this Act (of production) is Motion,—and none the less Motion by being directed towards Absolute Beauty” (Mackenna and Page 62). Thus Plotinus reverses Plato’s belief that art is a third-rate copy or phantom of truth while retaining Plato’s use of symbolic representation in philosophical discourse (as in his allegories). For in Plotinus mimêsis is elevated to its
highest form in the relationships between creation, representation, and movement from nature to art, and then to the ideal in the contemplating spectator. Rather than a deception, art as the representation of beauty is the means by which the soul ascends. Drawn from Platonic ideas, Plotinus’ conception also draws close to Aristotle’s belief that art is related to nature, and the creation of art is a natural imitation in the way nature bestows an imitative instinct. But imitation in Plotinus can either be that of nature or that of the idea in the artist’s mind, and both sources point upward toward the divine (Williams, R. 34).

At the conclusion of Classical and Early Christian thought we find three forms of *mimêsis*, mimetic representation with clear relations between likeness and the appearance of the empirical object thus represented, art as pointing either towards or away from truth, and symbolic representation in art and word (as in allegorical illustrations), and the notion of beauty. We have witnessed a myriad of examples of Pollock’s use of representation in the way he recuperated American Indian art forms, for at times his representations have clear likenesses of American Indian art symbols and forms. At other times his imagery is more symbolic and allegorical in nature. But Pollock also uses *mimêsis* in idealist ways. Because of this, it is helpful to understand the basic tenets of mimetic idealist art. Understanding what *mimêsis* is philosophically in ancient and medieval idealist thought equips us to analyze ideal *mimêsis* in Pollock’s primitivist and drip paintings, as both representational and as movement pointing towards idealism. Since the discourse of modern art, with its emphasis on abstract and disinterested pure form, has obscured our view of *mimêsis* as idealist, it is therefore important that we also acknowledge the rejection and subsequent loss of idealist and naturalistic *mimêsis* in art that has led to a forgetting and obscured view of the types of *mimêsis* we find in Pollock’s work.
Decline of Naturalistic and Symbolic Representation

*Mimēsis* as both symbolic representation and the representation of nature came into disrepute in philosophy by the late eighteenth century when Alexander Baumgarten applied the term ‘aesthetics’ to art and developed his science of perception. Art became a source for “immediate and particular sensory cognition” in the viewer and the more profound and philosophical methods and functions of *mimēsis* were forgotten (Halliwell 8). In its traditional role of representation or verisimilitude, *mimēsis* was displaced by a theory of disinterest. Platonic idealism and Aristotelian representation of nature were de-emphasized instead for visual sensation. Drawing upon Baumgarten’s theories, the philosopher Immanuel Kant claims that artistic genius, autonomy and matters of taste are the key elements in art. He writes that, “What distinguishes art from objects of craft is the skill or genius of the artist in creating something which departs significantly from nature, or is not given as a rule by nature” (Kant and Meredith lix). So rather than adhering to classical judgements that implicate *mimēsis* as a valuation of good art, Kant claims that art’s affects, brought by the skill of the artist in departing from nature and *mimēsis*, is what constitutes great art. Further, in Kant, the pleasure in art is a universal function of the viewer and not contingent on any particular feature of art such as in its naturalistic and idealist representational or mimetic functions, forms, or conditions. Kant explains this fact, “All one wants to know is whether the mere representation of the object is to my liking, no matter how indifferent I may be to the real existence of the object of this representation. It is quite plain that in order to say that the object *is beautiful*, and to show that I have taste, everything turns on the meaning which I can give to this representation, and not to any factor which makes me dependent on the real existence of the object” (205:20). For Kant, the quality of the mimetic representation and the
connection to knowledge of the thing, whether through natural representation or idealization, are not the important features of art. Rather, what is primary is the objective perception one gets from the work of art (or nature). Kant best explains this objective view writing that,

Here we have to attend generally to what has been already adverted to, that in the Transcendental Aesthetic of judgement there must be no question of anything but pure aesthetic judgements. Consequently examples are not to be selected from such beautiful or sublime objects as presuppose the concept of an end. For then the finality would be either teleological, or based upon mere sensations of an object (gratification or pain) and so, in the first case, not aesthetic, and, in the second, not merely formal. So, if we call the sight of the starry heaven sublime, we must not found our estimate of it upon any concepts of worlds inhabited by rational beings, with the bright spots, which we see filling the space above us, as their suns, moving in orbits prescribed for them with the wisest regard to ends. But we must take it, just as it strikes the eye, as a broad and all-embracing canopy: and it is merely under such a representation that we may posit the sublimity which the pure aesthetic judgement attributes to this object. … Here, for determining grounds of judgement, we must not have recourse to concepts ends … to influence aesthetic judgement. (270:5-25, 122)

For Kant, what is before our eyes and its relationship to what we conceptually see through mimêsis or representation is a distraction to pure aesthetic judgement. Rather, the forms as they “hit the eye,” provide matters for aesthetic judgments which are sensations that occur before one ponders upon about what a picture represents. What is represented in art (or
nature) is not important, rather, how the scene is visually presented in colors, shapes and forms is what is important (270:5-25, 122). Kant asserts that aesthetic judgments must be independent from both the content of idealism and the subject of representation in art. Thus the importance of mimēsis wanes in favor of celebrating an acknowledgement of perception and an understanding of the formal properties of art (Huhn 5). Such pre-perceptions are particularly attuned to issues of creativity, imagination, and genius but they overlook subject matter in art. As the philosopher John Sallis explains “genius is to be wholly opposed to the spirit of mimēsis” (qtd. Sallis 171). Genius is not that which perfectly imitates nature such as in Zeuxis’ fruit or Parrhasius’ drape. Genius is defined as the artist who “gives the rule to art” or rather, turns from nature and its forms and ideals (Kant and Meredith 307:5-10, 168). The emphasis in Kantian aesthetics shifts away from naturalism and idealism, and the final form of a work of art is less relevant than the manner of its creation. Kant devalues mimēsis in art since art is no longer required to be mimetic or representational. Kant, like Plotinus (and for that matter Coleridge and the German Romantics), relocates the nature of the pointing function of art from that of an art object pointing to nature to the pointing or directing from an art object to a higher or more ideal object or concept of beauty. For in Kant, this movement is no longer situated in the artwork, but rather is held in the mind upon the first glance at a work of art. Kant’s movement is not only important for our understanding of a type of genealogy of mimēsis, but also because modern aesthetics (and the critique of Pollock) draws heavily from Kant’s theory of abstraction and disinterest.

In summation, the modern era witnesses three modes regarding representation or mimēsis which are inherited from a classical and medieval past: first, representation in regards to the natural world, second, waning representation as idealist pointing to divinity or
ideals along a hierarchical movement towards eternal unchangeable forms, and third, the disinterestedness of the viewer to both forms of *mimēsis*. Ironically, however, in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, the art viewer takes a Neoplatonic journey (or at least hierarchical process reminiscent of Neoplatonism) that begins with the desire to possess a thing of beauty, to a state of disinterested aesthetic pleasure, and finally to a state of judgment or perception of beauty that echoes the movement towards ideal Beauty in Plato’s *Symposium*. In tracing the genesis of aesthetics, Meyer Abrams claims that the Kantian model is a secularized variation of Platonic and Neoplatonic transcendence (Abrams, “Natural” 12). However, transcendence lies primarily in the mind and perception, and art is merely a catalyst for this process rather than functioning as a device pointing toward higher forms of beauty or truth. Thus there is one sharp difference between Kantian and Platonic idealism, and this difference lies in the displacement of the art object, and particularly the role of art as representation. This is because of the way in which Kant limited knowledge to the realm of appearances (the phenomenal as opposed to the noumenal essences of things). For in Kant, both the experience of art or nature is coequal because both produce aesthetic feelings. But the production of feelings is derived from the forms of art, not its subjects or content, and thus the quality of art as a faithful copy of nature becomes an irrelevant consideration in the production of such feelings (Halliwell, “Aesthetics” 8). Separated from *mimēsis* and nature, art is autonomous. Aesthetic feeling is subjective, provoked by form and individual taste and therefore separated from *mimēsis*. Thus in Kant and German Idealism, art began to experience its schism, its separation from itself in its mimetic functions and affects, techniques, modes, and objects. *Mimēsis* in both its naturalistic and idealist forms becomes irrelevant to the judgement of art.
Schisms in Modern Art: Mimêsis, Idealism, and Abstraction

As in philosophy, mimêsis in art also comes into disrepute in the modern era, and it is this decline in the value of mimêsis that leads to a schism in modern art. Leading up to Picasso’s stand against mimetic representation and Pollock’s reintroduction of it, art was embroiled in a duel between mimêsis as symbolic and naturalistic representation. Ironically, as the reception of art is considered within Kant’s theory of disinterest, representation is at its peak by the mid-nineteenth century. At its highest point, the issue of faithful representation or verisimilitude in art is embroiled in the conflict between the French academic idealist tradition and the more sensuous Realist movement (Williams 124). Honoré Daumier illustrated this aesthetic conflict in a lithograph titled Duel of the Academician and the Realist, 1855 (Fig. 60). Realists looked at the contemporary world with a belief that modernity was a revolutionary time worthy of memorialization in art. Rather than looking to ancient myths for ideal models for modern society, Realists looked to the contemporary objective world and replicated this world with faithful reproductions. The Realists believed their work expressed, as Théophile Thoré explains, “new, truly human art expressing a new society” (qtd. Williams, R., 124).
A new society required a newer form of art equal to the task of expressing the spirit of the age, one that faithfully captured the appearances of contemporary life and nature while dispensing with idealistic themes and appearances.

This issue of ‘expressing a new society’ quickly became problematic, however, as artists and theorists grappled with determining what ought to be the content and form of the modern present. Mimêsis quickly became at odds with notions of modernity. With Courbet, Millet, Manet, Daumier and others, art became interested in verisimilitude, heightened naturalism and the concrete objects or forms of modern life and distinct and exclusive mimetic forms became more apparent, namely verisimilitude, idealism, and sensationalism. Art’s idealist tendency also gave rise to abstraction and Symbolism, while from naturalism and sensationalist tendencies we find art branching out into the Aesthetic movement, Surrealism, German Expressionism and Social Realism (with its sister style, American
Regionalism). This tension between expression and modernity’s need to find modern forms of expression becomes the genesis of a schism in art itself, a polemical modern-episteme between representation as naturalistic, idealistic, and sensational, and abstraction as in formalism or pure form separated from or distanced from the ideas and objects of the empirical world. We see this larger schism in the divided critique of Pollock’s works and in the way in which Pollock addresses the problems of modern art through mimèsis.

**Idealism in Art**

We ought to make it clear at this point that abstract and idealist art are two distinct and separate categories. Remember that in mimetic art, there is a pointing action towards the idea, ideal, or empirical object whereas in abstract art, the function of art is to bring attention to art’s formal properties. Moving toward idealism, the artists of Das Blaue Reiter, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, sought transcendence beyond the everyday to reveal eternal values in form and color. Their primary concern was in finding a universal form for art. They believed that there was a correlation between the possibilities that modern art could express and the deeper concerns of humankind at large. Kandinsky articulates these aims,

> There exists, however, another outward similarity of artistic forms that is rooted in a deeper necessity. The similarity of inner strivings within the whole spiritual-moral atmosphere - striving after goals that have already been pursued but afterward forgotten - this similarity of the inner mood of an entire period can lead logically to the use of forms successfully employed to the same ends in an earlier period. (Kandinsky 89)
Kandinsky claims these “forgotten” and archaic and idealist inner spiritual yearnings had become lost to bourgeoisie materialism and had created a division between modernity and primitive societies. Kandinsky believes that through idealist art, one can “see” hidden truths which are not yet “explained by modern-science” (89). For Kandinsky, art can point to ideals which are not presently visible. The color blue becomes symbolic of spirituality and one’s ability to move beyond oneself. Abstracted forms and color become equated with music in terms of each media’s fundamental and universal expressive capacities. The saturation of primary color within abstract forms is, for Kandinsky, equal to the essences of a spiritual life.

Kasimir Malevich also ‘liberated’ color from its functional role in representation of the natural world to reveal color’s idealist or spiritual underpinnings. For example, the color blue, rather than its associations with representing sky became, in Suprematism, a representation of infinity. Rather than painting objects, Malevich sought to create a new mode of art that references the pure qualities of color in order to free the ideal. He claims that “will is able to develop an artistic system when the object has been annulled in the artist's mind as a pictorial framework and a vehicle” (Malevich 290). Malevich sought an art that was free from traditional naturalistic representation in lieu of new idealist uses of color in order to create a new mode of art that represented freedom as well as infinitude. He writes, “Swim in the white free abyss, infinity is before you” (290). In his mind one is only free in a state of transcendence, when his or her will focuses critically and philosophically on that which eternally exists in order to attain new phenomena and knowledge. Both Malevich and Kandinsky are problematic artists because they appropriated abstract form and appear to be formalist artists. But their intent continues the pointing action of mimetic art, for they sought for an idealist art that represented a sort of Schopenhauer-esque notion of cosmic will,
wherein color and form can point to the divine, or envision it as a type of underlying metaphysical presence of order and structure. These idealist artists yearned to recapture lost ideal essences and sought to do so by implementing a neo-Neoplatonic idealism wherein art points upward. Their works point beyond the picture frame to the spiritual ideals they espoused and hoped viewers would embrace.

This pursuit in representing the divine adheres to ancient Pre-Socratic and Platonic traditions wherein metaphysical mimēsis is interpreted as mimēma or the representation of the cosmos or rather that which cannot be represented. Because the very act of attempting to represent the divine acknowledges the difficulty of and limits of mimēsis (which depends upon a concrete idea to represent), mimēma acknowledges the pointing action of mimēsis as well as its limitations (Halliwell, “Aesthetics” 274, n30). It also hearkens to Platonic and Neoplatonic emphasis on idealist mimēsis as a means to gain ideal knowledge or wisdom. Such non-representational idealism acknowledges a change or loss in concrete notions of a tangible God and seeks for an unchangeable metaphysical in terms of a theosophical concept of mystic or cosmic “One”, or one overarching, driving, undifferentiated and immutable force, or some notion of eternal structure. Rather than envisioning the metaphysical as embodied in tangible bodies, such as the Greek deities Zeus and Athena for example, or the planets and stars, the metaphysical is more ethereally defined. Thus both artists and those working in idealist (albeit abstract) forms during the turn of the century presuppose a type of spiritual value in art, wherein art expresses a deeper underlying hierarchy of spiritual or mystic experience which cannot be represented through concrete recognizable forms. Idealist abstraction moves art from symbolic color and abstract forms to divine principles along (Platonic and Neoplatonic) notions of transcendence. Art is seen as having an “essential
spiritual function” that can be systematized into a program that serves as an aid for social and spiritual advancement (Wood, “Art” 89). Idealist art reaffirms the connection between the Divine and art’s mimetic functions through mimēma, the representation of the unrepresentable-ness of the cosmos. It is in mimēma that Newman expresses the aims of the American Primitivism when he writes, “There is no such thing as good painting about nothing. We assert that the subject is crucial and only that subject-matter is valid which is tragic and timeless. That is why we profess spiritual kinship with primitive and archaic art” (Gottlieb, et al. 14). American primitivist artists sought to portray timeless idealism through appropriating archaic, primitive, and American Indian symbols and subjects.

**Formalism in Art**

But such idealism appears to be closely knitted to formal abstraction and here lies some of the confusion with the interpretation of Pollock’s work. For the formal properties of idealist art can threaten and visually overshadow art’s spiritual properties. This becomes particularly evident in the French abstract schools of Impressionism, Picasso-esque Primitivism and Cubism. Impressionist painters look beyond material objects, but not so far distant to spiritual properties of art. Rather, the Impressionists seek for the portrayal of time, atmosphere, and transient light. In so doing, the Impressionists intensify the autonomous and abstract effects of art (Wood, “Art” 13). We see this autonomy as bordering on the disinterested and abstract, approaching an undermining of both verisimilitude and idealism. The object portrayed is no longer related to other objects within the painting or in the symbolic or metaphysical order. Rather, objects are merely opportunities for color. The artist Léger succinctly explained the dissolution of the imitated object, “For the impressionists a green apple on a red rug is no longer the relationship between two objects, but the
relationship between two tones, a green and a red” (Léger 197). Representation is no longer a realistic or idealist mimetic act. It becomes an increasingly abstract form with an emphasis on its structure and material forms. Kandinsky and Mondrian reaffirm the idealist tendencies of art while the Impressionists, Cezanne and others intensify the autonomous effects of art in its abstract, disinterested, and autonomous forms. Naturalism and the representation of the natural world gives way to a discourse on the pure and abstract forms of art itself, l’art pour l’art, underscoring an upcoming repudiation and absence of mimèsis. It is from this point of departure from mimèsis that Picasso invented first his own version of abstract Primitivism and then Cubism, and from which Greenberg claimed Pollock’s works to be affiliated with what appears to be the natural result and development of Picasso’s Cubism and pure form. But rather than painting non-representational works, Pollock created an oeuvre based on a continued commitment to representation.

_Sensationalism in Art, Mimèsis and Subjectivity_

Simultaneously, as idealistic representation increased and naturalism waned before increasingly abstract art styles, mimetic representation continued to flourish in the portrayal of subjective experience which had become increasingly important as one of the essential conditions of the modern experience. While not specifically mentioned or understood in the art critical record, the representation of the subjective experience constitutes a type of mimèsis in that art seeks to reveal or represent something of the modern experience. Paris, the essential birthplace of modernity had, in the mid-1800s, grown exponentially into a massive urban cultural crossroads. The overcrowded city was largely structured as it had been since the medieval era and struggled to accommodate massive population growth and immigration. The French social reformer Victor Considerant wrote in 1845 that “Paris is an
immense workshop of putrefaction, where misery, pestilence and sickness work in concert, where sunlight and air rarely penetrate. Paris is a terrible place where plants shrivel and perish, and where, of seven small infants, four die during the course of the year” (qtd. de Moncan 10). Riots, disease, crime, and squalor raked the city. This is the city that intrigued Baudelaire. He found beauty in the experience of the contemporary in all its scenes, scents, and sights. It was Baudelaire, “one of the greatest and most influential” voices of the new modernity, who first articulated that the subject of modernity should be the sensual experience itself. The articulation of such was a sign of artistic authenticity and inner life; the pre-reflective expression of the mind or soul of the artist (Wood, “Art” 15). In art and art criticism, sensation seeks to replace idealism and naturalism. Such sensationalism or authentic experience became the hallmark characteristic of art. As Wood explains, “With the abandonment of naturalistic correspondence as a criterion, a premium was placed on the strength and authenticity of individual responses and feelings” (15). This impetus for portraying the intense feelings and sensations of modernity was felt throughout Europe before and just after World War I. As with Idealism, artists sought to represent and give form to inner feelings and metaphysical yearnings.

We see this trend for the subjective in the Post-Impressionist works of Vincent Van Gogh, Edvard Munch, and the works of the German Expressionists Max Beckman, Emile Nolde, and Ernst Barlach. In their works, art evokes the human experience, its emotions and sensations. Such is likewise the case with Parisian artists Auguste Rodin, Henri Matisse, Emile Bernard, Pablo Picasso in his Blue and Rose phases, and others. The Surrealists also engaged in a discourse on the subjective experience of the inner unconscious witnessed in dreams. As de Chirico declared, “To become truly immortal a work of art must escape all
human limits: logic and common sense will only interfere. But once these barriers are broken it will enter the regions of childhood vision and dream” (de Chirico 60). Representing the familiar natural world in art was to be banished, giving way instead to “presentiment” and the “irrationality of the universe” (60). Mimēsis continues in Surrealist visions by imitating the fantastical and imaginary rather than the natural. As August Macke explained,

To create forms means: to live. Are not children more creative in drawing directly from the secret of their sensations than the imitator of Greek forms? Are not savages artists who have forms of their own powerful as the form of thunder? Thunder, flower, any force expresses itself as form. So does man. He, too, is driven by something to find words for conceptions, to find clearness in obscurity, consciousness in the unconscious. This is his life, his creation. (Macke 100)

Art was to emanate spontaneously from the deep recesses of the mind and the innermost feelings of the artist without pre-thought. Surrealists drew upon objects from life but within dreamy landscapes, inducing mimēsis to point inward into the deep recesses of the unconscious mind. Rosenberg’s claim that artists were making art out of their feelings highlights the Jungian critique’s admission to mimēsis’ inward pointing. Within this backdrop between abstraction, idealism and the articulation and representation of subjective feelings, it is no wonder that Pollock’s work has been labeled Abstract Expressionism. But this label denies the primitivist content and mimetic representation we now know are pertinent to Pollock’s works.
Conclusion

When we talk of a schism in art we are recognizing that art divided itself into many diverse styles within two primary forms of art, namely the mimetic and non-mimetic forms. Within the mimetic form of representation, we see three forms: naturalistic representation of the empirical world, the inner feelings and subjective experience of the artist, and idealist representation. The abstract form of art arising from the modern era is formalism which separates itself from the mimetic functions of art representing the natural world to highlight the forms of art itself. In formalist and abstract art, art celebrates and explores its formal properties of two-dimensionality, flatness of the picture plane, color, line, texture, two-dimensional form, and the like. As waning idealistic art sought for underlying structures and declining realism sought the sights, sounds, and flavors of the inner and outer experiences of life, abstraction became the *modus operandi* of art. The representation of nature as verisimilitude fell into derision and *mimēsis* lost its value. It was regarded as mere copy or illusion, symptomatic of a traditional and outmoded past, causing idealism to become erroneously conflated with formalism. Thus from Kant to the end of the nineteenth century, art becomes divided amongst itself, manifested as disinterested, autonomous, pure form, and mimetic representation in terms of idealist abstraction, and abstractions of the inner and outer experience. This conflict is inherent within the problems of modern art with which Pollock and other artists of the era found themselves grappling, stemming from an extensive tradition of *mimēsis* and its relationship to philosophy. As a result, the subsequent critique of Pollock has been divided between formal and subjective forms. The key and missing element in the history of art, from Plato and Aristotle, to the present condition of modern art, is the role, appearance, and disappearance of *mimēsis*. *Mimēsis* as representation and idealism played a
key role in Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Early Modern art until its decline in Enlightenment philosophy and the arts of the later Modern Era. The decline of mimēsis occurs within the broader philosophical Cartesian dualism which separates objective form from subjective experience.

In conclusion, it is in appropriating indigenous forms and symbols that Pollock and the American Primitivists returned significant content, or rather mimēsis, to a new art form consistent with modes of ideal mimetic art forms. The American primitivist artists looked to indigenous American art and re-presented these forms in such a way as to convey new and significant content to art through the representation of existing and new primitivist subjects, while exploring these themes within matters of significant content rather than the outer abstract forms, or what Newman called “non-objective pattern” and Bell considered “significant form” (Newman, “Ideographic” 566 and Bell 14). It is primarily through representation and symbolic representation that these indigenous forms are reiterated.
Chapter Five

*Mimēsis* and its Modes

*I choose to veil the imagery.*
*Jackson Pollock*

Introduction

We have seen that there is a specific and tangible content in American Primitivism that returns *mimēsis* to art and this return has come about through the recuperation of the indigenous, with its forms, modes, and symbols that evoke its ancient myths. Our review of the historiography of *mimēsis* shows us that there are two primary forms of representation, firstly verisimilitude or the copy of or re-presentation of the natural world, and secondly, idealist representation. *Mimēsis* accounts for more than the representation of nature. It also explains the nature of idealist representation, but does so along four primary modes, namely: symbols and the symbolic representation of that which is un-representable, metaphors, allegories, and rituals. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze these primary modes of idealist *mimēsis* in order to illustrate the extent to which Pollock employs *mimēsis*, even in his more ‘abstract’ drip paintings. We will first question how each mode is defined in art theory and aesthetics. Second, we will apply these modes to Pollock’s works. The result of this analysis will demonstrate the extent to which Pollock’s primitivistic work recuperates idealist representation within the modes of mimetic representation.
Symbolic Representation

Further investigation into the nature of symbols gives us four primary conditions that we need to keep in mind. First, symbolic and representational art calls upon the way in which we see and perceive. Second, symbols stand in for objects which may be present or absent. In this case the symbolic representation suffices to bring the signified object, whether from nature, an idea, or from the imagination, into a state of presence in the mind through the action of pointing toward. Third, symbols represent concepts which otherwise cannot be represented. In these modes, symbols are arbitrary and convey meaning, not through direct correspondence between an object and its representation, but through emblems, signs and insignia, and personifications infused with meanings. Fourth, art symbolizes that which has no objective or empirical (or observable) form.

First, symbolic and representational art reveals the function of perception and sight. Whether illustrating an idea or concept, or a thing of nature, art represents, signifies, or gives material form to that thing. As we have already discussed in Chapter Four, it does so through a pointing action – it directs our attention to something. The nature of art reveals the means by which it is perceived as representational. The eyes present data for the mind, but it is the mind which sees. For example, in seeing a Dogon mask one sees not only the oriented surface, that part of the mask which falls within one’s direct line of sight, but also the contours of the object as it extends three-dimensionally into receding space. Sight sees frontal perspectives and receding contours. But the mind imagines the object in its full three-dimensional form. According to Husserl’s notion of the horizon of the perceptual field,
objects are apprehended or understood in their three-dimensional forms, which include the lateral and back aspects of the object even though the object is only seen scientifically within the direct line of optical vision (Spiegelberg 117). European Primitivism and Cubism articulate flattened forms, painting three-dimensional objects from nature within the confines of two-dimensional form and without illusionistic painterly techniques. Nevertheless, perception in the mind of the viewer renders the abstract forms as recognizable representations. Picasso’s cubist violin, though abstracted, is still recognized as a violin (Fig. 61).

Figure 61 Pablo Picasso, Composition with Violin, 1912, Cut-and-pasted newspaper, graphite, charcoal, ink on white paper, mounted to paperboard, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Though formal abstraction is the intention of Picasso’s Primitivism and ensuing Cubist works, they ironically challenge this interplay between sight and mind or perception. Through its radical manipulation of the representation of the natural world through distortion,
multiple focal and perspectival points and flattened space, Cubism portrays a flattened view of three-dimensional objects. It eliminates the contours of natural perspectival objects that the eye sees as recessive shadows. Yet it reveals all the three dimensional sides of the object, even those sides which are out of the view of the eye (much like the map lays flat a representation of the three-dimensional earth). All sides, regions, perspectives, and dimensions are seen at once on the flat picture plane. Such art challenges and critiques the interplay between vision and perception, as vision now sees what had been left for perception to imagine. This type of rendering makes Cubism representational and illustrative in that what is given on the picture plane is no longer left to the imagination. The picture allows one to see all sides of an object at once. The mind does not have to compensate for what is not in the perceptual field: the sides, top, bottom, or back of an object. Picasso’s primitivist masks and Cubist forms confirm Husserl’s horizon of the perceptual field, showing that sight and perception work together to create a mental image based on perception and sight beyond what is given in scientific vision (117). What is seen corresponds to what is perceived and known, even within abstraction. In this way art points to that which we already hold in our minds.

The irony inherent within Cubism then is that in objectively rendering the object within a multiple perspective composition that lacks a fixed point of reference, Cubism reveals the complex interplay between sight and perspective. Because what is given constitutes an aesthetic experience that is unnatural to a preexisting perspectival knowledge of nature, Cubism calls into question the nature of art as true and faithful representation, while revealing art to be merely a referent or a sign that can illustrate more than that which sight can see. While the sign is assumed to be a transparent referent, one that coordinates
equally to the referent, interchangeably such that the content (that which is being illustrated or signified) is materially or formally equivalent, Cubism reveals that the sign can be capriciously unnatural or transgressive to the signified, yet the sign still illustrates that which is signified. The referent is tied to the actual not by an equivalency but through an interpretive ground given through accepted meanings within perception (Barthes 689). As Burgin writes, “Cubism we can see as constituting a radical critique of this concept, a practice compatible with the recognition of the disjunction of signifier and signified within the sign” (Burgin 912). Ironically, Cubist and other formalist tendencies critique the validity or truthfulness of the image while affirming the representational value of art, even in its abstract form. We see that mimēsis accounts for the representation of both nature and the symbolic or ideal through its pointing action and the interplay between sight and perception. Our definition of mimēsis thus agrees with both Aristotelian views on mimēsis, as representation and imitation, as well as those held by Plato as the representation of higher ideals through symbolism. First and foremost, though, mimēsis is carried out by its pointing action within the nature sight.

Secondly, how does mimēsis represent things through symbolic ways and means? Like objects in nature, symbols represent through pointing towards some other thing. What we learn from Pollock is that mimēsis takes many forms (as signs, symbols, and representations in the form of names, numbers, hand prints, abstract human and animal figures, birds, totems, arrows, swastikas, circles, and many other signs and symbols) that point outward by representation to indigenous art forms. We have seen examples of all these in his primitivist work and hidden in his drip paintings. Idealist representation is highly significant in that it
refers to something outside the painting in the form of an empirical object, and idea, or object imbued with meaning.

Aristotle speaks of signs of identification such as birth marks, tattoos, scars or other bodily marks that identify and come to signify an individual, such as Odysseus’ scar which the nurse uses to identify him when he returns home (Aristotle, “Poetics” 21). He also mentions necklaces or amulets that serve as trademark accoutrements of an individual, or of particular skills that symbolize an individual. Signs, symbols, or tokens signify individuals or events. This is based on a sign system wherein the object is represented mimetically as a sign. In some cases, the symbol can also stand in for the power of an object, such as when the king’s seal makes a document valid, signifying the power or presence of the king. Certainly, art can be said to be both sign or symbolic, having both nuanced purposes and meanings. But it is in directing our attention to another thing that symbolic representation (and naturalistic representation for that matter) brings meaning to mind.

Originally the Greek word *sumbolikos* or ‘symbolic’ meant a sort of remembrance which came out of the ancient Greek practice of token giving (Gadamer 31-32). One would affectionately (or as an oath) give a token of a half of an object to another. Upon future meetings, both parties could produce the halved object which would fit together as a complete whole, witnessing to the friendship or covenant. The token was then symbolic of the nature of the relationship between the two parties, and the relationship was recognized in the symbol. As Gadamer explains, “In the case of the symbol, on the other hand, and for our experience of the symbolic in general, the particular represents itself as a fragment of being that promises to complete and make whole whatever corresponds to it” (35). Mimetic art functions in the same way, it re-presents what is given or known. It fits or corresponds to this
knowledge via recognition and thereby completes or makes whole two parts. Whether we are
discussing American Indian symbols or thunderbirds in Pollock’s primitivist artworks, or
friendship bracelets, we recognize these as signs. We find in them a familiarity according to
our experience with American Indian arts and artifacts.

All of these signs, symbols, or copies of nature are differing types of signifiers which
point to something else outside of them. They direct our attention to that which is signified,
either the object or the concept being represented. They stand in for something which we
cannot have always before our eyes, but which we might want to retain or keep in mind. For
example, we might want to take in the literal presence of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, but
this is impossible for most except those who live at the base of that great mountain range. Yet
through Albert Bierstadt’s representation, we will have the view of the thing (as a
substitution for the real) ever before us in the form of an image or painting (Fig. 62).

Figure 62 Albert Bierstadt, *Among the Sierra Nevada, California*, 1868, oil, 72 x 120 1/8 in. Smithsonian
American Art Museum
Though a substitution or *memento*, Bierstadt’s work signifies and points to the real mountains and conveys knowledge about them to us as viewers. But more than standing in through naturalistic representation, Bierstadt’s works are imbued with glowing ethereal light which serves as a symbol conveying meanings held about the sacredness of untamed nature. The light becomes a substitution or *memento* of divine presence.

Likewise, Pollock’s works are not just copies of indigenous forms, symbols and signs - they convey our collective knowledge of Native American life and art, transferring this knowledge into new forms while pointing to its precedent origins. The relationship between the signified and the signifier depends on a relationship wherein meaning is bequeathed and pointed to by the signifier. In other words, we recognize the indigenous forms and symbols in Pollock’s work as pointing outside of his work to a body of knowledge based on our experiences and previous encounters with indigenous art forms. Our previous encounters form a body of knowledge to which we apply meaning. Art points towards the indigenous forms, which in turn point back to our pre-ascribed meanings (Husserl 72). Once infused with powerful meanings, the sacred signs convey meaning in their reiterated and copied forms. Exact meanings and translations are lost but not the presence of meaning. *Mimêsis* then is implicated in meaning and knowledge through signification as a symbolic practice that points toward the thing signified.

Third, in terms of symbolic representation, it may not always point to or correspond to an object of fact. Rather, both representation and symbolic representation can signify that which is imaginary or conceptual. Whether from nature, an idea, or from the imagination, art brings something into view or into a state of presence through the action of pointing toward. Pollock represented the signs, symbols, figures, masks, birds, animals, and such in his
drawings and paintings, some of which are highly abstracted, such as the figures in his drip paintings. But Pollock also invented imaginary constructions of forms and figures, many of which we see in his drawings; nevertheless, they carry the function of symbolic representation and signification in their pointing and representing of that which is absent from our view, even that which is held in his mind. One of Pollock’s early paintings, *Flame*, 1938, gives us a symbolic representation of fire (Fig. 63).

![Figure 63](image)

While the representation does correspond to an empirical object, one of fire, it symbolizes not a specific fire, but the notion of fire as a primitive yet constant concept. Pollock’s use of contrast and the way he juxtaposes the bright reds, yellows, and whites within the dark browns and blacks, causes the eye to see the flames as pulsating through the interplay of the colors in their receding and advancing tendencies. The painting is symbolic of the concept of fire and all the meaning that may at any time be attached to the notion of fire, without necessarily referring to a specific fire per se. Not all works of mimetic art must correspond to
“specific, empirical, originals” to be considered mimetic (Halliwell, “Aesthetics” 16).

Whether pointing to an object of fact or its properties such as pulsating and flickering heat, or the representation of an imaginary idea or a concept, art is the manifestation of an effort to represent.

Symbolic representation in art functions much like symbolism in poetry. Even Plato, who questions the verity of art in its representation of truth and the Ideals, depends upon symbols in his allegories. For example, he speaks of the sun as a symbol of enlightenment in his Allegory of the Cave, and the River of Forgetting as death in the Myth of Er. Whether in art or the language of philosophy, images and words point to that which is absent symbolically and that which is pointed to can be an empirical object or one that is imagined. Philosophers like Plato become as “painters of mental images and interpreters of a cosmic work of art” (71). Philosophers, like artists, strive to paint a vivid image with words in order to present or embody the ideals conceived in and held in their minds. Whether in art or in text, artists and philosophers give form and utterance to that which is rational or imaginary, or otherwise held in their perception and thought. In this way, “philosophers are painters in another medium” (130). Whether as a concept or an image held in the mind, symbolic representation evokes and conveys these meanings to the viewer or hearer.

On this third point we might further distinguish the symbolic and its representation. For representation gives us something empirical or imaginary which can be given in representational form. But the symbolic can be that which represents something that cannot be represented outside of the use of a sign or symbol. In this regard, ancient theorists note that some things are known to be but yet are immaterial. As immaterial objects (asōmata), they cannot be represented visually because there is not a “perceptual likeness”, or
homoiotēs, from which such an image or eidōlon can be given (130). In this case, art must depend upon a symbol, one which corresponds through meaning but not necessarily through correspondence. This is the experimentation of the symbolist poets and artists of the late nineteenth century who sought to question meanings held in arbitrary signs. Symbols can be arbitrary in their correspondence because they depend upon a shared or collective meaning, and they describe concepts which otherwise cannot be represented as object-image correspondences (Duan 2). Ancient and Renaissance personifications, insignias, and emblem traditions function as symbols in this way as they carry meaning through often arbitrary imagery which is given and holds meaning. For example, Athena Nike in her personification as the winged goddess symbolizes victory. Not at any other time does Athena, the goddess of war and wisdom, represent or convey the meaning of victory, except in her winged form. The emblematic bees on the Barberini coat-of-arms represent the family’s wealth. But at other times, the bee might be a symbol of industry or of an agricultural product (honey). The symbol carries upon itself the meaning or the concept, though such is ascribed (rather than inherent to) the symbol. But the symbol (as in the example of a bee) is arbitrary in how it is applied or given meaning. Further meanings may multiply for any given symbol, but in any given use each symbolic representation takes the form of a sign or symbol in a singular rather than a collective fashion. An individual symbol constitutes a whole or unity within a singular sign. One symbol incarnates or makes visible the broader concept which may be otherwise hidden or undiscovered.

When modernist theories disparage imitation, they are condemning a long tradition of making visible the conceptual and the imaginary and proposing that art divorce itself from its signifying function. It leaves symbolic or conceptual iteration to the sole realm of
philosophy, removing art’s role in philosophical discourse. Abstract formalism creates a point of schism in art, a divide between the sensible and rational, or what is seen and what is thought, by attempting to divorce art from its own signifying role in mimēsis. American Primitivism illustrates how American artists, and particularly Jackson Pollock, found a solution to modern art’s dilemma. For in Pollock’s primitivist and later works, we clearly see a fundamental signifying rational structure that unites content and meaning by retaining art’s pointing function through naturalistic and symbolic or idealistic representation.

While symbolic representation can account for the hidden and visible symbols in Pollock’s works (for example, the hand prints we see beneath the dripped paint in Number 1A), symbolic representation can also account for the dripped paint as well (Fig. 42). For as in our definition of mimesis in Chapter Four, idealist art points to an ideal or concept outside of itself, and in this case, to Pollock’s performative techniques among other things. Despite its seemingly abstract qualities, the dripped paint points to that which we as viewers perceive in our minds; namely, the way the paint is applied. Our perception of the thing is inseparable from our view of the thing. But because we perceive Pollock’s sweeping dancelike motions through our perception, the applied paint is symbolical representation rather than a naturalistic one. We don’t see Pollock dancing, we see paint, but we perceive both. Thus, in its ontological presence, idealistic art can present a trace of something recognizable that relates to a concept or an ideal (or in this case an act), much like the way a symbol can represent the making of an oath or contract. In its autonomy and abstraction, the drip paintings can claim mimēsis as their ground because they lay claim to the ways symbols evoke underlying acts and ideals, such as in Pollock’s manner of painting or the more idealized structure of universal form.
Fourth, symbolic representation gives form to that which is not representable. The relationship between representation and the Ideal gives ground for idealistic representation. Idealist art, as we have seen in the works of Malevich or Kandinsky, for example, represents mimetically, through a notion of unknowability inherent to an understanding of the character of the metaphysical as being un-representable but having some underlying structure or thingness. Kant explores this in his discussion on the thing-in-itself as being that which cannot be perceived in space-time, or in the appearance of material things in space-time. The thing-in-itself can only be represented, it cannot be revealed. Kant explains that, “What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us” (Caygill 80, Kant A 42/ B, 59). Halliwell explains that the Pre-Socratic notion of *mimēsis* addresses this difficulty with representing the thing-in-itself, since as we have seen for ancient Greeks, the Divine resides in the concept of *mimeisthai* which “modifies mimesis and imitation to represent the difficulty of depicting the divine” (Halliwell, “Aesthetics” 274 n30). *Mimeisthai*, more specifically, is the term that indicates that something is an expression or signification of the cosmos. *Mimeisthai* signifies that which mimetically represents the cosmos in terms of a code or symbol rather than a direct representation. This form of *mimēsis* depends upon an “older Pythagorean-cum Platonic tradition of metaphysical *mimēsis*” that makes visible the relationship between the cosmos as an overarching structure that requires signification or a code-based idealism (274 n30). In other words, idealism represents order and structure, the formal and material concerns of the cosmos, but not the cosmos itself. Idealist art mimetically reproduces the notion of order and structure, and thereby re-signifies the notion of an ordered cosmos. This is the nature of idealism, which gives a concept material form by making some thing or concept intelligible.
Idealist art becomes a symbolic language or a code that is imbued with meaning; it represents order and structure, the formal and material concerns of the cosmos, but not the cosmos itself. Further, as we have noted in Chapter Four, because some things are known to exist but are more conceptual and immaterial (asōmata), having no known material equivalent or homoiotēs or image eidōlon to imitate, the notion of mimeisthai comes into play to represent that which is un-representable (Halliwell 130). Mimeisthai accounts for the representation of what is known to exist outside of material form. In this way mimeisthai is implicated in the representation of knowledge, giving knowledge of a thing material form, despite the fact that it is given outside of direct imitation.

Gadamer clarifies this point by invoking Pre-Socratic ideas regarding mimeisthai. He explains that Pythagoras taught that all things are imitations of the universe itself. Pythagoras specifically cites tonal harmonies and numerical ratios and subscribed such harmonies to all phenomenological or material things. The miracle of the kosmos is that all things seek pure harmonious relationships in accordance to other things (Gadamer 101). So while the Divine or Ideal may not be expressible in representation (mimeisthai), the order of the Divine may be expressed through the representation of any number of its forms. Thus, it is in the expression or representation of order that mimeisthai gives representation, for mimeisthai “reveals the miracle of the order of the kosmos” (101). This is not to say any form or object reveals the Divine, but that any object that reveals Ideal order reveals the Divine. As Gadamer explains, “Every work of art still resembles a thing as it once was insofar as its existence illuminates and testifies to order as a whole. Perhaps this order is not one that we can harmonize with our own conceptions of order, but that which once united the familiar things of a familiar world. Nevertheless, there is in every work of art an ever new and
powerful testimony to a spiritual energy that generates order” (103). Further, Gadamer explains that any work of art wherein one encounters “a spiritual and ordering energy” is a mimetic work of art that evokes the Ideal. Idealistic representation even is seemingly abstract appearances, such as in all of Pollock’s drip paintings, lays claim to this form of un-representable representation.

Meaning is given to idealistic representation, even in its abstract forms in the way that symbols and emblems become imbued with meaning. As Mondrian explains, “Art is in essence universal” (Mondrian, “Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art” 370). Mondrian discusses this as the “relation” between art and the “universal” and explains that “gradually art is purifying its plastic means and thus bringing out the relationships between them” (370). It is through the form of art that universal meaning is given. Idealist art evidences transcendence because it points (as in Platonic and Neoplatonic idealism) to that which is a higher Ideal or a metaphysical truth. Whether in the works of the early modern idealists such as Kandinsky or Malevich, or in the drip paintings of Pollock, abstract idealism reveals the ordering structure of the miraculous cosmos. To say that modernism evokes Platonic thought is to say that it emphasizes pure form or structure and a movement or pointing to the ideal. What cannot be represented directly through mimēsis is given through mimeisthai, the representation of the un-representable by representing what can be seen as properties of the said un-representable or thing-in-itself.

Whether in idealist or spacial terms, painting or language or music can, by the very notion of signification, be applicable to both. Art can act as a signifier of idealist concepts as well as natural forms. For example, we see an inward pointing in the articulation of formalist art in European Primitivism or Cubism, which presents artistic form; however, it does not
directly point outwards to any ideal structure. Abstract formalism does not entice the viewer to sympathize psychologically with what is abstractly represented nor does it evoke the un-representable. Thus, formalism deconstructs into an art of order that no longer resembles the order of nature or the cosmos, or the human experience; it severs art from its broader signifying functions. However, Pollock’s work subscribes to a definition of idealism in its adherence to evoking absolute truth through structure and form while confirming the un-representability of it. Pollock’s drip paintings, and especially the dripped paint portions of his drip paintings, attest to such an order and idealist structure without reference to objects from the natural world. We know this by the way in which Pollock’s dripped paint points, measures, and defines the surface of the canvas, with the layered paint pulsating through the interplay of receding and advancing color. Combined with the hidden figures within, Pollock’s drip paintings also attest to the mimetic nature of art as that which can represent both the ideal and the natural worlds in ways in which consciousness perceives them. We have seen how mimēsis can answer both to the representation of nature and Platonic and Neoplatonic idealism as mimeisthai. The symbolic modes of mimēsis encompass symbols, (with attendant emblems and personifications), metaphors, allegories, and through the concept of mimeisthai, the notion of structure and its associations with the order of the cosmos. Together in Pollock’s work, we see both mimēsis and mimeisthai at work in his hidden and overt representations and in his idealist dripped paint technique.

In sum, symbolic representation derives in part from sight and perception because the mind can perceive more than the eyes see. In this way, symbols can convey meaning in the perception even when the representation does not have likeness in the empirical world. Second, symbols function through the pointing action of art, but directing the mind’s
attention to that which the symbol represents or signifies. Because of the pointing action, symbols can stand in for or signify a person, event, object or token, or even a treaty or covenant. In this function, symbols stand in and point to something beyond as a memento of that something. In this capacity, symbols carry the pointing toward function, taking the viewer out of the picture field into perception and knowledge of the thing symbolized.

Symbols are used to convey the imaginary and concepts in both art and poetry. In the case of the imaginary, symbols appropriate a corresponding image that gives form to that which is held in the imagination. Third, in terms of the conceptual, a symbol may be arbitrary, and in this case it is the meaning conveyed that holds the symbol to the concept. But the sign with its attendant signification allows for things to be represented which have no direct correspondence in nature. As signs, symbols, insignia, emblems, personifications, and such, the symbol brings to mind a concept that might otherwise have no form. The correspondence between the emblem and an object in nature may be arbitrary to the meaning which is given to the emblem. For example, Athena’s wings might have been used to represent embracing love, but ancient Greek artists and poets agreed that her wings should signify the notion of victory. Pollock’s representational and symbolic qualities maintain this fundamental approach to the distinction between representation and the symbolic functions of mimēsis wherein meaning is understood through correspondences to empirical objects, or conceptually understood in the mind and imagination, or through that which is evoked by symbols and symbolic representation in their pointing action. This pointing can be carried out in terms of signs, insignia, emblems and personifications. Fourth, symbolic or idealist representation evokes that which is un-representable such as meanings, concepts and ideas.
which have no empirical form. Such ideas often allude to metaphysical presence or structure and are given form through mimeisthai in art.

Pollock’s paintings reinstitute pre and post-Socratic definitions of art as mimetic that draws upon the both the correspondences between the empirical world and the ideal (Halliwell, “Aesthetics” 15). Pollock’s work reinstitutes the relationship between art as signifier and the broader world of nature and ideas as the signified, thus declaring that art is a symbolic structure. Whether in imitation of forms in nature, or ideals and concepts held in the mind, or in representing something which has no equivalent found in nature, mimēsis points and directs the mind to its objects by playing upon the ways in which the mind perceives in empirical and ideal ways and in the way that art conveys meaning.

Mimēsis as Metaphor

In addition to symbolic representation and meaning, art also conveys through metaphor in a variety of ways. First, art transcends media specificity because it can designate through a variety of forms and materials. 53 Secondly, art symbolizes through designating and naming. Third, art participates in substitution, possessing fluid and mutable qualities. Whether in imitation or symbolic representation, mimēsis is significant in that it makes anew – it serves as a copy of the thing in a new form or material. It is not an exact copy but rather a form by which a thing is expressed or re-presented. The re-presentation can take any form. The forms of representation, symbolic or otherwise, constitute a metaphor or a type of image or figure of speech in which meaning is applied. This is like symbolic representation in the way a metaphor carries meaning upon itself. Symbolic representation has a fixed notion attached to it, whereas metaphor has a more fluid function which can still be accounted for
by the concept of *mimēsis*. In art, and particularly Pollock’s work, the metaphorical nature of art witnesses to its several aspects. First, all mimetic arts transcend specific material form; second, the metaphor is a naming process; and third, metaphor and art are interchangeable.

Our first lessons on the metaphorical nature of the arts in terms of media specificity or material form come from Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Aristotle speaks of the universal function and distribution of *mimēsis* in painting, poetry, and music, all of which are mimetic arts that represent or signify an idea or the character of a thing in a variety of media. He explains, “Some people use the medium of colour and shape to produce imitations of various objects by making visual images (some through art, some through practice), others do this by means of the voice” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 3). Elsewhere he also includes dance and language (verse and prose) to his list of *mimetic* arts. He does not tell us that only certain myths can be represented by certain media. Rather, all the arts are mimetic and thus the myth itself is the universal thing which finds material specificity only in *mimēsis* – its representation. Art as imitation or illustration (whether symbolic or otherwise) gives concepts, ideas, or myths some material form. But any concept or representation can be given in multiple forms, not just philosophical descriptions or images in paintings. Through the arts, concepts are able to transcend media specificity.

Any number of Pollock’s drawings illustrate the functions of metaphor in art. One of the simplest examples of media interchangeability is his untitled drawing which I will refer to as *Adam* ca. late 1937–39. The drawing simply illustrates this definition of *mimēsis* as metaphor by the way the metaphor works in a multiplicity of media (Fig. 64).
The work shows Pollock’s finesse with line drawing and inscribing volumes. In the drawing of Adam’s torso, which we recognize as a copy or re-presentation of Michelangelo’s *Adam* from the Sistine Chapel, c. 1511–1512, Pollock captures Michelangelo’s sensuous volumes of musculature as well as Adam’s apparent languid disposition. Michelangelo’s *Adam* is duplicated on the paper as a reference to the notion of origins, revealing in some visual form the underlying principle of the origins of material form. This is what Aristotle might reference as the underlying essence governing the material manifestation of the thing, or what Plato might abstractly consider the soul of the thing, as discussed in his *Phaedo*. Pollock also conveys metaphor as a mode of *mimēsis* by drawing an ideographic language based on signs or symbols that represent an idea or convey a concept. The petroglyphic text as a symbol of original language provides the textual equivalence of the notion suggested by the Adam figure. It evokes and represents the notion of the origins of writing. Because...
Pollock juxtaposes the ideogram with the image, we see that the drawing conveys a message about origins, archetypes, and ancient mythologies, and demonstrates how the singular idea of origin is represented through both graphic and visual means of representation. The essence of the drawing conveys representation of a concept, wherein the relationship between visual and narrative imagery equally convey the signified so as to suggest mankind and his sojourn, as in ‘we all like Adam’, or a type of ‘universal we’ in terms of origins and archetypes. He does not expressly say one is the other but conveys the possibility that one form is like the other, thereby giving us a new understanding of both ideas singly and in their relation to each other according to their position in comparison or juxtaposition in two media, drawing and text (Ricoeur, “Rule” 28).

Pollock imitates indigenous petroglyphs and juxtaposes these with a copy of Michelangelo’s *Adam* to universalize a broader content, an ideal or truth, by giving it a transcultural and trans-historical setting. Rather than focusing on the forms of indigenous American art, Pollock suggests a universal truth that supersedes any given historical or cultural context. More broadly, the image conforms to Aristotle’s claim that *mimēsis* transcends media specificity. The relations between two forms of *mimēsis* as respective media underscore the relationship between the signifier (as word and image) and the signified. *Mimēsis* then, is not media specific, but rather it is the metaphorical conveyance or representation that transcends word, music, dance, or image because it can be given form in any of those media.

Again, we can look at Pollock’s drip paintings and see the metaphor of hiding and concealing, hiding naturalistic figures and symbols beneath paint that conceals them. The metaphor of concealing is carried out by medium or paint, and the action of applying the
paint, or the dance that conceals. Rather than juxtaposing text and image, it is in paint and
dance that the metaphor of concealing is carried forth. The philosopher Gotthold Ephraim
Lessing, who was influential in Greenberg’s understanding of the formal properties of art,
claims that *mimēsis* interferes with the imagination, and that rather than painting what is,
artists should only paint that which is beautiful. When too much is shown in the arts, little is
left for the imagination to contribute: “Since the artist can use but a single moment of ever-
changing nature, and the painter must further confine his study of this one moment to a single
point of view” (Lessing 8). One of his concerns is that the arts ought to focus on their
inherent media specificity, for he believes there is a limit to what each media can accomplish.
He denies the metaphorical and symbolic functions of art, saying that, “Homer treats of two
different classes of beings and actions,—the visible and the invisible. This distinction cannot
be made on canvas, where everything is visible, and visible in precisely the same way” (77).
Lessing believes that only certain ideas can be represented in painting, and it is this notion of
what painting cannot do that Greenberg held on to. But Pollock rejects the idea of media
specificity; Pollock reasserts the mimetic quality of all arts. Each art is unlimited by its
expressive materials and properties and each media can interchangeably express all the
needful “visible and the invisible” concepts and things alike.

In any metaphor, one can see “two things in one” just as in Pollock’s drawing we see
origins in two forms (Ricoeur, “Rule” 26). This helps us to see that *mimēsis* is more than
representation. It functions as a metaphor that can take many forms, in this case, ideogram
and image. When Pollock drafted his sketch, he gave us his understanding of the
metaphorical nature of art as being an interrelationship between hieroglyphic text and image.
The sketch and his paintings illustrate the way in which *mimēsis* functions as a means by
which any idea can be given aesthetic form, whether in word, image, tune, dance, or other medium. Barnett Newman also reiterates this relationship when he writes that an ideograph (or signifier) is “a character, symbol, or figure which suggests the idea without expressing its name” and that the ideograph represents an idea through “symbols, figures, or hieroglyphics” without naming the object in direct speech (“Ideographic” 565). The idea is not so media specific that it cannot transcend into new forms. The metaphor is fluid rather than meaning specific. Newman makes it clear in his essay “The Ideographic Picture” that American artists were returning to mimêsis as a form of signification which also re-presented American Indian symbols and themes in terms of “ideographs”. Their modes and techniques clearly set them apart from the abstraction of Picasso’s Primitivism and Cubism and Surrealist autonomism. When Newman explains that “here is a group of artists who are not abstract painters, although [they are] working in what is known as the abstract style” he is asserting that the American artists are transcending media specificity to show us the metaphorical nature of art (566).

We have already suggested that Pollock’s work combines symbolic text in the form of ancient American Indian symbols, swastikas, cross-hatching lines, arrows, and markings similar to those inscribed on ancient rocks with figures – either as stick figures or more fully developed representations, as in his drawing of Adam’s torso. The progression of Pollock’s work, rather than becoming formal abstractions, demonstrates a continued commitment to representation. Through the reiteration of indigenous themes and symbols, or what Newman calls “ideographs”, Pollock was applying mimêsis as symbolic representation, taking and re-presenting the indigenous forms as metaphorical in the way such representations function interchangeably among image and text, or image and act.
Metaphor is more than that which is interchangeable within diverse media however. *Mimēsis* as metaphor is also implicated in the function of naming. For the philosophers Ricoeur and Aristotle both, *mimēsis* is a designating metaphor. Ricoeur explains that the “metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else, the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy” (Ricoeur, “Rule” 14; Aristotle, “Poetics” 1457 b 6–9).

Whether we see a visual symbol or a petroglyphic text, both variations function in a type of designating purpose. Aristotle explains metaphor in terms of lexis – language or modes of speech in his discussion on words and poetry. Whether the lexicon is of music, painting, or language, the comparison and substitution of elements is interchangeable in *mimēsis* by way of *onoma* or the noun. The noun names or designates, or rather describes a given object or term, not in its inner and outer details but in its ontological presence. To name is to give designation, to re-present. The material of the representation of the object is irrelevant, for the re-presentation in any form that names or designates it can be situated within any media. In art, re-presentation is a form of signification akin to naming. By pointing toward, art designates or names something. The conveyance of metaphor depends less on the distance from one thing to another than on direct and meaningful modes of representation (Ricoeur, “Rule” 30). So, within naming, the metaphor accommodates the model of the parts to whole, the relationships between broader to more specific terms (genus to species), and between particulars (species to species).

In Pollock’s drawing, he shows that both the text and the illustration name or designate that which it is. Adam is designated and petroglyphic type writing is likewise designated by virtue of its representation. Pollock’s drip paintings also show that the metaphor can be
distributed among two different media, act and image, both of which convey metaphorical meanings by designating or naming the attributes of hidden and hiding, concealed and concealing. In showing art to be metaphorical through designating and representing, Pollock shows art to be a narrative media which names and designates, thereby transgressing modern art’s claim to pure form devoid of narrative content. Newman, Pollock, and their colleagues returned the role of metaphor to *mimêsis* in terms of the many ways in which symbols, through imitation and representation, can take differing forms and be expressed in differing media, while expressing, designating, and naming. Aristotle stresses this aspect of art as being always a mimetic signifier. He writes that “an utterance is a composite significant vocalization, part or parts of which are significant in their own right. Not every utterance is composed of a verb and a noun; it is possible for an utterance to contain no verb. But it will always contain a part which a part which signifies something (e.g. ‘Cleon’ in ‘Cleon walks’)” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 37a, 33). *Mimêsis*, therefore is much more than imitation. As metaphor, *mimêsis* is also symbolic, media diverse, and designating or naming.

Third, the metaphor can also serve as a substitution. We’ve seen that Newman interpreted American art as being based on a type of hieroglyphic or sign system, which is to say that the sign is media diverse and it designates. *Mimêsis* is also given in terms of metaphor or substitution, which is a primary issue pertinent to our understanding of the function of mimetic arts. Art participates in pointing and ascribing meaning in fluid and mutable ways. Graphic and image are interchangeable. Pollock’s many drawings and paintings highlight this association between art and narrative, image and text, or painting and dancing, calling into question divisions between art media while asserting the way *mimêsis* functions in substitution as a metaphor of sorts. Pictographic figures arranged procession-like present
narratives, myths, and events to the mind, such that form recedes before mythologies. The mythic representation is addressed through meaning in that the relation of the myth to its signification is undisclosed, but the relationship between the signified and the signifier remains and thus witnesses to the idea of meaning through metaphor as transferable conveyance (Barthes 687-693).

Perhaps we might ask why is interchangeability or substitution important to our understanding of the return of mimēsis to art in Pollock’s works? In the Poetics Aristotle uses the term phora, which is to mean movement or a change of location. The term “metaphor” is a borrowed term, wherein that which is borrowed stands in for that which has become absent, or unillustrated (Ricoeur, “Between” 18). Ricoeur explores this same understanding of Aristotle’s notion of mimēsis as representation in terms of the concept of metaphor. For Ricoeur, Aristotle’s mimēsis is a borrowing or a substitution from one likeness or meaning to represent another, and this borrowing or substitution occurs as a relocation of meaning from one thing to another (Ricoeur, “Rule” 18, 20). The metaphor is still a representation of some type, whether it is borrowed or is a substitution, and it conveys meaning from one medium and form to another. This interchangeability of the signifier is easily identified in Pollock’s sketches (for example, in the sketch called Frieze discussed previously in Chapter Three (Fig. 44)). The hieroglyphic text takes the form of ancient American Indian symbols, swastikas, cross-hatching lines, arrows, and markings similar to those inscribed on ancient rocks and reiterated in several other drawings. But the signifier can just as easily be the paint or performance of painting, for the act of painting conceals the figure and the paint itself also conceals metaphorically, because both interchangeably conceal hidden figures. Any one of these types of signification can substitute for another. As in Newman’s interpretation, the
idea is given in image and hieroglyph or sign, indicating how all sign systems are mimetic, but because meaning is fluid rather than fixed, the symbols are interchangeable and can be substituted, and thus are metaphorical.

Another case in point is when Pollock painted *Mural* for Peggy Guggenheim in 1943. He gave us his understanding of the interrelationship between media by evoking symbolic animals of the ancient West, horses and cattle while showing them in the act of an iconic stampede. It is not that the animals appear to be in the act of stampede, but that Pollock gave the action or imitation of stampede new visual form as interchangeably as if actual animals were in flight through the canvas or on a film (Fig. 65). Or as Pollock describes the painting, It's “a stampede... [of] every animal in the American West, cows and horses and antelopes and buffaloes. Everything is charging across [the] surface” (qtd. “Mural”).

![Fig. 65 Jackson Pollock, Mural, 1943, Oil and casein on canvas, 95 5/8 x 237 3/4 in. Gift of Peggy Guggenheim, University of Iowa Museum of Art.](image)

The painting illustrates the way in which *mimēsis* functions as a means by which any idea can be given aesthetic form, whether in word, image, tune, dance, or other medium. But just
as meaning can be given in differing media, the signs and symbols to which meaning is attributed to are also interchangeable, such that “flight,” “stampede,” “charging” all allude to fluid meanings that can stand in for each other. Meaning in art by way of symbolic representation constitutes the metaphor, which is fluid, changeable, and expressed as multimedia. Unlike emblematic or symbolic representation, which is singular and fixed in meaning, metaphorical representation is diverse, plural, and interchangeable.

Like the multiplicity of metaphorical media in Pollock’s paintings, Pollock imitates indigenous forms and juxtaposes these in ways that universalize them, giving them a broader content, an ideal or truth within a transcultural and trans-historical setting. Rather than focusing on exact copies of the forms of indigenous American art, Pollock repositions these forms as pertaining to a universal truth that supersedes any given historical or cultural context. More broadly, the paintings conform to Aristotle’s claim that mimēsis transcends media specificity. The relation between two forms of mimēsis as respective naming signs underscores the relationship between the signifier (as word and image) and the signified. Mimēsis then, is not media specific, but rather is conveyed or represented equally in word, text, music, dance, act, or image. Further, because meaning in the metaphor is fluid, there is a substitutional value in art as metaphor.

In Pollock’s drawings, primitivist paintings, and drip paintings, meaning is conveyed through two modes of mimetic representation; symbolic and metaphorical. In Pollock’s paintings and drawings, he shows that the metaphor can be distributed among different media, designating and naming objects and concepts, and is given with substituting to its meaning. In so doing, Pollock transgressed modern art’s claim to pure form devoid of narrative by naming and designating. In art, the idea is immanent to its form. But the concept
or idea can transcend media specificity. It can be given through the naming and designation function in any media. It is also interchangeable with other modes of representation. One artistic mode and meaning can stand in as a substitution for any other type of representation. The act of painting can be substituted for text or a dance, and painting can be a concealing gesture.

*Mimēsis and Allegory*

American artists gave new and significant content to art through representation of existing and new primitivist subjects while exploring these themes within matters of signification, symbol and metaphor. But they also present new content through mimēsis as allegory. *Mimēsis* as allegory can be understood in three primary ways. First, the allegory is that which re-presents the mythic and secondly, the allegorical doubles that which is re-presented. Third, the allegorical is that which multiplies and reinterprets in a variety of forms and modes. Through appropriation, Pollock looked to indigenous American art and re-presented those forms in such a way as to convey, not the outer abstract forms of indigenous as symbols and motifs, or what Newman called “non-objective pattern” but direct allegories drawn from American Indian myths (Newman, “Ideographic” 566).

Pollock especially developed a means by which he created allegorical paintings based on American Indian symbols. Both Pollock’s *The Magic Mirror*, 1941, and *Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*, 1943 have alternately been interpreted as being based on Picasso’s *Girl Before a Mirror*, 1929 in art history literature (Landau 69) (Fig. 66, 67, 68).
But in *The Magic Mirror* we see Navajo directional energy lines (center left), and an abstracted Iroquois feathered masked figure taking up most of the picture plane. As the viewer looks metaphorically into the mirror or the painting, one sees a reflecting image looking back at the viewer. Centrally placed is a figure in an Iroquois mask, the face slightly to the right and the arm and bent leg below and to the left in the painting. Above center at the top of the painting, the Iroquois mask is reiterated, emphasized and given in bolder colors to emphasize the nature of the painting in terms of masking and revealing. In the top right we see another mask in frontal view, as if hung on the wall or reflecting back from a mirror.
Other figures are suggested such as the vague outline of a female figure to the left as if in the arm of the main figure, and another figure in a niche at the bottom right of the painting. These duplications of figures, as in a palimpsest, evoke theatrical events multiplied over many eons.

Likewise, an allegory is before us in the painting *Moon-Woman*. Rather than a girl standing before a mirror, we see the Woman on the left of the painting formed in the shape of an adopted embryonic Haida motif to emphasize birth and creation.

![Image of Jackson Pollock's *Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*](image)

**Figure 67** Jackson Pollock, *Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*, 1932, MoMA, New York

She has a train of energy in the form of symbolic Navajo stars that iterate her divine role. Pollock would have seen this motif at the MoMA’s “Indian Art of the United States” exhibit. Some erroneously see the woman as being on the right of the painting wearing an elaborate headdress. The painting has been interpreted as being based on “precedents in certain other
portrait compositions by the Catalan Surrealist [Picasso]” (117). But upon closer inspection we see that it is a chieftain’s feathered headdress worn by a running man who looks behind himself at the Woman to the left. It is likely that the Man is an adaptation of Umberto Boccioni’s *Futurist Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, a reference emphasizing velocity that has been entirely overlooked (Fig. 69). With the Woman on the left and Running Man on our right, we see the allegory *In Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*. Pollock interprets a Navajo myth wherein the First Woman creates the moon and sun by cutting out two circles, having them placed in the sky to provide warmth and light. In the painting the Woman on the left yields a sharp knife prominently placed in the center top of the painting.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 68* Pablo Picasso, *Girl Before a Mirror*, 1932, MoMA, New York

The discs which she has just cut are placed in the exact center of the painting. On the right, First Man has brought the discs to the top of a mountain and has hurled them into the sky, transforming them into the Sun and Moon. As he begins his swift descent homeward, the Man turns back to look at the First Woman. Pollock focuses the action on the moment just
before the discs separate and become heavenly lights. As with many of Pollock’s paintings, the interpretation of *The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle* can be re-analyzed to discover hidden symbols and allegorical references to American Indian arts and themes. As mentioned, some

Figure 69 Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913, Bronze, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

look to Picasso’s *Girl Before a Mirror* (and Joan Miro’s *Person Throwing a Stone Bird*) as main influential sources for Pollock. For some, the title is rather ambiguous but within the context of an allegory the interpretation is rather clear. More than reiterating and altering indigenous symbols, Pollock envisioned an ancient myth in terms of momentum and birth rewritten in shades of red, white, and blue. Rather than progressing towards a modernist aesthetic of pure from, Pollock reversed the modernist trend that eschews allegory and representation. He showed, through the repetition of an idea or myth, that art is mimetic through allegories.
Second, *Mimēsis* as allegory can be understood as that which duplicates another thing or idea. In essence, many of Pollock’s paintings (including his drip paintings) are allegorical in nature in that they duplicate in form some other thing, and it is these duplications that define Pollock as a representational and mimetic painter. Craig Owens in “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism” defines the allegorical as that which is a repetition. Whether in attitude, technique, procedure, or perception, the allegorical is the repetition or reiteration from a primary instance into a related or different form. In Pollock’s reiteration, the Woman creates the Moon in both figure and text. The figures symbolically act out the myth and the text labels the myth. Image and text reiterate and redefine the mythic Indian allegory in new ways. In this way the title is not read “Moon-Woman” in identifying the figure, but rather “Moon, (hyphen) Woman Cuts the Circle”. The emphasis is on the action of the text, “cutting the circle”. So Moon is the subject, which is created by the Woman. In re-conveying the myth of the Moon, Pollock acted on what Owens terms a “fundamental impulse” to redeem allegory from a remote past (Owens 1052). Whether in terms of reiteration, allegory, or representation, the fundamental impulse is one of *mimēsis*. In fact, this is Owens’ first point, that the essential quality of allegory is its ability to recover that which might otherwise disappear from view, such as indigenous art forms for example. As Owens explains,

> Allegory first emerged in response to a similar sense of estrangement from tradition; throughout its history it has functioned in the gap between a present and a past which, without allegorical reinterpretation, might have remained foreclosed. A conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present - these are its two most fundamental impulses. (1052)
For Owens, the allegorical impulse is that which recovers and revalues that which would otherwise fall into oblivion in the wake of new modes of representation. This recovering is not the event of archiving a historical mode but of recuperating and renewing it by making it anew. The re-presentation of the mythic is given new allegorical meanings which revivify the mythic in the form of new presentations. Secondly, an allegory is created in the act of doubling or reiterating and such doubling gives new meanings and interpretations.

A close look at Pollock’s *Full Fathom Five* reveals the depth of Pollock’s allegorical impulse as a recovery, reiteration, and doubling (Fig. 70). One of Pollock’s first all over drip paintings, *Full Fathom 5* is a flurry of encrusted paint applied in layers of poured, dripped and spotted paint in black, white, sea green, and shades of rust and ochre colors, beneath of which lies a figure, hidden and buried underneath encrusted paint. As mentioned earlier, we recall that while being restored by MoMA sometime before 1998, x-ray analysis revealed a hidden figure of a man lying on his back with his left arm raised, hidden and buried within the depths of a mythic sea (Adams, “Tom” 319-321). There is no reason to suggest an arbitrary placement and covering of the figure, for the figure is part of a new mode of representational allegory that still retains close associations between Navajo ritual and ritual art.
In Navajo rituals, sand paintings are made by the shaman and his assistants. Whether for fertility, healing, to bring peace of mind or banish evil spirits, the paintings are temporary tools for harnessing and distributing psychic forces of shamanic power. Prior to the ritual, sand painters carefully ‘paint’ and create sacred symbols on a prepared ground with colored sand. During the Navajo ritual clients sit or lie upon the sand paintings. The shaman takes the colored sand from off of the symbols in the painting and pours this sand on his clients for healing. This act disturbs, distorts and displaces the original forms and symbols. After the colored sand is re-distributed, any remainder of the paintings’ edges and symbols are then
destroyed as the shaman circulates about the painting, smudging, spreading, and blurring out figures and symbols, ritually obliterating them with a feather-tipped stick as he moves about the painting. In a type of cleansing dance, the shaman performs a covering and veiling of magic power, pouring sand on the client, covering him/her all while obliterating the painting. In the case of animal fertility sand paintings, the paintings are made just outside of the herd’s pens. After the paintings are complete, the herds, such as sheep, are allowed to run over and spread the colored sand of a painting throughout the fields. This obliteration of the painting and the spreading of the sands insure the fertility of the flock. In other fertility paintings, the symbols are disrupted as the shaman casts the sand from the painting into the fields. The power of ritual sand paintings lies in the creation of sacred symbols and the distribution and spreading of the colored sand. Power is transferred from image to recipient.

In *Full Fathom Five* (and his other drip paintings, including *Number 1A*, his first drip painting), Pollock deliberately mixed sand in enamel paint, creating paint with a heavy viscosity in order to do his own version of sand-painting. Like Navajo sand painters, he also changed the orientation of the canvas, from the vertical easel to the horizontal ground. Without brush, Pollock used a shamanic-like stick, pouring, dripping, spotting and splattering his sand-paint, carefully moving around the canvas to cover up the symbolic figures beneath. Like the shaman, Pollock was not creating but destroying art. *Full Fathom Five* combines symbolic representation in the form of the hidden figure, and allegorical tendencies in the forms of reinterpreting and reiterating the horizontality of sand paintings, the media of sand, glass, and bits of string, cigarette butts, and other life objects in the paint. Furthering the allegory, Pollock’s application of paint with a stick continues to reiterate the ritual of sand painting and the shaman’s obliteration of the sand paintings with his shaman stick. In *Full
*Fathom Five* the figure outlined on the canvas is covered up, not by paint splotches, drips and splatters, but rather by Pollock’s dance as he moves about the canvas performing the allegory. Rather than executing a direct ritual or performing a ritual shamanic healing dance as some suggest, Pollock’s drip paintings function as reiterations or duplications, which is to say he creates allegories of the construction and destruction of American Navajo sand paintings.⁵⁵ Drip paintings are allegorical, reiterations and reinterpretations of an ancient form of ritual performance art, but in their re-presentation, Pollock gives them new forms and meanings. In 1943, Graham, writing for Paalen’s *DYN* said, “Art can reunite us with our prehistoric past and thus only certain carved and painted images enable us to grasp the memories of *unfathomable* [italics mine] ages.” He declared that “Perhaps Pollock sought to unite the “memories of unfathomable ages” with a “consciousness of modern art” in his *Full Fathom Five* by hiding and covering over a figure beneath a tracery of dripping sand paint (qtd. Rushing, “Ritual” 274).

Drip paintings are thus allegories that recuperate indigenous modes of sand paintings in both materials and technique. The paintings enable one to view indigenous sand paintings because of the way mimetic images point to this, and in the same way that, as Northrop Frye says, “one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be” (qtd. Owens 1053). In this mode of viewing the painting is a type of palimpsest. For if in Pousette-Dart’s *Palimpsest*, we see a “paradigm for the allegorical work” that revalues indigenous rock art, then so too are Pollock’s *Full Fathom* and other drip paintings, allegorical images that allegorize the act and materials of indigenous sand painting (qtd. Owens 1053). Pollock’s drip paintings are likewise types of palimpsests.
Third, the allegorical is that which appropriates by way of confiscation. The artist takes some culturally pertinent thing and reiterates it in a way that does not necessarily restore its original meanings, but rather adds new meanings to it. As Owens explains, “allegory is not hermeneutics” (1054). The artist does not excavate meaning but repurposes modes and imagery in ways that revalues and imbues fresh meanings. Owens claims that Sherry Levin, Troy Brauntuch, Robert Longo, and others are the first artists to create works of art based on the works of earlier artists. But we can see that Pollock and the American primitivist artists did so when they aestheticized indigenous art forms as early as the 1930s.

To understand the finer points of allegory and its importance for Pollock, particularly in his drip paintings, it is helpful to compare allegorical with symbolic modes of representation. Walter Benjamin explains the differences between the symbolic and the allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, the first serious study of allegory in the modern era. Early theorists considered an allegory to be the development of a myth. Homer’s legends of the universe and the divine were believed to have been derived from Nestorian beliefs or from the orphic doctrines from ancient Egypt (as the Greek geographer Strabo believed) (Benjamin, “Origin” 165). In this way the Homeric tales work backwards in order to move the ancient truths forward into present myths. If it is as Owens describes, allegory is the recuperation of an older tradition that would otherwise be relegated to a distant and forgotten past unless it is put to new purposes (Owens 1054). But the distinction here is that the recuperation of ancient rituals and myths are played out in new forms.

Traditional definitions distinguish between symbolic and allegorical modes of art as being that which incarnates the idea itself in the symbolic or singular mode, while the allegorical mode signifies a much broader concept, such that the idea and the concept stand
in for the dialectic of the particular and the universal. But it is not just that one is unlike the other, in an opposition, but rather one is as a progression built upon the other. As Heidegger explains,

The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than what the mere thing itself is, *allo agoreuei*. The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made. To bring together is, in Greek, *symballein*. The work is a symbol.

Allegory and symbol provide the conceptual frame within whose channel of vision the artwork has long been characterized. But this one element in a work that manifests another, this one element that joins with another, is the thingly feature in the artwork. It seems almost as though the thingly element in the artwork is like the substructure into and upon which the other, proper element is built. ("Origin" 146)

The symbol brings meaning to form, and the allegory reiterates and reveals that action. Together symbol and allegory create a structure upon which meaning is communicated through the forms of the work of art.

Walter Benjamin explains further this relationship between symbol and allegory, “the distinction between the two modes (symbolism-allegory) is therefore to be sought in the momentariness which allegory lacks”. In the symbol there is a “momentary totality” and in allegory there is a “progression in a series of moments” (Benjamin, “Origin” 165). Thus, the symbolic looks to the eternal unchanging idea in that it describes a singular meaning,
whereas the allegorical embraces the temporal with its multitude of fluid interchangeable meanings. Symbols retain an overarching singular concept while allegories see the expression of the symbolic within a field of variety and multiplicity. The symbolic signifies the ideal and the allegorical signifies the natural and thus multiplies in meanings and purposes. Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* provides a template for how the allegorical can point to the ideal, as the onlooker of shadows comes to leave the cave to ponder the bright sunlight, the symbol of enlightenment. It is the allegory that points to the myth while the symbol embraces its truth or meaning, which is another way of saying that Pollock’s drip paintings are as mythic or allegorical as Dürer’s *Triumphal Cart of the Emperor Maximilian* (Fig. 71).

![Figure 71, Albrecht Dürer, Triumphal Cart of the Emperor Maximilian, wood cut, 54 metres, 1512-15](image)

The mythic is not to be confused with the symbolic, for the symbolic represents one thing or a unified thing which is ideal. But the allegorical is mythic in that it contains within it the narrative of past, present, and future enactments, as in a palimpsest. For example, we might look at the emblem of the Sun King at Versaille (Fig. 72) as symbolic of the King’s power as an ideal, while the *Triumphal Entry* is the articulation or expression of Maximillian’s power as the allegory of myth played out in time and space. Benjamin elaborates on the dual types of representation, “We can be perfectly satisfied with the explanation that takes the one as a sign for ideas, which is self-contained, concentrated, and which steadfastly remains itself,
while recognizing the other as a successively progressing, dramatically mobile, dynamic representation of ideas which has acquired the very fluidity of time (Fig. 72).

Figure 72 Motif of the Sun King Louis XIV (the sun was associated with Apollo), Palace at Versailles, France

They stand in relation to each other as does “the silent, great and mighty natural world of mountains and plants to the living progression of human history” (165). The symbolic is representative of the singular transcendental ideal, and the allegorical presents us with the ideal reinterpreted in a variety of terms along the line of life processes and potentialities. The symbolic is upwardly linear, hierarchical, ever looking ascendant, while the other, allegory, looks at the variations of life as the sequences of mythic truths played out upon the human stage. As Schelling summarized the relationship of allegory or myth to its past, “The Odyssey is the history of the human spirit, The Iliad is the history of nature” (qtd. Benjamin, “Origin” 165).

Medieval and early Renaissance theorists describe allegorical paintings as emblematic in that they appropriated the symbolic for new allegorical purposes. As Benjamin summarized, “Painters imitated the old works of monks; but with great understanding and close observation of objects, so that I might almost call this age the emblematic age” (167). This tendency to allegory or the emblematic continued with increased enthusiasm in the sixteenth
century. The fullest expression of the emblematic image can be found in Reformation morality imagery. For example, Dürer’s emblematic woodcuts of Maximillian I illustrates Northern European love for the iconic and emblematic allegory. In Dürer’s *The Triumphal Cart of the Emperor Maximilian* published 1523, Maximilian I is regaled within a mixture of medieval symbolism and Reformation emblems to create an “ideology of princely power” printed on eight folio pages. Benjamin explains that “because of the seriousness of their national character” German artists were avid in their enthusiasm for the allegorical image and its power to “manifest…newly discovered truth” (qtd. Benjamin, “Origin” 165). Such enthusiasm for all things allegorical was fueled by Reformist print materials as well as the work of humanist scholars such as Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, author of *The Praise of Folly*, an allegorical satire that criticizes the Catholic Church. Such allegorical works were produced throughout the continent as well, such as the ever popular John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Whether illustrating princely power or morality tales, allegorical and emblematic devices made use of one mode of meaning and reiterated them in new media and techniques. Artists were no less serviceable in the construction of complex allegories than their literary counterparts, and by the early sixteenth-century, many relied on Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia*, a guide for creating emblems and allegorical imagery.

In the painting *Birth*, Pollock illustrates the form of an Inuit mask and through reiteration, creates a narrative through the juxtaposition and intertwining of the forms (Rushing 17) (Fig. 40). One such mask would be symbolic. One mask might signify a singular ideal, but many masks suggest the interplay between masks, masking, and unmasking played out over time. The reiteration and recuperation of a legion of masks is allegorical. The allegorical is that which reiterates and doubles, but in so doing multiplies in a variety of ways. It evokes the
particulars of the mythic whereas the symbolic corresponds to the overarching ideal or concept.

A long list of Pollock’s allegories paintings contains overt associations and reiterations of indigenous Indian myths. Beyond the few works analyzed here the list includes various drawings and studies, *Red-on Buff Plate, Mural*, 1943 and *Guardians of the Secret*, 1943 and others (Fig. 73). For example, Rushing compares Pollock’s *Guardians of the Secret* to a drawing and a sand painting, both of which were published in the *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* 11, which was in Pollock’s library (Fig. 74). The drawing shows members of the *Guardians of the Knife Society*, and in between the guardians are the altar and ceremonial bowls and a type of small wolf. In the sand painting, the altar is depicted along with symbolic elements. But Pollock’s uncovering and reclaiming the mythic goes beyond the plastic surface of canvas to represent the mythic within mythologies, repurposing the allegorical.

Figure 73 Jackson Pollock, *Guardians of the Secret*, 1943, oil on canvas, 48 3/8 x 75 3/8 in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Others have noticed the allegorical tendencies in Pollock’s drip paintings, but not all agree on their interpretation. Hubert Damisch claims that Pollock’s drip paintings are based on Pollock entering a trance state. He calls the paintings “the Indian example” and claims that these have less to do with “iconic resonances” or the actual appearance of pictograms (or Indian sand painting), and more the “marking out” of a shamanistic ritual (Damisch 30).

![Figure 74 Guardians of the Knife Society at Zia Pueblo. Illustrated in Eleventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology (1894)](image)

But we must not take this suggestion literally to say that Pollock was painting as a shaman in trance, but rather that Pollock enacted an allegory and imitated a ritual, in order to arrive at new artistic meanings for the modern world. The act of painting is the allegory which holds space and time within the content of the paintings united in the ephemeral movement as part of the allegory. The paint itself is the trace of the allegory. In reiterating American Indian arts and myths through symbolic and allegorical representation, Pollock enacted and reiterated the mythic, creating a new mode of artistic representation through a fuller application of
mimēsis as allegory. This gesture combines the substitution and interchangeability of the metaphor from one media to another with the notion of reiteration that constitutes the allegory. It retains the symbolic meaning of Navajo myths while re-envisioning it within new paradigms of artistic representation.

Rather than being the iconic Abstract Expressionist, Pollock returns mimēsis as symbolic, imitative, metaphorical, and allegorical representation into art, thereby disregarding modernisms claim to autonomy and pure form. To be clear, the allegorical is that which doubles or reiterates. Owens clarifies that the allegorical is both “an attitude as well as a technique” for the allegory chooses what it reiterates, and through technical executions does so (Owens 1053). Further, it is through the allegory that the original is known or “is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest” (1053). We have already seen how the palimpsest iterates eons of petroglyphic writing in Poussette-Dart’s Palimpsest (and we can find them in his Symphony No. 1, The Transcendental, 1941-42, and other works), but here the drips paintings are as a palimpsest, illustrating how one work of art as metaphor and allegory points to the original and in so doing, makes it known (Fig. 38).

In this way, just as Pollock’s drip paintings allegorize American Indian sand painters and ritual, Hans Namuth’s 1950 preparatory black and white films for the documentary Jackson Pollock are also allegories based on Pollock’s reiteration of the sand painting ritual. The films point to, designate, and determine what we have come to know as a unity of time and space in an ephemeral artistic performance. Namuth’s raw preparatory footage, which consisted of lengthy takes that focused on Pollock silently moving about the canvas – in a sort of dance. In the films Pollock focuses on the act of painting, reiterating the movements
and gestures of the Indian shaman applying sand and brushing it away. The original raw footage lacked rhetorical intervention and narration. It focused on Pollock engrossed in his silent performance. However, as Catherine Sousloff notes, the final colored version that was shot over a two-week period in November 1951 contains Namuth’s interpretive (or allegorical) narration (Soussloff 62). For the film, Namuth created a pit in the ground and covered the pit with a sheet of glass. Namuth stood in the pit under the glass while Pollock painted on the glass above. Namuth found the perfect vantage point from which to shoot Pollock in the act of painting and this glass painting became his work Number 29. Shot from the vantage point of being below the glass Namuth’s camera recorded Pollock throwing, splattering, and dripping paint onto the glass in short colorful clips that he edited into narrated vignettes. Namuth’s final film focused on the gestures of painting and on the materials of form without regard to the source of the allegory. The film marked the final form of what had been a tracing of a conscious mimetic act in the making. The allegory became, in its reiteration by Namuth, a narrative about an unconscious splattering of paint across a wide expanse of glass. But as Namuth shot Pollock at work above the glass, the layer of splattered paint increasingly obscures our view of Pollock painting and focuses our attention on the paint itself. From this vantage point and in a strange and tragic irony, Full Fathom Five was recreated on film. Pollock became both the maker casting paint and the figure obscured behind the paint. In a sort of strange loop, Pollock became his own allegorized subject. The day Namuth finished filming Pollock making Number 29 is the day that Pollock, having been sober for four years, began an alcohol binge that lasted nearly five years until his death on August 11, 1956. Number 29 illustrates the irony of mimêsis as allegory, metaphor, and
substitution in the making between Pollock’s original work and Namuth’s doubling of that work.

Like Pollock’s critics, Namuth focused on the sensational gesture and material form and completely missed the nuanced allegorical event. These nuances had been established in *Full Fathom Five* and earlier drip paintings. Thus, Pollock no longer needed to reiterate the exact re-presentation, for the form of Pollock’s allegorical painting evolved into a focus on the allegorical re-presentation of the painting and obliteration of the sand paintings carried out by the American Indian shaman. This ritual content was infused into each successive painting. The subject of Indian pictograms and the sick man on ground having been established in earlier works were no longer needed elements in the allegory, because each of Pollock’s successive works became the “interminable reinterpretations”, allegories that evolved and synthesized until he achieved a fusion of allegorical content within allegorical form by virtue of the creative and expressed moment (Merleau-Ponty 62). Successive works, *Comet 1947, Reflection of the Big Dipper, 1947, Number 1A, Out of the Web: Number 7, Autumn Rhythm: Number 30*, and *Number 32* retain this synthesis of form and content, time and space in an allegorical performance. But even more so, his latest works retain all of the earlier symbolism in the form of hidden figures being revealed out of the paint for our view.

For Pollock, the art is in the making, it is in the process of allegorizing sacred ritual. Lee Krassner alludes to allegorical performativity when she characterized Pollock’s work as being some form of a dance (Krasner 63). Soussloff suggests that Pollock’s dance lends “performative poetics [to] the paintings”, but we should not get fixated on the dance here, but remember the dance is the reiteration of a ritual, captured in paint, leaving its trace (Soussloff 63). Pollock suggested this fact when he said, “Technic is the result of a need—new needs
demand new technics—total control—denial of the accident—States of order—organic intensity—energy and motion made visible—memories arrested in space…” (qtd. Soussloff 71). Making “energy and motion visible” meant to leave in paint a trace of the allegory of indigenous art in its re-presentation.

That the original work of art was Pollock’s allegorical dance is reiterated in Benjamin’s tenet that, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens.” Because Pollock’s works are re-presentations and not reproductions (as in photocopies or photographs and prints of the original paintings) they retain the “aura” of ritual art in the making because they function as unique works that retain and double that upon which they are based (Benjamin, “Work” 513). As Benjamin explains, “The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition” (514). In Pollock’s work, we see the original idea and its conveyance through symbolic representation and allegorical re-presentation. This transition from the symbolic to allegory via the performance as a mythic recreation was missed by Pollock’s critics. As trace, Pollock’s drip paintings are allegorical works based on both symbolic and metaphoric elements.

_Mimèsis and Ritual_

Our final mode of symbolic or idealist representation takes its form as ritual. Ritual typically has associations with spiritual practices and anthropology, particularly in the analysis of Non-Western art. But at its core we can define ritual as a mode of idealistic representation that is based upon a foundation of the repetition or reiteration of an allegory.
Whether in Pythagorean rituals surrounding death or rituals based on mythic heroic journeys as found in Homeric tales, ancient Greek tragic poetry, or in the fertility rituals of ancient Navajo peoples, or medieval Gawain poems, or as in medieval plays and theater or enactments of the Passion, all ritual ceremonies are based on allegories and myths that form the basis of a ritual performance or enactment. The mode of ritual can thus be defined as the reiteration of allegory in theatrical performance or mimetic dance. This symbolic mode of representation, more than any other mode, is at length a subject that crosses a variety of boundaries in anthropology, religious, and postmodern studies. For example, Gadamer believes that life is based upon a hidden series of rituals that preclude “human understanding, acting, feeling, and loving...[that] have less to do with planning, control and being consciously aware, and much more to do with a subcutaneous fitting into the rituality of life, in forms of tradition, in an event that encompasses us and that we can grasp only stutteringly” (Grondin 49). But for our purposes, we are less concerned with the purposes of ritual than with the reiteration of allegory as constituting the ritual as a form of idealistic representation.

As reiteration of the allegory, Pollock’s drip paintings illustrate this mode. We have already identified the allegorical nature of Pollock’s drip paintings that conceal figures and obliterate art as a doubling in media and techniques of Navajo sand painters. These allegorical paintings are, in their reiteration, ritual paintings. Each painting re-envisions and reiterates empirical objects rendered as signs and symbols, such as abstract figures for example, and ritualistically, or repeatedly as when concealing these figures with paint in the way the Navajo shaman obliterates sand paintings with his stick. This is not to say that Pollock performs a ritual, but rather that he ritually or re-iteratively recreates the ritual
paintings. Symbolic of both art making and its destruction, and the reiteration of concealing, the drip paintings describe a class of repetition and the reiteration of an allegory, thereby illustrating the mode of the ritual as a signifying idealistic representation. The paintings are metaphorical performances of reiteration.

Certainly, we see how in Pollock’s *Blue Poles*, simultaneously disclosed and hidden totems bracket a never-ending dance of what appear to be Indian war lances decorated with various elements (Fig. 75). The pointing function in the painting’s articulation of paint, back and forth and round-about is formed through the ritual dance, a reiteration of allegory and symbolic representation. Within the paint is the trace of the ephemerality of the dance captured in the form of pulsing and swaying paint. Motion is held within stasis, the material properties of paint witness to a repetitious pattern of actions, an endless reiterating mimēsis. The painting points to the dance as a ritual of reiterating *ad infinitum*, again and again, perpetually in the same way forever.

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 75 Jackson Pollock, *Blue Poles (original title: Number 11)*, 1952, Enamel and aluminum paint with glass on canvas, 212.1 cm × 488.9 cm (83.5 in × 192.5 in), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Whether in an early overall painting such as Gothic, 1944 with its juxtaposition of small and grand figures and body parts or in Full Fathom or late works such as White Light, 1954, presence is hidden but felt and revealed in paint that serves as a trace of the dance. Symbolic and hidden figures point to meanings inherent in the signs, the dance reiterates the ideals hidden within the allegory. Each painting is nothing short of a cosmic and eternal repetition of the ritual dance. If there is any question of formalism one need remember that the paint witnesses to the dance, it being the trace of the enacted and reiterated ritual, or the allegory which makes the drip paintings idealist in structure.

**Conclusion**

We have seen that there are several primary modes of mimetic representation that constitute naturalistic and idealistic representation. While these modes are attributes of both forms of representation the symbolic or ideal is primarily constituted by symbolic, metaphorical, allegorical, and ritual modes. It is largely through these modes of idealism that we can see there is a specific and tangible content in Pollock’s primitivist and later drip paintings that returns *mimēsis* to art. This return has come about through the recuperation of the indigenous, its symbols, allegories, and rituals that evoke indigenous myths.

Observing this recuperation first hand, Newman underscores the primary nature of art as mimetic, declaring that “Undoubtedly the first man was an artist” (Newman, “First” 568). Perhaps then it is no small coincidence that Pollock sought indigenous symbols, pictographs and hieroglyphs to convey the role of *mimēsis* in art and continued to explore *mimēsis* in his drip paintings. Figuration and representation, and American Indian symbols are so
predominant in Pollock’s work that it is important that we account for their existence. Newman emphatically identified and qualified the American Primitivist movement as being, “spontaneous, and emerging from several points” and as “a new force in American painting that is the modern counterpart of the primitive art impulse” (Newman, “Ideographic” 566). If American painting is the “modern counterpart of the primitive” then it behooves us to establish more fully that this “primitive art impulse” is first and foremost mimetic.

Second, symbolic representation is given as metaphor through diverse media (in the case of Pollock, diverse media constitutes the media of paint, pictographic text, and the motion or dance of painting). Metaphor is evoked as well through the act of signifying, labeling, and naming, all functions derived from the representation of empirical and symbolic objects as well as through the attachment of meaning to such objects as emblems and symbols. Finally, metaphor is that which is changeable from one form to another, and yet within changes meaning is retained and transferred, such as in the juxtaposition of imagery and text for example.

Third, mimêsis is evident in the way symbolic, naturalistic, and metaphorical representation is employed within a doubling or reiteration that constitutes an allegory. As with metaphor, this allegory can be given in diverse media, from sand paint, to painting and representing myths and the mythic, to executing, recreating, or reiterating the mythic through re-presenting ritual performance. Art, mythology, and the reiteration of the mythic come together in ways that re-produce a text or narrative in some form and in so doing become the way in which the narrative comes to be known. We have seen how allegory functions as a doubling or reiteration through diverse media in the way that the painting Moon-Woman Cuts with the Knife illustrates a narrative myth. We have also seen how Pollock reiterates sand
painting and its destruction through the media of sand and other objects in paint, the creation of figures and the covering up of the same, and the notion of destroying art as well as performing its destruction through performative action. But we have also seen the copy of the allegory in Namuth’s films, which themselves function as an allegory and re-presentation of the execution of the allegory, wherein Pollock himself becomes as the allegory of which he painted.

Finally, we can claim ritual as another mode of symbolic representation in that ritual is functionally and formally the repetition of the reiteration of the allegory. This review approaches the issue of *mimēsis*, in terms of its most basic definition as representation, symbolic representation, metaphor and allegory. We have seen that *mimēsis*, particularly in this broader definition beyond mere representation and imitation, qualifies Pollock’s works as particularly unique, falling outside European formalism with its emphasis on abstract forms or “significant form”. With an emphasis on symbolic representation, narrative, metaphorical, allegorical and reiterative ritual *mimēsis*, Pollock’s paintings also lie beyond Jungian interpretations with emphasis on idealized archetypes. Instead, Pollock’s work reiterates and recreates indigenous forms through the primary modes of *mimēsis*, through symbols, metaphors, allegories, and rituals, thereby recuperating the spirit of indigenous art through *mimēsis* in its broader definition.
Chapter Six

*Mimēsis and the Truth in Art*

I've had a period of drawing on canvas in black – with some of my early images coming thru – think the non-objectivists will find them disturbing – and the kids who think it simple to splash a Pollock out.

*Jackson Pollock*

Introduction

We have identified a schism in modern art and art theory between *mimēsis* and formalism. We have used American Primitivism and the allegorical (including the drip) works of Pollock to illustrate the modes of *mimēsis*. What remains to be discussed is how to concretize the recuperation of the spirit of indigenous art in terms of truth or knowledge which lies at the center of the discourse on *mimēsis*. For our purposes here, we will look at the relationship between *mimēsis* and myth and its location in the work of art. In this chapter we will consider *mimēsis* in its role of envisioning *mythos* or truth. In so doing, we will explore three main questions. First, we will ask how is *mimēsis* implicated in knowledge, particularly in terms of recognition, mental imaging, and correspondence? Second, we will ask, what is the relationship between *mimēsis* and *mythos* in terms of myth, *harmonia*, and consonance? Third, we will consider knowledge in terms of the underlying opposition regarding the interlocutor in Platonic and Aristotelian notions of *mimēsis*. Fourth, we will consider *mimēsis* as the underlying conditions for truth as *alētheai*. The result of these
considerations will be that we will see how Pollock’s works are mimetic in terms of the forms and modes of mimēsis, as well as in the functions of mimēsis as it pertains to the relationship between art and myth. Applied to our problem at hand, we will see that the division in art and art criticism along representation and formalism rest in the location of the interlocutor and in the tensions between transcendent and immanent form which are resolved in the event of truth or alētheai.

*Mimēsis and Truth*

Whether in art or language such as philosophy or poetry, both mimēsis and mimeisthai are forms of expression that convey information about the ideas and objects of the world. Our present question is that if mimēsis is implicated in knowledge, then on what grounds can we account for this relationship between mimēsis and knowledge? There are four key functions of thought that pertain to mimēsis and truth that we need to consider, namely, recognition, mental imagery (consciousness), correspondence, harmonia and consonance. We first return to Aristotle and his views on knowledge and artistic form and then to a discussion on these four modes of truth and mimēsis.

First, Aristotle claims that poetry and art grow naturally out of the same mimetic impulse (Aristotle, “Poetics” 1448b2-6). Further, Aristotle claims that one naturally feels a sense of delight in mimetic works, saying that,

Though the things themselves may be painful to see, we take delight in seeing the most perfect images of them, the forms for example of obscene beasts and corpses. The reason is this, learning things gives great pleasure not only to
philosophers but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it. The reason that we enjoy seeing images is that one is at the same time learning and gathering what each thing is. (1448b2-6)

For Aristotle, *mimēsis* is a means by which one learns knowledge. It causes a delight in seeing and a pleasure in learning. Part of this delight is directly connected with the fact that the mimetic works present a correspondence between the image seen and the thing known to be. The delight comes from recognizing the represented object within its image. As Sallis explains, “The difference, the remoteness of the image from the truth [real] is no longer just a source of deception but rather is the very condition of the possibility of a certain kind of learning” (Sallis 175). Whether the representation is like or nearly like the object represented, the representation opens up the possibility for learning.

Aristotle also explains that *mimēsis* is a source of knowledge even if one has not seen the real object before. Aristotle explains that “If one has not happened to see the thing before, one’s pleasure is not due to the *mimēsis* as such but to the technique or the color or some other cause” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 1448b2-6). Thus, the pleasure of viewing images is gained by both the recognition of an object or idea brought about through *mimēsis* itself, and by the copy’s ability to represent or imitate the real. Such pleasure is felt because of the manifestation of the effects of *mimēsis*, through color, design, line, and so forth that represents a thing even though it is presented as a first experience rather than the recognition of a previous encounter. As Sallis explains,

> For though Aristotle leaves it unsaid – one can learn through the image only if it is recognized as an image of the thing itself; and such recognition requires
that somehow one has seen the thing itself already, in advance, that one has already caught a glimpse of those obscene beasts and corpses themselves, even if only in turning, in pain, away from them to their images. Poetry, arising in mimēsis, would be subordinate to a prior vision of the truth. (Sallis 147)

Delight in images arises through recognition by the presentation of the copy. But delight in images can also arise when recognition is not present. For Aristotle, the pleasure ought to be greater in a work where recognition occurs, but delight can also be felt when viewing an image of some previously unknown thing because learning new things is pleasurable. For Aristotle, mimēsis is first and foremost a condition for knowledge.

Memory and Recognition

First, in terms of recognition, Pollock’s primitivist paintings and drawings are not the only mimetic works in Pollock’s oeuvre. Pollock’s painting Bird reveals the nature of representation and recognition (Fig. 76). Abstracted though it may be, viewers recognize that the image presents a stylized view of a bird with spread wings. This view cannot be dismissed by any viewer who has ever encountered a bird. Such a bird (or any bird once encountered) becomes imprinted on the mind as a mental image of knowledge.
Recognizing all subsequent birds in nature and art becomes inevitable. Although in the modern interpretation of such abstracted views, the viewer ought to dismiss the subject of the painting (the bird) and focus on the abstracted form, Pollock’s rendition makes this very difficult to do, for the application of the paint in broad layers that radiate upon and about the bird’s form becomes reminiscent and recognized as those attributes of birds we know, such as flight, feathers, and light and shadow which reflect off of the silken feathers of the bird. We cannot help but associate what we see as illustrative of what we know from our experience with nature. Further, we know or can recognize that this bird is a variation or reiteration of the Navajo thunderbird symbol (Fig. 77). So, through multiple layers of experience we recognized Pollock’s bird to be a thunderbird.
But how do we analyze the hidden figures in Pollock’s drip paintings, such as the figure of a man lying on his back with his left arm raised in *Full Fathom Five*, or the male and female figures, she-wolves, faces, birds, and other figures, which were then covered over with layers upon layers of dripped paint in other paintings? Being that these figures are generally abstract, even stick-figures, how are these a continuation of Pollock’s representational style? We might suggest here that such figures assert presence and play upon how representation is accepted as factual statements through the processes of sight and perception. In other words, Pollock’s most abstract works are fundamentally mimetic works, initiated in representations from nature. In Pollock’s *Full Fathom Five* and other paintings, figures are signs representing or signifying what we recognize them to be. This is not to say we recognize any particular man (or animal), but that the representation of the sign gives us a view of a simplification of a signification which we still recognize as such. The image corresponds to what it represents in that it appears like it in some way. To represent the world is to signify it, and to do so is to participate in a process of signification wherein the sign is
signified within a correspondence between what is in the world and its signification. The
notion of recognition is elemental to the issue of *mimēsis*. This notion of recognition helps us
determine a certain truthfulness. If the sign or symbol corresponds or adequately signifies the
object, then the sign has merit and is perceived to be representational. Thus, it is not the
mimetic process nor the final sign but rather our recognition of the object in relation to its
sign which determines its truthfulness for us.

In its most elemental condition, recognition is tied with memory (Plato, “Symposium”
208b, 46). Recognition or *re-cognition* is the ability to recall or recognize an event or object
as pertaining to one previously encountered. It is a form of elemental knowing and
remembering. Repeated encounters with such objects or people creates a recognition
associated with familiarity. For example, an image or picture of one’s grandmother produces
a similar familiarity in terms of the recognition that the image corresponds to the way one
sees his/her grandmother. But if a photograph of the grandmother was taken when she was
four years of age, one may not recognize the child in the photograph as one’s grandmother.
For one would associate only with the image of the grandmother when it reflects the image
one has in mind of an older or grandmotherly woman. So, recognition depends on accuracy
or verisimilitude between the image and the real, or nature. But if one sees a picture of
anyone’s grandmother, having the properties of what one has come to see as being
‘grandmotherly’, such as grey hair, insightful eyes or perhaps glasses and such, any image of
any grandmother might be re-recognized as a generic grandmother, and thereby be associated
with one’s own grandmother. This is not to say that one would recognize the generic
grandmother in the photograph as one’s own, but that one would recognize that the image of
a grandmother corresponds to the image one has in mind and has experienced.
Recognition also generates knowledge as a “change from ignorance to knowledge” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 48b, 6). In this case, one learns through new experiences. Such is our experience of nature. From birth on, one is ever engaged in encountering the world. Each experience and encounter constitutes a growing body of knowledge presenting the basis upon which future knowledge and engagement in the world is built and organized. Once learned, any signification of the experience constitutes a re-cognition through memory.

Representation, signs and symbols embody experiences and create new experiences. *Mimēsis* is implicated in a cycle of learning and relearning. As we have discussed, art points towards an object which we perceive according to our previous encounters where such objects came into play. Images and objects also create new knowledge and meaning and reinforce (or challenge) previously acquired meanings (Husserl 72). This is why babies can learn to recognize a dog or duck, for example, from a picture book even before encountering one in nature. The image can precede the corresponding empirical object and vice versa. In terms of learning, it does not matter which image is first presented to our minds.

Thus, recognition is tied with memory and learning and is so by our very nature to instinctively imitate and learn through imitation. Aristotle is very clear in the beginning of the *Poetics* to illustrate the didactic quality of *mimēsis* in conjunction with recognition and memory and of its grounding in nature with learning, and pleasure. “Imitation comes naturally to human beings from childhood (and in this they differ from other animals, i.e. in having a strong propensity to imitation and in learning their earliest lessons through imitation); so does the universal pleasure in imitations” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 48b, 6). Our first engagements in the world are constituted as knowledge through a process of imitative play. This type of formative information gathering includes parody and the imitation of others. “In
humans, imitation is natural to childhood, and children learn most of their first life lessons through the imitation of others” (6). Toddlers learn to speak through imitating the sounds they hear their parents speak and generally copy most everything they see their parents and peers do. Recognition is a form of mental play and interplay wherein something is identified as important and then imitated and thereby learned. In terms of imitation as learning, there is a fundamental reciprocity between learning, recognition, and art, particularly in verisimilitude. As art imitates or reproduces a given form or idea, that form and idea is conveyed within the representation, which is then presented as transmitted or recognized knowledge. As Gadamer explains, by virtue of being, “every representation finds its genuine fulfillment simply in the fact that what it represents is emphatically there” (Gadamer, “Poetry” 119). What is given in art either corresponds to what one has previously learned, or it presents new information for learning upon which future experiences will reinforce such learning and produce feelings of recognition and familiarity.

In this way, the hidden figure in Pollock’s *Full Fathom Five* declares itself a signifier of something outside of itself. While pointing to something outside itself, it also witnesses to the knowledge of such existence. It mimetically reproduces what it signifies in its pointing and witnesses to a knowledge of being through representation and recognition. That it signifies a complete and perfect copy of a man is not in question, for the representation conveys meaning even in its abstracted form. Gadamer further explains the relationship between this type of imitation and knowledge,

The pleasure involved in mimetic behavior and its effects is a fundamental human pleasure that Aristotle had already illustrated with the behavior of children. The pleasure of dressing up and representing someone other than
oneself, and the pleasure of the person who recognizes what is represented, show what the real significance of imitative representation is: there is no question of comparing or judging the degree of accuracy with which the representation approaches what is intended by it. Of course, such critical judgment and evaluation do exist alongside any representation, but only as something secondary. When Aristotle describes how the onlooker knows that “that is who it is,” he does not mean that we see through the disguise and know the identity of the person dressed up. On the contrary, he means that we know who is represented. Knowledge here means recognition. We recognize whom we know, whether it is the god, the hero, or even our own laughable contemporaries with whom we are acquainted. Mimesis is a representation in which we “know” and have in view the essential content of what is represented. (119)

Because of the way that imitation presents a recognizable image to the viewer, the representative arts present a form of knowledge. Thus, *mimēsis* is not always the representation of something that is already fully familiar to us. But it does make something known or recollected through “sensuous abundance” that always “represents something” (Gadamer, “Relevance” 36). Pollock’s paintings overtly reproduce and covertly contain signifiers of rich and meaningful truths in the forms of American Indian signs, symbols and abstractions of objects in the world, stick figures, animals, and the like. The American Indian symbology is known and recollected according to the collective cultural knowledge of which all viewers participate in, whether knowingly through their experience of Native American
art and culture, or in terms of new knowledge. But when not known, such symbols present new knowledge to viewers.

While we are concerned with knowledge in terms of recognition, it is important to remember that within the learning and recognition paradigm, art and mimicry are pleasurable, and such pleasure is returned to art. Verisimilitude is not required for one to take pleasure in representation, imitation, and parody, for the very act of imitation itself is a pleasure in itself. As Aristotle explains,

People are also naturally given to taking pleasure in imitation. This natural pleasure in imitation is demonstrated by the fact that some experiences or things painful or unpleasant in themselves can be taken as pleasurable as images or imitations, especially of corpses. Like philosophers, people are naturally inclined to enjoy learning, even if their pleasure is more limited, and people take pleasure in looking at these representations because they are engaged in a process of learning. (“Poetics” 48b, p6)

According to Aristotle, even looking at something disturbing (such as a corpse), can witness to the pleasure of images and imitations, not because of a perverse interest in such things but because of the fundamental way in which we take pleasure in the processes of recognition and recall. Recognition incites a certain aesthetic pleasure, which Kant derides in favor of his theory of disinterest. But imitation as a naming practice through recognition as correspondence is fundamental to learning and brings about knowledge as well as intellectual and aesthetic pleasure. Recognition between mimēsis and objects implicates art’s role in creating knowledge and the pleasure one takes from these activities. Some of the pleasure of
Pollock’s work lies in how the viewer recognizes and identifies with the swirling paint, the hidden figures, the rich colors and the recessive depths created by successive and sweeping layering and dripping of paint.

Our broader understanding of *mimèsis* as symbolic, idealist, and naturalistic representation within metaphorical and allegorizing processes that implicates art’s role in making knowledge visible, learning, recognition and its properties, and the pleasure one takes from these activities, gives us a broader notion by which we can understand the relationship between representation and knowledge. This relationship between knowledge as recognition and learning in art is what is at stake in the modernist repudiation of *mimèsis*. Pollock’s recuperation of the indigenous spirit of art brings the question of *mimèsis* to the foreground of modern art. It returns to art a significant content by way of signification, making visible the relationships between representation, correspondence of appearances, knowledge, memory, recollection, and recognition. Pollock’s recuperation of *mimèsis* asserts that significant content enriches and enlivens significant form, such that the formal properties of art recede into a subservient role to enriching content. Significant content, in its relations to learning, recall and recognition, asserts the fundamental ways in which we orient ourselves visually in the world. In a modernist era that values form over content, Pollock saw *mimèsis* via the modes and means of indigenous arts as a vehicle for reasserting the primacy of content as knowledge over form.

*Mental Image*

Our second point in terms of knowledge and art concerns the issue of cognition, particularly in terms of mental image-making. Pollock’s painting *Full Fathom Five* illustrates
this type of representation as a statement of fact in symbolic and idealist terms. Pollock’s artwork does not claim a pure abstraction without reference to the phenomenal world, as we see in his many references to the human figure, animal life, American Indian signs and symbols, and his idealist form. Rather, his representation is an infraction to the modernist rules for pure form. Modernist claims overlook any inherent representational nature of art because “abstract art is opposed to a natural representation of things” (Mondrian 371). It is difficult to claim a modernist psychological or subjective detachment and a critique of purely formal elements given the highly representational nature in terms of the symbolic, metaphorical, allegorical, and ritual content of Pollock’s works. Taking all mimetic elements into account, it is a difficult prognosis to claim detachment and non-representation for even the drip paintings. This is due to the nature of representation and also the nature of consciousness itself. For in terms of representation or mimêsis, even Pollock’s hidden figure gives us more than an understanding of representation, correspondence, and recognition. Pollock’s representational art, whether in his primitivist works, or his figures hidden beneath layers of dripped paint, recuperates more than processes and pleasures of learning. His art reasserts and recuperates the primary way in which consciousness occurs within signs systems altogether in terms of mental image-making. Ludvig Wittgenstein’s work on consciousness further underscores this point.

It is rather unusual to discuss Wittgenstein in conjunction with Ricoeur and Gadamer, mixing a phenomenal critique of narrative and learning, and metaphors and symbols, with a critique of signification in terms of the relations between logic and language. But let us remember that representational art is a lexicon of signs and thus resides within a critique of logic and consciousness as well as within theories of perception. Wittgenstein’s seminal
work *The Tractatus Logicophilosophicus* sheds further light on the processes of learning and metaphor making that underscores the importance of imaging and its relations to *mimēsis*. For it is Wittgenstein who excavates the importance of the mental image as a fundamental ground for language and philosophy, and this applies to our discussion on *mimēsis*. While Wittgenstein is preoccupied with logic and the ability of language to express or even address the concerns with logic, he shows that logic and language are based upon the foundation or ground of the mental image. Wittgenstein explains “In the picture and the pictured there must be something identical in order that the one can be a picture of the other at all. What the picture must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it after its manner—rightly or falsely—is its form of representation” (Russel ix). In other words, our ability to perceive knowledge depends upon our ability to make images, either in our minds or on the canvas so to speak. Our engagement in the world is involved in a process of picture or image making and the subsequent making of mental images. Mental images are models of the objects of reality. Such models or images are seen to be facts, not mathematical facts or truths, but rather symbols of knowledge. As Wittgenstein writes, “We make to ourselves pictures of facts” (Russel x). The body of Wittgenstein’s work proceeds to furnish diagrams intended to structure language in a way that allows language to function more adequately as a signifier in the way that images do. Wittgenstein’s entire system depends upon the interpretation that language falls short of supplying the adequate correspondence between image and world that art supplies.

In the Preface to the *Tractatus*, Bertrand Russel identifies Wittgenstein’s concerns with logic and its relation to language as a signifier. He qualifies this as being,
First, there is the problem that actually occurs in our minds when we use language with the intention of meaning something by it; this problem belongs to psychology. Secondly, there is the problem as to what is the relation subsisting between thoughts, words, or sentences, and that which they refer to or mean; this problem belongs to epistemology. Thirdly, there is the problem of using sentences so as to convey truth rather than falsehood; this belongs to the special sciences dealing with the subject-matter of the sentences in question. Fourthly, there is the question: what relation must one fact (such as a sentence) have to another in order to be capable of being a symbol for that other? (Russell x)

Wittgenstein’s main concerns are the ways in which language accrues and expresses meaning and how such meaning comes to signify a truth. But the main problem with language in terms of signification, meaning, and truth is that while language does facilitate recognition in the way that images re-present the world, but language can do so only arbitrarily.

We have seen that symbols and metaphors can hold arbitrary meanings as well. But images (whether symbols, metaphors, allegories or verisimilitude) can cognize the world in ways that enable mental image-making and thus recognition and learning. All of Wittgenstein’s concerns are rooted in logic’s foundation in spatial forms, and the way in which these forms can be seen as mental images with a correspondence which is adequately held as either a spatial form or a mental image. Mental images can mimetically reproduce or re-present logical, mathematical, and geometrical forms. But language, according to Wittgenstein, because of its arbitrary nature, cannot. This appears to be a quite a jump between the way Aristotle discusses *mimēsis* and the pleasure of recognition and learning.
But in actuality, Wittgenstein is asserting the primary mental conditions which enable the learning and recognition cycles to operate. *Mimèsis* as recognition and correspondence depends upon a preexisting mental image of the thing being imitated or represented. When a thing is represented in art which one has not encountered, the work of art imprints the object on the mind of the viewer, creating a new mental image as a ground for further and future recognition. This is why a toddler might learn what a tree is from either looking at trees in a picture book, or from coming in contact with a tree. Regardless of which scene takes place first, recognition of the second occurs through a preexisting mental image and then subsequent correspondence and recognition. And we might recall that this cycle of cognition produces pleasure in learning.

To further explain this point, Wittgenstein’s concerns are rooted in an emphasis on pictorial and spatial imagery which is underscored throughout the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein is clear in his observations; “logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world” for logic depends on a system of signification in order to represent the world (Wittgenstein 6.13). He also writes that,

The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world. (Wittgenstein 6.41)
For Wittgenstein, the world is as we see it. We have a mental image of this world and everything in it. But any verbal commentary about the world depends upon language which is an arbitrary signifying system. Language cannot adequately present a mirror image of the world because it can only signify it. Language cannot represent. It can only point to a thing. In this way, primitive hieroglyphs and petroglyphs can give us knowledge of an ancient writing system, but not necessarily provide an exact image of what said text means or intends to represent. This fact fueled European imagination for the possibility of deciphering ancient texts in order to find hidden and mystical meanings during the Age of Discovery. But imagery represents a degree of correspondence to the thing being represented because mental images previously held in the mind facilitate recognition in ways that writing systems do not. In the American primitivist artworks, we recognize and understand imagery that represents American Indian symbols and art objects because the representations correspond naturalistically or idealistically to the original objects: art faithfully copies. This correspondence is not always exact verisimilitude, for we have seen that through the conveyance of meaning, symbols, metaphors, allegories, and even rituals convey meaning through idealistic representation. But it is in the representation, whether naturalistic or idealistic, that the mind draws correspondences between what is given and what is already held in the mind and in terms of new forms of knowledge.

This relationship between text and image is underscored by the fact that earliest writing systems were formed first as images that corresponded to objects of the world, or the world itself. Earliest hieroglyphic scripts, as foundational language systems, denoted what they described through a pictorial correspondence to the world. In such a script, “A proposition is a picture of reality: for if I understand a proposition, I know the situation that it represents”
(Wittgenstein 4.021). In other words, the hieroglyph denotes what it proposes through a correspondence between the object and the mental image of the object in the viewer or ‘reader’. The accuracy of correspondence then gives a ground of truth to the representation, it is faithful to what it speaks. It “shows its sense” or it represents or demonstrates what is false(Wittgenstein 4.022). The hieroglyph, like a mimetic work of art, shows either what is or is not according to its correspondence to what is in the world. Thus, the hieroglyph is descriptive of, and corresponds to, reality. It’s important to note here that this notion of correspondence is not to suggest an exact or mathematical equivalence between mental image or art and an object, but rather a correspondence between what is known and what is given.

This correspondence between object and sign or hieroglyph is lost in later signs systems which have no direct correspondence between text and image. Writing systems become purely arbitrary because they are based on a collective agreement that such and such a sign (written or spoken) corresponds to what it signifies. Hence Newman’s point (that modern art is based on the “ideogram” which presents ideas “without directly naming them”) illustrates the correspondence between meaning even when the image presents meanings which are non-specific (Newman, “Ideographic” 565). Art as a lexicon based on an ideograph or hieroglyph retains a certain (albeit partial) correspondence between the image and the world, and art can also retain meaning without direct interpretations. But language depends upon words that name and describe without illustrating (565). Within this sign to object correspondence, our own mental image of the experience of the world allows for us to ascribe interpretive meaning to language and non-representational art and recognize such correspondences as true or false. When Newman describes American Primitivism as an art
that is “ideographic” and “hieroglyphic”, he points to the nature of representation, art, and language and how meaning is either cognized or ascribed. The image presents direct knowledge whereas language (and non-representational art) points to a thing through the agreement of the meaning of the signs within the text. Without a knowledge of language and an agreement of meaning, there is no correspondence. Images however are readily understood according to their correspondence with the world. Because of our nature being one that possesses a signifying consciousness, it is a matter of degrees of correspondence which connects representation to truth, a “relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified” (Barthes 688). Mimetic images can directly reveal knowledge. Languages require translation; they require a lexis. But images give direct and immediate knowledge, through correspondence between image and the object being represented, and our recognition of both through our own mental images. In other words, art and mental imaging are foundational to conscious thought.

Image based consciousness was known to René Descartes. At the beginning of modern philosophy Descartes found thought itself to be a matter of cognizing images. For Descartes, the “subject” is that self which thinks. For Descartes, thinking entails such things as that which “represents, perceives, judges, agrees, disagrees, loves, hates, strives, and likes” (Çüçen 1). That which the thinking subject comes to know is that which lies in the phenomenological world, the world of things. For Descartes, there is a separation between the knower and the object of knowledge. This separation between the knower and the known or the subject and the object constitutes a separation, gap, schism or duality which lies at the root of modernism’s critical and artistic system, the divide between subject and object. From Descartes onward, the basic premise of philosophy resides in the question of how the subject
or knower cognizes the object, or that which is apart from the thinking knower in the external world of objects (Çüçen 2-3). Descartes calls the modes of thought from the thinking self “cogitations”. But Martin Heidegger stresses that these “res cogitans” are representations (qtd. Çüçen 2). Heidegger interprets the object as “Bild” which is to say view or picture. So, like Descartes and Wittgenstein, Heidegger makes the image primary in thought.

Ricoeur explains that the Descartes’ “cogito” is a concept bearing the meaning of a truth of existence. It means that there is a correspondence between subjectivity and truth, thought and existence. This truth is conveyed as an image because of its direct correspondence to thought and certitude. As Ricoeur writes, “With objectivity comes subjectivity in the sense that this being-certain of the object is the counterpart of the position of a subject” (qtd. Çüçen 5). In other words, thinking (as cogitations) is based on correspondences to objects of the world as perceived by the subject. Heidegger calls the philosophical tradition, from Descartes forward, “the age of the world picture”, because of the importance of such correspondence in cognition (5). From Aristotle to Descartes, and from Wittgenstein to Heidegger and Ricoeur, logic and thought depends upon a correspondence with an image of the world.

Ironically, Wittgenstein’s concern is that language cannot adequately represent ideal forms much in the same way that Plato believes art cannot represent ideal forms. For Plato, logos – the word, describes philosophy, even “where no logos can be given of a thing, then it is not knowable; where a logos can be given, then it is knowable” (Cross 433–450). For Plato, truth or the metaphysical otherworldliness of the Ideas cannot be represented. They can only be described with words. The world, being a copy of such Ideas, is removed from the Ideas by some distance. Art, as a copy of the world, is removed even further. It is an “appearance” but not “truth” (Plato, “Republic” 596c-e). Art describes what can be seen,
poetry describes what cannot. But Plato’s philosophical oeuvre depends upon creating mental images with words through his allegorical and metaphorical writing. Hence the point (mentioned in Chapter Five) that philosophers “paint with words” (Halliwell, “Aesthetics” 130n1). But for Wittgenstein, however, language is inadequate for “what can be shown, [in imagery] cannot be said” with words (Wittgenstein 4.1212). Wittgenstein would go beyond the notion of painting with metaphors to say that language as a signifier depends upon a mental image, and mental images are drawn from direct experiences in the world. In other words, an image corresponds to our mental images of the world and therefore indicates truth. But language requires interpretation because it is an arbitrary code or sign system.

Wittgenstein’s concern is less for art than language and logic, but his analysis asserts that mental imagery is primary to how we perceive and understand correspondence between the world and thought. This primacy of the mental image is fundamental to our most basic mode of consciousness. Language is learned, but images are recognized. In the works of Pollock, we see that mimetic representation (whether symbolic in terms of idealistic representation in the form of symbols, metaphors, allegories, or rituals, or in terms of naturalistic representation) corresponds with the ways in which we consciously think in terms of mental images that represent what we know and come to know about the world. Through *mimēsis* and its relationship to learning and correspondences between images and things, Pollock recuperates the indigenous spirit of envisioning knowledge in art.

The image, from Plato to Descartes, and Descartes to Wittgenstein, has a unique underlying role in philosophy. The image illustrates the notion of knowledge as truthfulness through correspondence between the image and world, in thought and text. As Wittgenstein stresses, “The picture is a model of reality” drawn from experience with spatial objects
(Wittgenstein 2.12). The image represents objects and combinations of objects and their
states of being. But because of metaphor and the interchangeability of meaning, the picture is
interchangeable with language as we have seen; it is isomorphic, for Aristotle and Ricoeur
both point to the interchangeable nature of signifiers in mimêsis. While there are limitations
upon language’s ability to adequately describe the world outside of metaphor and ascribed
meaning, the image corresponds to images of the world which are held within the mind
(McManus 12). The inadequacy of language depends on its arbitrariness as a sign system and
its struggle for mirroring, representing or picturing. Only the mimetic image can give a
mirror accounting of the world. In this way, Pollock’s hidden figures, even in their
hiddenness, declare the relationship between image, thought, and truth through
correspondence. Thus, we thus say that Pollock and the American Primitivists, in restoring
indigenous forms and myths to art, reaffirm the role of mimêsis in its descriptive and
empirical roles in the correspondence between image and knowledge.

**Correspondence**

Recognition and mental imaging are implicated in the perception and dissemination
of knowledge, especially in its relation to images. But recognition and mental imaging
depend upon correspondence. It is correspondence which has always been at stake in art, and
for that matter in philosophy and poetry. For our purposes here, we will now discuss our third
point, which is that knowledge, as it is ascertained or cognized through recognition and
mental imaging furthers our understanding of mimêsis, and this relationship between
recognition and the mental image, depends upon correspondence.
In most basic terms, *mimēsis* gives us representation by way of a correspondence between what is represented and the representation itself, whether by image, text, or some other media. In naturalistic representation such as in imitation or verisimilitude in the copying of empirical objects, this correspondence between what is to be empirically seen and represented agrees in varying degrees of faithfulness. What is represented is recognized as being that which it represents. In most basic terms, *mimēsis* gives us representation by way of a correspondence between what is represented and the representation itself. But in symbolic representation, whether by image, text (as in hieroglyphs or signs), or some other media (such as dance for example) recognition still occurs and thus verisimilitude is not required. This idea of correspondence lies at the very heart of naturalistic and symbolic representation and particularly *mimēsis*. But symbolic representation also conveys meaning through correspondence even though that meaning can be applied arbitrarily, particularly in terms of symbols such as emblematic representation and personifications, or in terms of metaphors and allegories. In many cases, symbolic representation agrees or corresponds to the empirical appearance of an object, such as in hieroglyphics where images are like the objects they signify, and in the many signs and symbols in Pollock’s work that correspond to American Indian symbols even though the likenesses between the object or idea and the symbolic representation are not exact.

In short, correspondence involves our mental images, imprinting, recollection, and comparisons, which comparisons are between what is given to be known or learned and what is represented. Correspondence is easy to see in images such as Pollock’s *Flame*, a painting discussed in Chapter Five (Fig. 60). The painting simply demonstrates the correspondence between the painting, its subject and representational style, and the title of the painting, to
what it signifies – a flame, and that mental image of a flame which is held in the mind. The image and its title present a statement of fact. It is what it purports to be: a painting of red hot fire. We already discussed how such signs, symbols, or copies of nature, are differing types of signifiers or mimetic devices or utterances which point to something else outside of them. They direct our attention to that which is signified, either the object or the concept being represented. They stand in for something which we cannot have always before our eyes, but which we might want to retain or keep in mind. Though a substitution or memento, Pollock’s flame signifies and points to some real fire and conveys this knowledge to us as viewers. We could go so far as to suggest that there is truthfulness about Pollock’s flame because it designates, names, or witnesses to fire in a way that agrees with our mental image or concept of fire.

Correspondence Theory looks at the ways in which signs describe their objects. Today the notion of correspondence is as to say that truth is according to a fact. However, anciantly and for the purposes of understanding the relations of art and myth, correspondence was more a matter of relations: specifically the relation or pointing toward a signifier and that which it signifies. Language (and its structure) is most generally regarded as the primary sign. Aristotle, for example suggests that “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true” making the saying that which points to its object in relationship to its truth (Aristotle, “Cratylus” 385b2). It is not the saying but the pointing which makes a statement true. For example, “he is sitting” is rather vague until it designates the actual fact that a given “he” really is sitting (Aristotle, “Categories” 12b11, 14b14). By pointing to “he” whom is sitting, the saying is related in a truthful relationship. The pointing is a way of relating: the sitter is
related to the way he is signified by the saying. In language or art, the representation points to and relates to its object. The nature of this movement or pointing towards, from signifier to the signified is fundamental to correspondences particularly in ancient thought. As we have already seen with Wittgenstein’s observations, images directly point to their objects, and particularly point to underlying mental images. Language on the other hand, must be interpreted before the pointing is made sure. Representational art points more directly and conforms more precisely to mental images and objects in life than does language. Through correspondence, Pollock’s *Flame* makes a statement of fact that functions in accordance to our understanding of signs, signifiers, fire, flames, and the correspondences between language, art and our mental images and pre-existing knowledge. But is this pointing sufficient for an understanding of art in its role of corresponding or disclosing knowledge as a type of truth?

Heidegger helps us to understand correspondence and truth, and art in his essays *Being and Time*, and *On the Essence of Truth*. In Heidegger (before his discussion on *alētheai* which will be addressed more fully) we read that truth is first, a site of correspondence (Heidegger 224). Something is proclaimed to be true or there is a certain correspondence between a thing and the meaning or truth attached to it.57 Heidegger succinctly explains correspondence by writing that,

The true, whether it be a matter or a proposition, is what accords, the accordant [*das Stimmende*]. Being true and truth here signify accord, and that in a double sense: on the one hand, the consonance [*Einstimmigkeit*] of a matter with what is supposed in advance regarding it and, on the other hand, the accordance of what is meant in the statement with the matter. (117)
So a thing or proposition agrees with its representation in some way because meaning in some way verifiable in the way it is signified. Second, truth lies in the agreement and acceptance that something given is true such that the truth is confirmed by the judgment of more than one person in an agreement of the thing. Traditional notions of truth as a proposition and agreement are based on a correspondence or agreement in pre-Socratic and even Kantian thought.

In our first foray into understanding correspondence, we can say that whether knowledge of the ideal or of material objects, the correspondence of what is given, such as in representational art, and what we know establishes an order wherein the parts to the whole agree upon the association of the sign to the signifier in a correspondence between one to the other. But this type of knowledge is also limited to the extent that knowledge is dependent on its own scope and limits of what can be known by what is known. There is truth or factual information in the correspondence between image or text to the meaning of its object because it conforms to what we do know about the object, (but it does not give us knowledge of the thing outside of what we know of it). We see this clearly in Pollock’s *Flame* because the image corresponds to what it represents in both its title and representation. It purports to be a flame, it looks like a flame, and the correspondence of it to an actual flame is valid because of what we know *a priori* a flame to be, according to our held mental images and knowledge of flames. For our present concerns with representation and *mimēsis*, art functions as a verifiable means by which the signified and the sign are in concordance and thereby participate in our understanding of representation as a form of correspondent truth.

Whether addressing this as a Pre-Socratic concept of correspondence or according to a Kantian explanation on the relatedness of things, there is a correspondence between images
and meanings. In this way the relationship between art or language and truth is built upon a ground of factual correspondence. Foundational imagery, such as the notion of a clock may be based upon an analogue clock or a wristwatch. In experiencing or seeing diverse forms of clocks, the mind can organize a myriad of timekeeping devices into a general notion of clock. This foundational image allows for further distinctions about clocks such as sundials, digital clocks, obelisks, hourglasses, clepsydras, incense, candle, and atomic resonance candle clocks to be known and recognize in both language and art. In this way, Pollock’s flame denotes a truth. It represents what is known. Or perhaps one of his hidden figures is seen to be a man. This is because of one’s experience in seeing the sign of a man as being rendered as anything from a generic portrait to a shadow of a figure or even a stick figure enables one to recognize the correspondence between the object of a man in the world to its sign, in this case Pollock’s symbolic figure. It is in correspondence between image and thing that mimêsis operates in truths of facts.

Signs and symbols, or copies of nature, are differing types of signifiers or mimetic modes or utterances which have the same functions which is to point to something else outside of them. They direct our attention to that which is signified; either the object or the concept being represented. They stand in for something which we cannot have always before our eyes, but which we might want to retain or keep in mind. They function as a substitution for the real, allowing it to be ever before us in the form of an image or painting. It is in correspondence between the symbol or representation and its meaning held in the mind which permits the function of knowledge and truth in relation to mimêsis. Pollock’s works are not just copies of indigenous forms, symbols and signs. Rather Pollock’s works convey our collective knowledge of Native American life and art transferring this knowledge into
new forms while pointing to its precedent origins. Because of the correspondence between what we see and know, Pollock’s works give us corresponding truths or knowledges. The recognition of the correspondence between a representation and its object gives two primary functions which have bearings on our present project. First, recognition of correspondences enables art to act as a declaration of knowledge in the very way Plato fears. Second, it enables art as mimēsis and mimeisthai to reproduce universal truths for viewers. Pollock’s work combines declarations of knowledge as correspondences between representation of figures, signs, and symbols and the natural world and the world of ideas. But most importantly, his work plays upon the way viewers experience art through recognition, mental imaging, and correspondence. Art is a direct representation of how the “I am” “thinks”. Upon this ground of learning, recognition, mental imaging, and correspondence, mimēsis is implicated in the role of art and knowledge.

**Myths and Mythos**

We have considered mimēsis in terms of its functions in knowledge as recognition, mental images, and correspondence. We have seen that representation has significant bearings on our understanding of knowledge as a correspondence between what is seen in the empirical world, and what is known as mental imagery in the mind and experience. Symbolic representation also corresponds to meaning by way of what is held in the mind as a mental image that the sign is meant to correspond to. Art envisions truths. Now we will consider mimēsis and its relationship to truth through an analysis of the notion of the mythos and its relationships in harmonia and consonance. For harmonia is the underlying ground upon
which mental imaging, recognition, and correspondence function, and mythos is the purpose for art.

While we could conclude our study of mimêsis with our present understanding of Pollock’s work as symbolic and empirical representation, metaphor, allegory (as these are implicated in how viewers think in terms of recognition, mental imaging, and correspondence), our analysis would still be lacking the most important relation between mimêsis and art, which is the distinct way Pollock’s work bridges the gap or schism in modern art and theory through considerations based on truth as mythos and as event. These missing or yet to be discussed elements are at the root of the issue of mythos, or truth and its representation in the myth. Because our current definitions of myth tend to associate myths with oral traditions and folklore, art’s role in myth and truth have been obscured. Thus, in this analysis we will excavate a lost and ancient understanding of truth and its representation and relationship to myth.

**Mimêsis and Mythos**

Aristotle’s *Poetics* gives us our first understanding of the concept of myth within the definition of mimêsis. From the Greek word μῦθος, or mûthos the myth is that which that conveys a significant truth or meaning or a type of storied conception of life. Mythos is expressed in the myth that reveals its meaning through artistic or expressive form. For Aristotle, this mythos can be read as a type of correspondence between the myth and its representation as a mythology. In *De Anima*, Aristotle writes that, “where the alternative of true and false applies, there we always find a sort of combining of objects of thought in a quasi-unity” (Aristotle, “De Anima” 430a25). He also explains that “an affirmation is a
predication of something toward something; a negation is a predication of something away from something” (430a25). Rather than say some specific thing exists to be true, it is the relationship of a thing to other thoughts or to its representation that it constitutes a truth. This definition of truth opens to the possibility of finding truth in things of themselves and in their absence, and in combinations of things or separations of things. In art, for example, the relation between an idea and its parts in terms of representation, absence, and appearance constitutes a correspondence between form and truth, or rather between mythos and the myth.

Aristotle extends this tradition in his treatise on poetry. He first indicates how the plot, or mimêsis as it is often translated, is the most important element which affects or causes catharsis (which has been called upon to critique Pollock’s paintings when transposed in theories of shamanic healing). But what is most important at this juncture is that Aristotle defines mimêsis as plot at the forefront of his treatise. He begins by explaining that the plot is primary to all other parts and elements of poetry or theater. “The Plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy” and “ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 1450.10). For Aristotle, the plot is the primary element that enables the conveyance of purifying emotions. But what are we referring to exactly in terms of a plot and how does this relate to representation? Aristotle gives us three modes that define plot, namely, mythos, mimêsis, and structure, all of which will now be addressed, for it is in Aristotle’s notion of plot that we best see the relationship between correspondence, truth, and art.

First Aristotle’s notion of myth is defined as plot which suggests that myth must become embodied, be given material form. Aristotle calls this concept mimêsis which is to
copy, illustrate, or represent. *Mimēsis* is not media specific, for whether by verse, music, or paint, the idea is given material and mimetic or representational form, as we have seen in our discussion on metaphor. But what is it to illustrate the mythic, to give it mimetic form? The myth must exist in some form whether as an idea in the mind of the artist, or a preexisting myth within the cultural tradition. But beyond this, the idea requires a form to be presented to our senses, whether in verse, music, paint or some other medium. The myth requires signification. In terms of *mimēsis* the signification of the myth is to make a copy of the thing in a new form or material, as we have seen in terms of naturalistic or idealistic representation as in symbolic, metaphorical, or allegorizing and its reiteration in performance and ritual. This is not to say an exact copy of the myth is required for the myth to be expressed or re-presented. The re-presentation can take any form in any media. Because all the arts are mimetic, the myth itself is the universal thing which finds material specificity in *mimēsis* or *mimeisthai* - its representation. Another way to understand this is by looking at Pollock’s figurative elements and idealistic drip elements, for they are mythic for several reasons. First, they evoke mythic stories, which is definable as a theatrical quality wherein the action of the myth is carried out. These stories are given in a structure or overall composition or arrangement of the pictorial parts, and in both naturalistic and idealistic representation, the myth is given form. For example, in Plate 1, Gouache painting, one of the drawings and paintings given to Henderson, Pollock presents a monumental act, like a final scene within a tragic play, within which each figure takes place (Fig. 53). The pile of tragic and pathetic figures before a crucifixion scene attests to a larger narrative wherein both image and narrative exemplify a truth. Or take for example Pollock’s painting *Eyes in the Heat*, 1946, one of Pollock’s first drip paintings (Fig. 26). Pollock paints faces in varied positions and
expressions and covers these with dripped paint that conceals and reveals parts of the whole. Each layer is covered over with yet another layer, like a palimpsest expressing an ongoing tragic truth within which each representation takes part. A monumental collection of pitiful faces speaks to a larger account wherein both image and narrative elicit a type of life story. Before the myth can be given, it must be given in material form within a compositional framework or structure.

Aristotle’s notion of plot is to say the narrative structure wherein the mythic is given form. He conceives of plot as a form of allegory in terms of what could plausibly occur within the context of a storied-narrative, something akin to the possibilities that art opens up rather than the specificities of history. In this, mythos as plot is less the mythic truth and more the embodiment of a notion, or rather the work of art. This notion also distinguishes Pollock’s form of myth as allegorical and ritual works of art rather than statements on indigenous ritual and supernatural beliefs.

Harmonia

The signifier – sign relationship in terms of truth has a long history, reaching back to Pre-Socratic thought and debated throughout medieval and contemporary philosophy. Anciently, art and language or logos were understood to be not only signifiers but signs as well. This thought hinges on the idea that there is a deeper harmony or concordance between objects and meaning beyond what is ascribed that constitute a “hidden ontological attunement (harmonia)” of things in the universe (Kearney 41). Within the notion of harmonia objects in the world (and universe) exist in a harmonious relationship to other objects. In this system, any one object is only as important as its role in relationship to the
whole of all objects. In this cosmology, philosophy is an essential way of life that encompasses not only thought, but myths and sacred rites as well that aid the journey of the soul to its apotheosis, all things being parts to the larger whole (Finamore xi).

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle gives us a concise method for recognizing truth within his theory of *mimēsis* as *harmonia* and truth. He wrote the *Poetics* as a type of handbook to guide poets in the making of epic and tragic poetry, such that these would best affect and inspire feelings of pity and fear (the requisite emotions for catharsis or a cleansing or purifying experience). We know that Pythagorean rules facilitated the purification and the doctrine of transmigration of souls through the harmonious connections between music, the order of the cosmos, and the ordering of the soul. In Pre-Socratic thought, the arts intended to purify (Gadamer, “Relevance” 102). Pre-Socratic philosophy concludes that there is a direct relationship between the world and the universe, and the way these are signified in terms of *mimēsis* and *mimeisthai*. Truth exists in both the expression and signification as well as in the harmony between its parts. The means by which this unity is signified, either as in the parts of the whole in its mutable forms or as an *a priori* condition of divine order is a matter of relationships. The signification of these relationships is brought about in a number of ways, through images, text, numbers, and harmonic ratios.

Much of this cosmology of harmonic relations was worked out first by Pythagoras and then more fully by his successors. In the Pythagorean model, unities between objects are explained through the relationships of elements and substances. The Pythagorean universe, as further developed by Philolaus of Croton (ca. 470 to ca. 385 BC) illustrates the universe as being made out of limiters (or finite material or element) and unlimited (infinite material or element), or material or measurable elements and elements unconstrained to material
structure such as the elements earth, air, fire, water, and space and time. Limiters set boundaries for which unlimited substances yield and combine. Limiters and unlimiteds fit together in harmonious ways which can be described mathematically. For example, the universe comes into being when unlimited fire is fit together with a corresponding limiter, the cosmic sphere. In Aristotle’s view of Pythagorean relations, objects - *phainomena* contain truths within them, “not because the appearances are unassailably accurate, but rather because, as he supposes, appearances tend to track the truth” (Shields). Appearances are parts within an overall relation of parts that evidence the truthfulness of the whole. Whether in whole or in part, truth is immanent when given form. Art presents to our view some measure of truth.

The ordering or pairing of limited and unlimited elements creates a unity and order that ancient Greeks termed *kosmos* (κόσμος), which means both “ordered-world” and also “ornament” in a way that connotes that the universe or world is ornamented with order. The primary expression of the order of the universe derives from ancient number theory wherein the number one signifies a totality from which all other numbers are harmoniously related parts. Another way to envision this is in Philolaus’ example of the numerical scale that structures and organizes limiters and unlimiteds in a unified expression of mathematical ratios. *Harmonia* or harmony is created in the relationship between the mathematical intervals of things, including sound and music. For example, the ratios 2:1, 3:2 and 4:3 respectively provide harmonious relations between things. What gives harmony between things is the mathematical relationships underlying such things. The beauty of *harmonia* is the way it presents or qualifies an overarching order amongst related things. It allows for portions of truths of the cosmos to be expressed in artistic form.
Pythagorean theory also noticed the harmonic intervals in music. Gadamer explains that in Pythagorean thought, music is an expression and practice of harmony, which was an important part of ancient cultic practice. He writes that “Pythagorean regulations concerning purity and the doctrine of the transmigration of souls clearly belong together. The earliest concept of imitation thus implies all three manifestations of order: the order of the cosmos, the order of music, and the order of the soul” (Gadamer, “Relevance” 102). Thus, *harmonia* is more than an adequate correspondence between things and the totality of their representation. It is also connected to purifying practices that reveal the nature of the order of the universe or Divine and Ideal Truth. This aspect of harmony, number theory, and music is preserved in Plato’s *Republic* wherein he made the “unadulterated preservation of musical order the basis for the order of human life in the polis” (102). Gadamer stresses how Pythagorean theory accounts for a certain universal truth in order and harmony. It accounts for “the miraculous order visible in the heavens above, where, apart from the irregular motion of the planets, which do not seem to describe a perfect circle around the earth, [yet] the same pattern constantly recurs” (101). Thus, in *mimeisthai* order as structure and relationship signifies the harmony of a well-ordered universe. Gadamer further explains the significance of *harmonia* in Ancient Greek thought and representation. “What is it that is imitated, according to Pythagorean teaching? It is the numbers and the ratios between them. But what are numbers? And what are these ratios? Clearly the essence of number is not something that we can perceive, but a relation that we can only conceive in our minds” (101). It is in *mimēsis* and *mimeisthai* that this order is represented or articulated, through numbers, harmonic intervals, language, and the arts as ideal structure, and as naturalistic and symbolic representation.
The relationship between principles and things is inherent in the argument of Parmenides of Elea as well, although Parmenides presents a contrary image of these relations between art and *harmonia*. Writing sometime after late sixth or early fifth century BC, Parmenides presented a view of an unchanging idealist universe which “so challenged the naïve cosmological theories of his predecessors that his major successors among the Pre-Socratics were all driven to develop more sophisticated physical theories in response to his arguments” and presented an altered view of relationship between things and the cosmos (Palmer). In a poem that describes a mysterious journey into the Night, Parmenides suggest that the unchanging universe cannot be signified by the changeable things in the material world. Parmenides’ poem challenges the notion of relational harmonious unity between all things within the cosmos and the world as being both equal interchangeable parts of a whole and also being references of that whole. Further complicating this challenge to *harmonia* is Parmenides’ concern that the world is an inadequate referent of the universe because it is apperceived through the senses which cannot be trusted. Parmenides, like Plato, believes that the universe can be signified through language and it is in language or *logos* that the correspondence between the universe and its representation is preserved (Russell, “History” 49). As Bertrand Russell explains,

> When you think, you think of something; when you use a name, it must be the name of something. Therefore both thought and language require objects outside themselves. And since you can think of a thing or speak of it at one time as well as another, whatever can be thought of or spoken of must exist at all times. Consequently there can be no change, since change consists in things coming into being or ceasing to be. (49)
So if a word (or in our case an image of a thing) exists and has meaning or referent, that word (or image) signifies a preexisting, unchanging, *a priori* concept or thing. While there are many theories about Parmenides’ core concepts as outlined in his complicated and only surviving work of poetry, one thing is certain – Parmenides breaks with Pre-Socratic theories about the unity of a universe manifest in the harmony of its material parts while maintaining that the universe can be expressed, represented, or signified in *logos*. Yet the outcomes of signification continue the idea of *harmonia*, in that the sign and signifier constitute a united whole such that one can state the nature of the existence of the universe, and this statement is proof of the universe’s existence. As Parmeniedes writes, “if one listens to the word of truth, it is the same thing to think and to be” (qtd. Kearney 42). Wittgenstein certainly disagrees with the power of language to signify the world, because for him, the world is more adequately represented by the mental image and its corresponding images in art.

Nevertheless, the notion of correspondence still remains between truth and its signification. *Mimēsis* in Pre-Socratic terms, then, is constituted by a harmony of principles (truth) to its expression in nature through *logos* or *technai* – the production or representation of such principles in letters and arts.

In art, *mythos* is immanent to its form because it is given or represented in some art form. Aristotle’s notion of concordance or *harmonia* which informs his notion of *mimēsis* as the totality of the parts to the whole underscores the way the myth can be given through diverse media, forms, and allegories. In this relationship, the Navajo shaman, Pollock painting, and Namuth filming constitute diverse media and forms of the same related allegory. The myth and its form as in art is the relationship between the thing and its referent, and it constitutes the fact that such truths are immanent to artistic expression. Thus, there is
an immanent and harmonious relationship between *mythos* and its representation and through the *harmonia* all representations are related parts.

This theatricality of mythic proportions demonstrates the nature of myth and its relationship to truth in terms of *mimēsis* as representation, correspondence, and *harmonia*. Timothy Gorringe, in *Earthly Visions: Theology and the Challenges of Art* observed that Pollock’s work returns a tragic vision to art that becomes the sole justification for painting. “Since psychographic expression could be sustained only by the most intense life feeling, the authentic artist was constrained to live at the highest emotional pitch” (Gorringe 179). While this view adheres to the myth of Pollock as the existential artist par excellence, it also suggests the mythic nature of Pollock’s work, which is to say that Pollock’s performative or ritual drip paintings (as reiterations of allegories of sand painters and their paintings) and theatrical representations are reaffirmations of the notion of *mythos* in its form as myth. Whether found in ancient art practices, or reinterpreted as modern re-presentations, art and art making evokes allegorical truths which are reflected in and immanent to art. Pollock’s works make manifest the truth of art as mythologies, the outward manifestations of myth and its varied representations. But Pollock’s work makes these notions abundantly clear by evoking mythological tendencies and forms of distant and present art forms, particularly those of ancient and contemporary American Indians. The relationship between Pollock’s mythologies and those of American Indian arts bears witness to art’s role in giving form to and uttering *mythos*. By making American Indian arts a point of reference and departure, Pollock reaffirms that *mythos* is universal and it is in *mimeisthai* that *mythos* is given form by way of mimetic representation through structure and composition. Exact meanings behind the indigenous signs and symbols that Pollock re-presented in his works are lost, but the function
of art to convey such meanings is retained in the symbols, metaphors, allegories and rituals of art in compositional forms. This interrelated relationship between mythos and myth, myth and mimēsis constitutes the harmonics of truths, Pythagorean unities, and the ordering of an ancient kosmos. Mimēsis, beyond the ways in which viewers think and perceive art, also constitutes the manner in which mythos as myths are constituted in material form. When Pollock’s work takes on the appearance and grandeur of the mythic, it is because of the way in which myth is embodied and structured in Pollock’s representational and ideal forms.

When Plato writes about the power of art, he agrees with Parmenides in that he acknowledges that knowledge of truth depends upon a proper signification in logos. But he declines to support the notion of harmonia. This is where Plato believes that art fails, for in painting, as in poetry, the works are, according to Plato, “inferior in respect of reality” (Plato, “Republic” 605). The artist only knows “how to imitate” and can therefore say nothing of the truth of what they imitate, for the “imitator knows nothing worth mentioning of the things he imitates” (602B). For Plato, the outward appearance of things is insufficient. One needs to have a richer, deeper, more adequate representation, one that points to a fuller description of how things really are. Plato explains that the arts play upon the weaknesses of vision and perception, giving an appearance of things, but failing to account for things in their proper measured, numbered and weighed attributes. Viewers are “equally ignorant” for they will praise the paintings or poetry for their meter, color, harmony or technical brilliance, and still fail to gain any true knowledge about the things being represented (601B, C). Viewers will fail to have an adequate knowledge of things in their true natures as having weight, size, and dimension. Because the arts imitate, they fail to account for the true nature of things, and they convey or reveal only appearances but not their true structure and form. Viewers are in
danger of accepting such mere appearances as truths and thus never learning of the truth of real things. For example, an object, whether near or far, “does not appear the same size, I presume, as when viewed from a distance” and “the same things appear bent and straight when seen in water or out of it, or concave and convex because sight is misled by colors; and every other similar sort of confusion is clearly present in our soul. It is because it exploits this weakness in our nature that illusionist painting is nothing short of sorcery, and neither are jugglery or many other similar sorts of trickery” (602C, D). The problem for Plato is that our field of vision makes objects appear to bend or to be smaller or larger than what they actually are, and the problem with art is that it draws appearances from sight rather than the sciences of measure. Socrates asks Glaucon, “And haven’t measuring, counting, and weighing proved to be most welcome assistants in these cases, ensuring that what appears bigger or smaller or more numerous or heavier does not rule within us, but rather what has calculated or measured or even weighed?” (602, D). Art, being based on sight, can disrupt the relationship between the sign and its signifier, relaying falsehoods or appearances rather than adequately relaying actual truths about things. Thus, the correspondence or harmonious relationship between a thing’s true properties and its representation is disrupted by the arts. For Plato, Pollock’s *Flame* is a pernicious lie, a departure from the true nature of the actual properties of heat and gasses. But in Pollock’s *Flame* we see that (according to Pre-Socratic thought) correspondence reveals the nature of truth as being that which can be signified within a harmonious correspondence between truth and its representation within a larger whole wherein text and image participate interchangeably – in representing this relationship through *mimēsis*. For in Pre-Socratic thought, it is the relationships rather than distinct elemental properties which signify *mythos*, and this relatedness supports our analysis of *mimēsis*. In this
way, \emph{mimēsis} as allegory reveals relationships between truths and their articulation in form. Art participates in ways that echo the relationship between sight, image, and mental image in cognition. The image relates to truth because of what is known \textit{a priori} and thus the image need not be scientifically accurate to convey such truths.

Aristotle applies the same unity of the parts to whole relationships found in Pre-Socratic thought. For Aristotle, statements have inherent relations to truth and judgments. Truthful statements are predicated upon the measure of the relationship or ratios of truth within them. In this model even \textit{endoxa} or opinions are reputable, credible, entrenched, or common because they represent degrees or ratios of truthfulness and because of this, philosophy or reason can ascertain degrees of truth through any related expressions of truth. For such expressions, statements or ideas become repeated and accepted into the common vernacular wherein they are unreflectively endorsed and reaffirmed. Upon reflection, these statements are seen to be varying degrees of appearances or manifestations or expressions of wisdom. Statements advocate in various amounts of wisdom. Aristotle explains that when reflecting on a matter, one tends to consult with wisdom from the past in order to find more germane explanations by earlier sages that help clarify a problem to be solved or a solution to a problem of question. This is why in domains of inquiry we are likely to find ourselves seeking guidance from our predecessors even as we call into question their ways of articulating the problems we are confronting.

Aristotle’s conviction that truth is relational is borne out in the \textit{Poetics} wherein Aristotle makes it clear that poetry (or any of the mimetic arts) ought to base its plots on that which is plausible to happen, to be a realistic as possible. The imitation need not be an exact copy of an event or object, but there must be a similarity or a correspondence between the
two. Aristotle is particularly clear in Chapter Nine that poetry need not recount exact events in history, for that is the work of the historian. Aristotle was more interested in the possibilities of art than the conveyance of a specific cosmic spirituality. As Aristotle writes,

> It is also clear from what has been said that the function of the poet is not to say what has happened, but to say the kind of thing that would happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity. The historian and the poet are not distinguished by their use of verse or prose; it would be possible to turn the works of Herodotus into verse, and it would be a history in verse just as much as in prose. The distinction is this: the one says what has happened, the other the kind of thing that would happen. For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars. The universal is the kind of speech or action which is consonant with a person of a given kind in accordance with probability or necessity; this is what poetry aims at, even though it applies individual names. (Heath 12:51b)

Art then does not prove, but rather proposes possibilities. What is important is that there is a relationship between how art evidences in some way a larger truth, even if that evidence is only partial or plausible. In fact, plausibility as a relation within the overall harmonics of truth is important enough a fact that it forms the subject of Aristotle’s now lost six books on the poems of Homer. His text, known to us by later authors, discussed the passages in Homer which Aristotle considered to be implausible (Heath vii).
Aristotle’s notions of truth, particularly in regards to art, while not to be exhaustively discussed here, are as Pre-Socratic notions of truth: related parts of a unity or whole. The harmonics of the overall is greater than the individual properties of its parts. This is much like the way a modern orchestra functions. All instrumental parts are significant in the way in which they contribute to the overall sound and timbre of the musical score. Individually, each instrument is lacking, but taken as a whole, each plays a part but in terms of differing tones, melodies, and harmonies. Thus, each distinct part evidences some ratio of the overall truth of the whole.

For Pre-Socratics and Aristotelians, what can be considered to be true is evident as a correspondence and harmony between the unity of its parts and this unity can be expressed in diverse ways. The expression of the truth of harmony becomes a part of the overall unity of the thing. Augustine echoed this same sentiment in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* when he suggested one that, “wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master” (Augustine 88). Truth is relational and all truth, no matter where it is found, is a manifestation of higher truth. Truth becomes immanent within its many related forms. In the same way, art evidences the truth of which it envisions. In Pollock’s symbolic, metaphorical and allegorical representations, each artwork evidences a harmonious correspondence with what each one represents. *Harmonia* constitutes the relationship between truth and its representation. In Plato, truth is idealist and beyond the ability of art to represent it. Truth can only be given adequately in words. But in Aristotle and the Pre-Socratics, transcendent truth is immanent to its expression or form because of its relation to other forms in *harmonia*. *Harmonia* is the basis of the variety and relatability of all the mythological parts.
Consonance

We have investigated truth as relational, as in narrative stories bearing truths or conceptions of life and finding form in mythologies and art. We have also noted the notion of *harmonia* as the ground upon which mythologies in varied forms, modes, and media bear portions of life truths. We will now consider *consonance*, the unity of all these varied but related parts. Aristotle’s *Poetics* defines *mimēsis* as a totality of its parts within a *harmonia*, *symphonia*, or consonance. The term consonance, from the Latin *consonantia* is to denote harmony and agreement. The term derives from the Greek term *symphonia* which is to say consensus. It denotes ancient Greek beliefs that the *kosmos* is organized as a great and purposeful symphony. This notion of organization and harmonics organizes Aristotle’s account for content, meaning, or truth in art and how these truths are expressed or signified in material form through a definition of plot as *mythos*, structure, and *mimēsis*. Plot as mythic structure and illustration becomes the nexus point between idea and material, or idea made material. Another way to consider structure is through the term or composition which provides the underlying order and arrangement of all other parts and forms. Or, another way of suggesting structure, plot, composition, is the term *consonance*. All parts are tied together through *consonance*, or a unifying field. Thus the speech of a character in the theatre or its appearance in art is consonant with the probable ways in which the character would naturally speak or appear. The rising and falling action represented within a work is consonant with probable actions according to nature.

Plot as structure, myth, and illustration within *harmonia* and the relation of parts allows for a myriad of possibilities in which the myth can be illustrated. But all of the possibilities reside within a qualifier of both probability and consonance to each other part. In other
words, the characters on the stage or in art, with their personality traits or types, costumes, props, and words with a particular syntax such as rhythm and assonance, articulation and pitch, and all other parts of a play or picture are elements that can be designed and executed in a myriad of potential ways. The constant within the craft of artmaking is the overarching structure which gives form and limits to what is otherwise a cacophony of possibilities. Probable or potential variables and outcomes are unified by a structure that allows and limits these variables. It is this unity or relationship between structural forms to expressive possibilities which constitutes consonance. Thus, consonance allows for a unity within the work that ties probabilities with structure, and varieties in speeches and spectacle (meaning the props, costume, music, etc.) with the overall myth. It is upon this joining between myth and media, idea and nature, universal and particular that constitutes Aristotle’s notion of consonance – that balance or harmony between form and content.

Aristotle stresses that any given medium expresses mythos adequately and effectively. But what is important is how the aesthetic elements within any given medium are united to the whole of the work of art. Aristotle writes, “As therefore, in the other imitative arts, the imitation is one when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 1451.20). In other words, the concordance is between the idea, its representation and the form of that representation. It is consonance or composition that secures the harmonious relation of all the parts of art. In consonance, the work becomes a whole and complete thing comprised of mythos and its diffusion into mimetic forms. In
Pollock’s work, we find a deep and rich tradition of varied signifying practices, from symbolic to idealist representation. We can say that his idealist tendencies evoke notions of structure as in *mimeisthai* as the representation of divine order. When Gadamer links idealist structure with the representation of the cosmos, he validates Pollock’s idealist tendencies. But we can also say that Pollock’s idealist form presents a structure as a plot, that which provides the form into which the mythic can reside. Gadamer explains this connection between idealist forms of art and ideal order. He acknowledges the role form plays as an overarching structure composition, or consonance upon which all other forms occur and visually interact (Gadamer, “Relevance” 101). Further, the relationship between idealist form and hidden figures suggest an immanence wherein the mythic finds expression amongst representational and ideal parts which unite mimetic particulars and universals into one harmonious expression of the whole. In both Platonic and Aristotelian thought, truth as *mythos* is embodied within artistic form. In Platonic, as well as Parmenidean thought, *mythos* can only be described through *logos* or philosophy. But in Aristotle and Pre-Socratic thought, the relationship between truth and its form in myth is based on the notion of plot, structure, composition or *mimêsis*. Thus, *mimêsis* constitutes the consonant field upon which all varieties, modes, and materials of the myth can be envisioned and expressed. The transcendent as *mythos* is immanent to its form through a larger construct wherein truth is expressed or envisioned as relational (as in *harmonia*) to the larger whole of which it belongs. If truth is a *harmonious* relation between the divine and its expression as order, structure, or composition, and these can be represented in some symbolic or idealized way, then Pollock’s work evidences the notion of truth in the harmonious interplay between idealist form and significant content. When Pollock recuperates the indigenous American
Indian spirit in art, he revivifies the relationship between *mythos* and myth as mythological structure, *harmonia*, and *consonance* between all its constituent or represented parts. Art then is implicated in the way in which philosophical tenets or mythological truths are given in expressive form.

*Mimêsis and the Locus Sanctus*

We have considered the issue of myth and truth from the point of reference of knowledge, with its correspondence, recognition, and mental imaging and concluded that art is implicated in learning and knowledge. We have also considered how art participates in myth making and expressions of truths, not as mathematical proofs but as plausible and related expressions of an idea, a truth, *mythos*, or a myth. One of the conclusions we derive from our discussion is that notions of myth and truth from ancient philosophical conceptions are aligned closely with how art symbolically represents, in terms of expressive parts to a larger whole. Symbolic and naturalistic representation gives views and referents, convey knowledge and information, and participate in the larger discourse of assigning meaning to greater themes and ideas.

But in our overall project of *mimêsis*, particularly in context of a divided and polemical- modernist theory on Pollock, there is an opposition in how either idealist and/or subjective form is interpreted. Modernists consider Pollock’s drip paintings as formalist, devoid of myth and meaning. Jungian critics imbue Pollock’s drip works with subjective meaning based on concerns of existential man and issues of sickness and healing. At the core of this debate is the issue of who has the right or the truth of Pollock in mind and can speak...
for his works? There is a similar opposition in Aristotelian and Platonic thought that questions truth and its representation, but at the core, the question is one of location rather than representation. The key difference between Platonic and Aristotelian schools of thought with regards to *mimēsis*, particularly in relation to Pollock and modern abstract art, lies in the location of truth, the *locus sanctus*. There are two points that we will excavate at this point; first, the differences between Aristotle and Plato with regards to the *locus sanctus*, and second, we will summarize with a discussion on the location of interlocutor as the determining factor in the iteration of truth and its myth, particularly as it pertains to critical arguments on who has the right to speak for Pollock. *Mimēsis* as consonance or plot, wherein the immanence of *mythos* and myth constitutes a harmonious relation or *harmonia*, reveals not only the character but also the location of that truth. Both Aristotle and Plato agree that *mimēsis* bears *mythos* through mythic representation. But Plato and Aristotle also have differing opinions about the location of truth, the *locus sanctus*. Although Plato questions the validity of artistic representations and the potential for untruths, partial truths, or falsehoods to be represented, he admits that art conveys some related content to or away from truth.

He prefers the language of poetry or philosophy for representing truth. For Plato, philosophy claims the privilege of speaking truths. For Plato, the *locus sanctus* of truth abounds in the un-representable thing in itself. Unpresentable but understood in the intellect, Plato signifies *mythos* in terms of the Theory of Forms, around abstract concepts or the thing-in-itself that is iterated in mathematics and particularly in geometric shapes. Thus, Plato put forth his theory of the embodiment of the thing-in-itself in the forms of that which is otherwise un-representable, hence the half-equilateral triangles signifying fire, air, and water that make up the simplest elements in the universe are un-representable. These are not
objects of sight but are given as objects through symbolic representation or mimêsis. These signifying geometries, even though present as mental images, are, according to Plato, not to be confused with the location of the thing-in-itself, which resides in the transcendent or the abstract and non-spatiotemporal realm. Or in other words, the forms are given to logos, and like myths are representations which are given in a holy place.

Kant further articulates the locus sanctus as being apart from human intuition or knowledge. Because one can only know what is experienced and what appears to the senses, the thing-in-itself cannot be known. Kant calls this transcendental idealism,

We have therefore wanted to say that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us; and that if we remove our own subjective or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What may be the case with objects in themselves and abstracted from all this receptivity of our sensibility remains entirely unknown to us. We are acquainted with nothing except our way of perceiving them, which is peculiar to us, and which therefore does not necessarily pertain to every being, though to be sure it pertains to every human being. We are concerned solely with this. Space and time are its pure forms, sensation in general its matter. We can cognize only the former a priori, i.e., prior to an actual perception, and they are therefore called pure intuition; the latter,
however, is that in our cognition that is responsible for its being called a posteriori cognition, i.e., empirical intuition. The former adheres to our sensibility absolutely necessarily, whatever sort of sensations we may have; the latter can be very different. (Kant, A42/B59-60)

In this point, Kant agrees with Plato. The human mind cannot perceive in space time, or in the appearance of material things (in space-time), the things which pertain to the intuitions or intellect, the thing-in-itself. The thing-in-itself can be represented but it cannot be revealed by form or material.

This emphasis on the un-representability of the ideal forms the justification for idealist art, which only gives an account of the thing-in-itself without presenting it. According to Nietzsche the problem of representing is the core issue in aesthetics more generally, and modern art more specifically. Nietzsche describes the problem as being one wherein “aesthetics began with Plato and Aristotle at the very time when “the great art and also the great philosophy which flourished along with it comes to an end” (qtd. Gadamer, “Relevance” xiv-xv). Nietzsche is rather concerned with art’s role in “representing the absolute, that is, of establishing the absolute definitively as such in the realm of historical man” (xv). He is concerned with the location of the divine, which is un-representable, within the temporal or representable sphere. Since the long project of philosophy and aesthetics lies in the attempt to articulate that which cannot be represented, philosophy has a problem, which Nietzsche knew. As Gadamer explains, “Hegel considered Plato’s Parmenides to be the greatest masterpiece of ancient dialectic, precisely because in this work Plato proved the impossibility of determining any single Idea by itself, independently of the totality of Ideas” (137). In other words, the Absolute, the thing-in-itself resists being known and its location is
problematic as well. The un-representable can only be known through symbolic
representation and in *harmonia* or in the represented parts of it, not in totality, and thus its
location remains incomprehensible.

In his attempt to know the Absolute, Plato locates the Ideal to the realm of the
intellect. He divides the being into three parts within a hierarchical structure that preferences
the mind over the passions and the body. Within this hierarchy all parts are ordered within a
value system of unequal parts needing regulation. What’s at stake in Plato’s thought is the
relocation of the *locus sanctus* from its location from within the mental images of the objects
and forms of the empirical world to the world of language that would overturn ancient
theories of harmonic truths. For in Plato, any representation of truth lies outside of truth and
imitation produces profane copies.

Aristotle, however, draws distinctions between *mythos*, *mimèsis*, and myth, not in
terms of a hierarchical structure, but more in agreement with Pythagorean theories of
*harmonia* or consonance, and immanence. In the case of painting, meaning is conveyed
through representation which in turn gives aesthetic pleasure. Knowledge is attained through
empathizing with imitations and this recognition of truth not only brings aesthetic and
intellectual pleasure but also knowledge. Representation locates the knowledge of truth, not
in *logos*, but in its representation. Truth becomes immanent to its form and expression.
Through *mimèsis* as representation, recognition, and correspondence, *mimèsis as mythos*, and
*mimèsis* as composition or myth, Aristotle restores a Pre-Socratic notion of *mimèsis* as a
*mythos-mimèsis-myth* triad that constitutes truth in terms of correspondence, *harmonia*,
consonance, and immanence. In so doing, the location of truth, the *locus sanctus* resides, not
in words, but in mental images and art.
In contrast to Platonic and Kantian justification for pure form in art, Aristotle provides a means by which to account for figuration within idealistic form in Pollock’s representational work. For Aristotle, the *locus sanctus* resides in the space-time *phainomena*, or phenomena immanent to concrete material. This is not to mean any material per se, but rather it is exclusively to living materials which have a soul and are constituted in terms of causation or its relationship to all parts within causation. Thus, the material of a thing, together with its underlying structure, shape, or form, along with the agent itself responsible for change and transformation and its final purpose make up the totality of the living thing. Because living things are animated with a soul that dwells in material form, having causes to transform and change into a final form or cause, the *locus sanctus* resides within given categorical processes or events. Taking Aristotle’s basic view of truth as immanent to its expression in material form, whether in utterance within myth or in the study of nature, the truth of a thing lies within its living parts and related totality as *harmonia* in consonance.

We have discussed the location of truth in terms of Platonic idealism and transcendence and Aristotelean immanence, and now we must look at the residence of truth in relation to the interlocutor. Who has the right to represent or speak of truth? Is it art or philosophy? For this is the polemic within not only the debate between Plato and Aristotle, but also at the core of the polemical-modern episteme between modern formalism in Greenberg and surrealist subjectivity in Rosenberg. Who speaks to the meaning or the truth in art? The second point that constitutes the difference between idealism and immanence, in Platonic and Aristotelian thought, and modern and postmodern art (or the divided modern theory) involves the interlocutor in its utterance of the truth in terms of the *diegesis - mimēsis* -*mythos* paradigm. Another way of expressing this difference is that the primary difference
between the formality of European Primitivism and the mimēsis of American Primitivism, or rather formalist art and idealist-representational works of Pollock, lies in the logic of diegesis and mimēsis.

In the article “Diegesis – Mimesis” Halliwell explains the narrative properties underlying both ancient discourses. Diegesis, contrary to contemporary definitions more generally refers to the communication within a discursive and temporal framework. It generally refers to the voice or narration of the muthologos, or rather the poet or the storyteller by way of or “by means of mimēsis” or direct speech as it is voiced by the characters or actors. Diegesis speaks to the narrative content of a play, poem, epic, or story. It denotes the narration as it is voiced by both the actors and the narrator as in Homer’s tales. According to Halliwell, Socrates explains the “diegesis/mimesis complex” in the Republic so that he can underscore the importance of didactic mythos (Halliwell, “Diegesis”129). Halliwell explains that,

From the outset … he makes the important assumption that stories/narratives (muthoi, which signifies traditional “myths” but also artfully constructed stories more broadly) can embody and convey value-laden beliefs about the world. It is clear, moreover, that before reaching the typology of Book 3, Socrates treats authors of muthoi as globally and supra-textually responsible for everything “said” in their works: he thus criticizes Homer, without apparent discrimination, for passages in the voice of both the poetic narrator and individual characters. (129)
In other words, diegesis gives the right to speak to the narrator, while mimēsis puts expression in the characters or other arts. So, our discussion on knowledge, truth and myth, and its location, constitutes a paradigm of the locus sanctus as immanence that is implicated in both Platonic and Aristotelean thought. For Plato’s discourse on art defines art as having a didactic purpose, even one which it cannot possibly fulfill because art can only represent truth. For Plato, the myth as truth-bearing mimēsis must convey a singular or specific truth unsullied by multiple or digressive voices and must be given in philosophy. As we have seen, art shows through correspondence, recognition, and mental images, rather than tells. For Plato, only one privileged voice should evoke truths or the symbolic. The arts however constitute more than one voice, for they are a digression or a multiplicity that alters the purity of the myth and threatens to degrade the unity of the polis. The arts reveal portions and parts of the whole. Too many voices dilute the mythos and alter its utterance from the monologic-supra-author. At its core, the discursive and digressive distribution of mythos relies on the “psychology of both the performer and (by extrapolation) audience” rather than relying expressly on the interlocutor (130). What Plato or Socrates is most concerned with is the “inducement” for the audience to empathize (through imagination) with the mimetic delivery of the myth.

Plato’s definition of mimēsis does not differ from that which we see in Aristotle’s discourse. Both agree that mimēsis connotes imitation and representation as practiced in the visual arts, poetry, drama, and music. In the broadest sense, mimēsis denotes to representation, depiction, and expression in various media (visual and musical as well as poetic). The differences we have cited so far are concerned with truth in art and its location. Plato’s problem is not with mimēsis per se, but rather the relationship between mimēsis and
the imagination and the distance between this and the forms or un-representable truths. Further, Plato’s concern is less with mimēsis than with the location of the utterance, the interlocutor. In mimetic poetry, the poet utters what is or what might be as that which constitutes the distance between the viewer and the grander narrative of divine truth. In rhetoric and philosophy, the philosopher utters truth and idealistically brings the viewer to a closer understanding of that truth (132-134).

Aristotle’s use of the terms varies little in meaning from that of Plato’s. Aristotle maintains the broader definition of mimēsis as representation or imitation among all the mimetic arts, including painting, music and dance in addition to poetry and theater. But this broader use of the term, beyond art and poetry, allows Aristotle to consider the conveyance of the myth without assigning any responsibility for the myth to the narrator or any particular actor or part player in the case of the other arts and media. In other words, “Aristotle strips his categories of the normative judgments made by Socrates in the Republic. He shows no sign of taking dramatic representation to be intrinsically more powerful, or less psychologically “distanced,” than narrative; nor, accordingly, does he think that the one raises greater ethical concerns than the other (133). Aristotle allows for deigesis, which is to say that the narration of the myth can be given in either the narrator or the actor’s voices, or a combination of the two, or it can be distributed interchangeably and in substitution among the chorus, the dancers, paintings and artworks, music, poetry and other media.

Both Plato and Aristotle conceive of “diegesis by means of mimēsis” but by the use of the term mimesis, Plato sees the mimetic arts as distanced from diegesis while Aristotle leaves open the possibility of diegesis through mimēsis. Plato seeks to keep mythos in its representation as pure or close to the ideal as possible and we see this same articulation in
formalist European Primitivism and abstract arts, which present the structure of myth without enticing the viewer to sympathize psychologically with the myth. Truth as mimetic plot or structure can be ascertained by way of an abstract disinterest or intellectual pleasure.

Aristotle on the other hand, as in American Primitive arts and the works of Pollock, opens the broader possibility that mythos is conveyed through the mimêsis metaphor-representation-mythos-correspondence paradigm, thus opening up the possibility of learning and pleasure that viewers take when recognizing truth (“Poetics” 1449.25). Aristotle, through diegesis allows all arts, in a harmonious whole, to participate in expressing the myth. He does not say that myths can only be read by the poet, or that certain myths can only be represented in certain media in the way that Lessing or Greenberg would. Rather, all arts are mimetic and participate equally in expressing universal truths through harmonia and consonance which finds material specificity only in mimêsis - its representation.

Applied to Pollock’s figurative elements and the notion of mimetic paradigm as mimêsis as allegory-mythos-correspondence, the location of the Aristotelian interlocutor qualifies Pollock’s work as mythic through its mimetic content and form and gives art the right to speak to such truths. Plato, Picasso’s Cubism, and Greenbergian abstraction claims the un-representability of truth can only be described abstractly but not represented. But if the mythic is primarily a cathartic element, then it is through mimêsis that this act is carried out. Mimêsis in both its role as myth and representation is the means by which one learns, recognizes truth, and/or experiences catharsis. As Aristotle writes,

First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no
less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. We have evidence of this in the facts of experience…the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, ‘Ah, that is he.’ (Aristotle, “Poetics”1448.5)

Thus, Aristotle's claim is that mimēsis is primarily didactic and no matter the source of the utterance of the myth, mythos is recognized and understood. Rather than transcendent and ascertained through thought alone, the divine is immanent to its expression. Pollock, by invoking myth in his work claims the right to be the interlocutor of a truth, expressed in art rather than words. But he also claims for art the right to return to the representation of the mythic. Mimēsis in terms of the representation of mythos through painterly myth constitutes correspondence and harmonia which reveals the character and location of truth. This relationship between the didactic mimēsis as allegory-mythos-correspondence and its mimetic utterance in deigesis is revealed in Pollock’s mythic and allegorical works. It is problematic for the philosopher (who claims to be the direct interlocutor for wisdom) when the artist listens to the muse.

This excavation of mimēsis as mythos or truth and its relationship between myth and form is primary to our broader understanding of mimēsis, and also brings us back to an understanding of the divided and even polemical modernist critique of Pollock’s work. It demonstrates the divide in modernism between formal abstraction and representation and thereby reintroduces the notion of idealist truth which was lost in Greenberg and the subsequent modernist critiques of Pollock’s work. For in formalism, there is no interlocutor. In the case of a sign or symbol the interlocutor is the authored narrator. But when allegory and ritual come into play a myriad of forms reveals differing viewpoints of truth. The
interlocutor becomes multi-vocal. There is an underlying opposition in Platonic and Aristotelian notions of *mimēsis* and the location of truth which are likewise evident in the larger modern art and criticism polemic. But Pollock’s work overcomes the divisions in modern art by reclaiming the right of art to be mimetic in multiple ways and to therefore claim its right as interlocutor of the mythos of which it represents and gives form.

*Mythos, Alētheai and the Performance of Art*

Our fourth and final point concerns the dialectic of art as a process or the event or happening of art, which we find in terms of Heidegger’s notion of *alētheai*. First we will define *alētheai* and second we will look at *alētheai* in terms of propositional function and material syntax and event. We have considered art in its role as representing myths in a variety of harmonious forms consonant to the myth itself. In this united orientation, art occurs in time as an event or happening of art. The event of art is the coming together or happening of all the related mimetic forms, modes, and functions of art in the representation of *mythos*. The event of *alētheai* is that which discloses the unity of art’s related parts. We can look to Martin Heidegger for an account of truth as *alētheai* in his work *Being and Time*. In this work, truth is a phenomenological orientation towards a thing, which makes it less a verifiable correspondence between the agreement of one thing to another, or a thing to its meaning (as we discussed in Chapter Five), and more of an unconcealing or unveiling of truth by virtue of an intention or attitude toward that thing, more like in terms of harmonious relations of that which art reveals or represents in consonant ways. For Heidegger, this notion of truth is called *alētheai*. The intention of art is the representation of its object, whether in
naturalistic or idealistic form, and this coming together of the myth and in its represented form enables the work of art to come into being. This opening or disclosing of the work is the truth of the work of art, or *alētheai*.

*Alētheia* for Heidegger is a departure from Platonic notions of metaphysical idealism, *a priori*, and the corrected-ness of apprehending and asserting (3). Plato believes that essential truth is situated in the highest of the Ideals. Knowing truth is a matter of apprehending or seeing truth correctly. This definition recalls Parmenides’ ideas (found in Plato’s works) that imply our everyday mode of ‘knowing’ is based on the realm of appearances and shadows, situating us in Heraclitus’ realm of ‘flux’. In Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* there is a distinct emphasis on sight and seeing, perceiving and apprehending the light of the sun over the darkened shadows within the cave. Truth is evident, ascertainable, and verifiable through powerful and deep insights. Likewise, the reverse comes into play – there can be deceptions, falsehoods. One of Plato’s concerns with art is that it can be deceptive. The artist in particular is one who deceives and “knows nothing worth mentioning of the things he imitates, but that imitation is a form of play, not to be taken seriously, and that those who attempt tragic poetry, whether in iambics or heroic verse, are all altogether imitators” (Plato, “Republic” 447). These imitators are “concerned with the third remove from truth” or with making art objects that imitate or have the likeness of a thing without comporting its true nature or use. Following Platonic idealism, Heidegger is concerned that philosophy on the whole (and technology) focuses on verifying truth rather than disclosing or uncovering truth. Rather than focusing on an ultimately higher ground situated in the Forms, Heidegger’s truth focuses on essences or conditions of the phenomenological experience of truth as grounded in *alētheai*.
In Heidegger’s view all things already exist for us in a pre-existing world full of things and meanings. Before we arrive at meaning, we are thrown into a world of objects by birth. Meaning is accrued in the process of engaging with objects in the world as in Dasein, the subject always oriented to its world. If we compare Heidegger’s model to art then the objects of the world are sorts of materials and tools ready for use or fashioning. But these objects have meanings that are pre-given and pre-existent. Even so, not all things are understood for their meanings or focused on at the same time. Rather, all things are apperceived in terms of how they will be of use for us. The collective and individual use and engagement with the materials of the world condition an agreement of judgments or meanings. The truth of a thing is uncovered or revealed through the process of collective and pre-existing judgments and new assessments. As things are in play or put into use, meanings are ascribed to them. Once these things are accepted into common understandings and meanings, a truth is proclaimed or revealed about such things. Likewise, things fall out of use and their truth can become hidden, concealed, and covered over. The process of unconcealment is dialectical in that as some things are revealed and unconcealed, other things which reside out of present view or use become concealed or hidden. So, for Heidegger, truth is experienced in the ways it is revealed (or not). It is also historically contingent upon collective intensions and agreements. The most important, evident, or immanent aspect in the correspondence between a thing and its truth or meaning is its uncovering or unconcealment. Truth revealed (or concealed) is an act or event.

There are two divergent yet related arguments that come into play in the unconcealing of truth, both of which relate to our discussion on the work of art. First, there is the unveiling of truth itself within a phenomenological intention or focused attention in doing so. We see
this unveiling in Pollock’s last paintings wherein he deliberately disclosed his former hidden figures, as in his painting *The Deep* (Fig. 78). In a letter Pollock wrote to his friend Alfonso Ossorio in 1951, Pollock said, “I’ve had a period of drawing on canvas in black- with some of my early images coming thru – think the non-objectivists will find them disturbing – and the kids who think it simple to splash a Pollock out” (Karmel, “Interviews” 79). Rather than concealing and hiding the figures, Pollock intentionally made them visible, unconcealing them and revealing them. Secondly, there is the syntax in which this occurs, the poetry or artistry of the unveiling itself. This is also to say the forms of *mimēsis* (natural and ideal representation) and the modes of *mimēsis* (symbol, metaphor, allegory, and ritual) make up the syntax within the overall structure and composition of art that envisions the *mythos* of the work of art. Third, Heidegger’s analysis on truth and art is helpful in our understanding of truth as the dialectic of transcendent and immanent in *alētheai*, and our understanding of the work of art as a syntax or signifier of truth, which corresponds to our expanded definition of *mimēsis*. We can see the assertion of both types of truth in Pollock’s drip paintings and final paintings. First, in terms of propositional openings, it is clear that Pollock juxtaposes the hidden figure beneath a swirl of abstract interlacing webbing. The placement of his figures was concealed and forgotten, only to resurface with careful scrutiny and with the help of modern x-ray equipment, and in the case of the later paintings, figures are revealed deliberately. Figures are at once revealed and concealed, hidden and disclosed, truth and untruth, and forgotten and remembered in the critical emphasis on Pollock’s abstract qualities. Second, there are the material qualities of paint mixed with sand and other bits of contemporary objects, and the manner in which the paint is applied, through an allegorical performance. Combined, the concealing / unconcealing and allegorical performance
works together within a world or harmonious whole, wherein a creative freedom enables an openness upon which the truth in art happens.

Heidegger’s essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*, clarifies the question at hand between material and *mimēsis* in the openness of *alētheai* as one of totality. It is not merely the formal object that is the work of art, but rather the materials, forms, intentions of the artist, and the final form of art that enables its unveiling and happening of truth. Heidegger explained, “The work’s becoming a work is a way in which truth becomes and happens” (Heidegger, “Origin” 185). This emphasis on process and action is reiterated in his statement that, “The works createdness, however, can obviously be grasped only in terms of the process of creation” or in terms of its *happening* (183). In other words, the forms, modes and
functions of *mimēsis* only come together in the creation of the work of art – in the event of the work of art. These elements of art enable the creation of a “world” or a setting in which the truth of the work becomes immanent to the work. In the work meaning as immanence becomes evident. It unfolds as an act of truth, ascertained by the viewer. What is important is not just meaning or truth but the unveiling of that truth. Art is the “becoming” and the “setting to work” of truth (140). Unlike our discussion on emblems and symbols where the metaphor grants that such are imbued with meanings, and as these meanings are accepted, emblems become symbolic representations of a truth (for example, bees symbolizing industry or power and wealth), *alētheai* is less concerned with corresponding or metaphorical truths and more focused on the conditions from which truth can be revealed. Thus, we are not saying that *alētheai* constitutes meaning in mimetic arts, but rather that in *mimēsis* the possibility of truth is revealed as *alētheai* or as the coming together of all the constituent parts of *mimēsis* as the event of art.

In summary, *mimēsis* allows for the representation of truth, the *mythos* in the myth. *Alētheai* allows for the performance of art as an event which creates the unveiling that brings forth the myth. The mythic, given form, requires both representation or *mimēsis* and the event of the work or *alētheai*. In light of Aristotle’s notion of myth and immanence, Heidegger’s analysis recovers the possibility of immanence as the happening in a work of art, because of the unity of the subject-object in art and its expression in *mimēsis*, and because of the way this unity enables the event of art, or *alētheai*. The performance of art demonstrates the nature of art as immanent in the dialectic between *mythos*, myth and its representation in *mimēsis*. It also reveals truth as an event with the result that recognition, cognition, imaging, and memory of this truth becomes immanent to participants. In the process new knowledge is
formed by the modes of recognition and knowledge. *Alētheai* is the event of art which verifies the mimetic functions and forms of art.

Modernists claim that formalism in art is autonomous because it separates itself the role of signifying or representing the natural and the ideal worlds. But we know from our extended understanding of *mimēsis* as natural and ideal representation and as *mimeisthai* that art re-presents or brings into presence the truth to which it points. Idealist art begins with the transcendent idea and gives it immanent form. Art is the result of an idea – material dialectic. It is in the striving to obtain or materialize the idea that the idea is given form. Once obtained, the dialectic of striving remains as a trace within the work of art. Benjamin describers this striving as art’s work writing that, “one of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later. The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard, that is to say, in a new art form” (Benjamin, “Mechanical” 517). It is this dialectic between striving and forming which impels art onward into new stylistic territories. This phenomenon of striving also determines what Benjamin calls the “aura” and the “ritual” of art. He explains that the original work of art contains an “aura”, which is to say that the idea and the manifestation of that idea functions within its use. For Benjamin, original works of art, prior to the schism in art and abstractionist *l’art pour l’art* dictums, were based on the ritual use of art. It is in the ritual use of art that we again see the dialectic of striving, wherein the ideal is sought for and made manifest, immanent and transcendent, which is presence or *alētheai*. This dialectic in striving constitutes the truth of art, the presence of truth, and the trace or aura of its use. Benjamin writes, “It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never
entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value” (514). What we have in *mimēsis* and *mimeisthai* is art in both immanent and transcendent forms. It is in the dialectic between these immanent and transcendent forms that the nature of the indigenous spirit in art is apparent. This dialectic with its resultant presence or opening of its truth as *alētheai* is the very notion of ritual art. Pollock’s drip paintings as allegorical re-presentations and performances of indigenous ritual art reveal the indigenous spirit of art as the striving for transcendence made manifest in art, giving the ideal form and making it immanent.

Indigenous art is the striving of a prayer made visible. Pollock’s drip paintings, like indigenous ritual arts, manifest propositions or allegories in aesthetic form which are executed as a performance or event of the work of the truth in art. Pollock’s recuperation of Native American arts shows us the true nature of the indigenous aesthetic as being that in which the performance of the dialectic of transcendent and immanent *mimēsis* with its form, modes, and functions occurs.

**Conclusion**

In this discussion we have expanded our definition of *mimēsis* with its forms and modes to consider the relations between *mimēsis* and *mythos*. We have considered the functions of mimetic art in terms of memory, recognition, correspondence, and the iteration of *mythos* in terms of *harmonia* and *consonance* in terms of the overall relationship between *mythos* and its representation. With this expanded view of the functions of *mimēsis* we have considered Pollock’s work as both allegorical and mythic. We have distinguished his works as participating in immanence according to Aristotelian theories on art and *mythos*.
Our discussion has led us to consider the location of truth, the *locus sanctus* and particularly this residence of truth within Platonic and Aristotelian thought. Locating truth enables us to ask whether truth is transcendent and Platonic, or immanent and Aristotelian. Finally, we have found that Plato’s concerns with *mimēsis* have less to do with a contention against myth and its evocation of truth and more with the rights of the philosopher over the artist to evoke such truths. Most importantly, however, for our present purposes, we have found that Pollock’s work returns myth to art through *mimēsis* by recuperating indigenous symbols and allegories with their related ways to evoke mythic truths through the performance or happening of art. This is evident in his early primitivist works and his later drip paintings. The allegory of washing or wiping away sand paintings is recuperated as dripping sanded paint. What is recuperated is repurposed and re-presented as a new mythology revealing new meanings and truths, and new forms for the event of art to create a clearing from which new truths can be manifest. The result of these considerations is that we have seen how both Platonic and Aristotelian conditions of idealism and representation are implicated in art’s responsibilities in learning and issues of truth which are relevant in Pollock’s representational, symbolic, and idealist drip works. We have also seen that the divisive theories on Pollock’s work are implicated in the issues of *mimēsis* and *diegesis*. But as an event and happening of art, Pollock’s allegorical reiterations or ritual drip paints claim the right of art as the interlocutor of significant truths. Pollock’s works, far from being solely formalist autonomous works, are actually entrenched in the dialectic between concealing and revealing these truths as the events and happenings of art.
As we have seen, the literature on Pollock’s work and life have stressed Pollock’s alcoholism and possible personality disorder, and in so doing has contributed to the mythology of both the artist and his work. Biographers and critics have repeatedly stressed Pollock’s psychological states, referring to his tendencies as “brooding”, “impulsive”, “savage”, “joy”, “pain”, “reaction” “violent emotion”. Deeper reading into Pollock’s life indicates that he was not especially violent, but he was prone to verbosity and anger when drunk. When interested in a topic, Pollock was very talkative, articulate, and intelligent. He did suffer from depression, but Krasner claims that he was not suicidal. Although Lee Krasner tried to clear up some of the misunderstandings concerning Pollock’s personality and his work, the myth of Pollock prevails today, and he is remembered as much for his colorful life and personality as for his artwork. The irony is that while Pollock’s work returns mythology to art, Pollock is also part of the myth.

This underlying return of the mythic, and its associations with mythos and mimêsis has been neglected in the critical review of Pollock’s work. While both the abstract modernist and psychoanalytic critiques emphasize Pollock’s mental health they draw
differing conclusions. The tenets of abstract modernism, largely set forth by Hans Hofmann through the influential writings of Clement Greenberg, define an American modernist aesthetic based on the flatness of the pictorial surface and the illumination of any and all pictorial illusion or mimetic representation. Greenberg (also one of Pollock’s greatest supporters) echoes Hofmann’s dictums in writing that, “Pollock’s strength lies in the emphatic surfaces of his pictures, which it is his concern to maintain and intensify in all that thick, fuliginous flatness which began – but only began – to be the strong point of late Cubism.” Greenberg claims that Pollock adopted and expanded upon Cubist techniques, and in so doing, relocated the center of the art world from Paris to New York City (Greenberg, “Collected” 20-30).

However, during his lifetime, the critical review of Pollock’s work was rather mixed. Contemporary critics emphasized the formal attributes of paint and color and calligraphic or hieroglyphic qualities. In this mixed review, Barnett Newman also saw these ideographic and primitive qualities in Pollock’s and likeminded artists’ works, while Harold Rosenberg focused on Pollock’s gestural action or execution. But Rosenberg also contributed to the mythologizing of Pollock, writing that “The tension of the private myth is the content of every painting of this vanguard” (Rosenberg, “Action” 583). As a result, the modern abstraction critique concluded that Pollock was the quintessential tortured artist aiming to express the avant-garde’s intense need to transcend the particulars of history in order to seize upon universal ideals (Rushing, “Ritual” 273).

Shortly before and soon after Pollock’s death, Surrealist and Jungian theorists (such as Harold Rosenberg and others) began to look at Pollock’s work through the lens of psychoanalytic thought and Jungian archetypes, a view which carefully scrutinized Pollock’s
early childhood, relationships with peers and his lifelong battle with alcoholism. These theorists conclude that Pollock’s work describes a type of ritual healing wherein Pollock found solace in art and art making. Increasingly, within this discourse, art historians have taken notice of the American Indian influences in Pollock’s early drawings and paintings and have concluded that these elements prove Pollock acted as a shaman for self-healing purposes.

Ironically, both critiques conclude that Pollock’s drip paintings are deeply personal expressions of psychological pain, evidence of mental illness, the struggle with modern life and alcoholism. This divided critique separates Pollock’s works into phases, wherein the modernist critique claims abstraction in Pollock’s later drip paintings while psychoanalytic based theories claim Pollock’s earlier primitivist works. This divided theoretical review is rather problematic, since both views mythologize Pollock’s personality but fall short of explaining the plethora of mythic indigenous references and allegories in his oeuvre. Because these references are so ubiquitous, we must ask if there a unifying notion or concept that applies to all of Pollock’s works as a type of underlying principle explaining both the influence of Native American arts and aesthetics in his representational and allegorical elements, and his abstraction.

We have addressed the socio-political context of Pollock’s youth and his formative artistic training. We saw that within this context the representation of the American Indian played a large role in both politics and the arts. We identified ways in which the American Indian has traditionally been portrayed as an ethnographic subject. We also noted the changes to this ethnographic representation as an important epistemic political shift that turned the American Indian into an American icon, personified to symbolize the Regionalist and New
Deal national identity and agendas. We also looked at the distribution of the American Indian icon within all cultural sectors, from politics and fine art to popular media and merchandizing. Because the representation of the iconic American Indian was ubiquitous among these sectors, we have come to label this era the Indian-episteme. Pollock’s world was one wherein the American Indian was embedded into the very fabric of the society.

We have also questioned the polemic within modernism. We have seen that the critique of Pollock is divided along modernist and psychoanalytic discourses. We also concluded that art criticism is epistemic, codependent on the socio-political context of the times. While each era has predominant trains of thought or epistemes, it also has sub-epistemes, some of which rise to predominance while others decline and fall into disuse. Within this view, both the modernist and psychoanalytic reviews of Pollock’s work are as much critiques of the period’s context as they are of his work. We have seen that the modern abstraction review is grounded in political and cold war conditions, wherein critics were seeking to claim modernism as a supremely and uniquely American variety. This seemingly convincing view claims that Abstract Expressionism is the natural extension and development of analytic Cubism through a variety of influences and sources. But the critique oversimplifies the trajectory of Pollock’s work and neglects to account for his engagement with indigenous arts and themes.

We have also discussed the psychoanalytic critique of Pollock. This theory formulates an interpretation of art that contradicts theories of pure form, but it is also epistemic in that it is based upon contextual fashion trends and interests in psychoanalysis and Surrealism. This critique claims that Pollock appropriated Surrealist and Jungian archetype imagery for personal purposes. Within the critique of Pollock, as well as the larger epistemic discourse of
modern theory (with its ties to the political and social discourse of its time), both theories constitute a disunity that describes a polemical modern-episteme. From this point of view, we see how this critical division has overlooked important indigenous elements in Pollock’s work. Having clarified for the art historian the social, political and artistic contexts, and having reviewed the nature of art criticism as epistemically related to its own historiography and political situation, we have established a foundation upon which turn to a discussion on mimèsis and all that it entails.

From a view of the Indian-episteme and the fashion for an iconic Indian in politics and art to a view of the divided polemical modernist-episteme, we have seen that many differing ideas made up the richly varied and tangible world from which Pollock arose and in which he worked. The rapid political, socioeconomic and cultural changes within and external to the United States in less than one century moved it from a nascent national identity founded upon the notion of authenticity and origins to one of military and industrial supremacy and superiority. Pollock’s world was one of shifting foundations, and within the art world specifically, Pollock found himself within a polemic rooted in dualism, a schism between art either as abstract and non-representational (pure) form, or as the representation of the inner experience. By the late nineteenth century both sides of the debate erupted into a myriad of differing styles. The problems of modernity, upon which Pollock deliberated, were based on this critical divide.

But the problem of the divided critical debate began long before Pollock’s engagement with mimetic forms of art. After Realism, and certainly since Impressionism onward, the role of portraying the appearances of things has been overshadowed by the theoretical divide between the formalism of Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, abstraction,
and other -isms, and the subjective experience of the inner and outer lived experience in Surrealism, Social and New Objective Realisms, and Expressionism. All these movements evidence a schism in art between formalism and content, abstraction and experience, rationalism and empiricism. This schism in art is symptomatic of the larger dualism within critical theory and philosophy which polarizes the issues in modernity between personal subjective experience and rationalism.

In examining the political epistemic and divided art world, we should ask to what extent did Pollock in fact engage extensively and purposefully with American Indian arts, and how can we conceptualize this? We have noted key influences in Pollock’s life, including Wolfgang Paalen and John Graham, likeminded artists and theorists who helped to establish Pollock’s artistic interests in American Indian arts and also influenced Pollock’s peers and fellow primitivist artists. We have found that the American Indian aesthetic was a deeply held interest and source of motivation throughout Pollock’s life. We also analyzed many of Pollock’s drawings to show that, rather than being the inheritor of Picasso-esque Cubism and Surrealism, Pollock’s early work shows distinctly American primitivist subject matter within both abstract and three-dimensional and volume-rich forms. Rather than “significant form” terminology as coined by Clive Bell, we have noted that Pollock’s works are instead based on a significant, even mythic content. Pollock’s references to American Indian arts throughout his works can best be understood as content rich re-interpretations of myth through mimêsis.

From Plato and the beginnings of aesthetics, art has been inseparably associated with philosophy, most especially in terms of its signifying and representational qualities. Plato’s greatest concern is the degree to which art reveals truth and determines that at best art can not
reveal but only imitate it. Aristotle claims imitation to be a key function of learning. We learn through imitating and seeing the imitative arts, whether these be paintings, poetry, dance, theater, or music. When Picasso and others claim pure form and a break with tradition, it is not just mimêsis as representation that is lost to art. Rather, the loss of mimêsis also impacts a key component of art’s relationship to metaphysics and hermeneutics. While the importance of mimêsis to the history and concepts of art and philosophy will be explored further in other studies, Pollock’s recuperation of mimêsis marks a distinct break with not only the notion of pure form, but with the notion of the avant-garde and its repudiation of tradition as well.

From Descartes forward (at least until Heidegger), the subject is defined as that which thinks, perceives, and feels, and the natural world and all it contains constitutes the object or objective. From Kant onward, art has increasingly followed this split between the subjective and thinking experience and the objective natural world. Art became divided between representations of the experiences of modernity in its outer and inner forms and focuses, and idealistic pursuits with its ensuing formal concerns, until, with Picasso and his abstracted Primitivism, we arrive at a purely formal conception of art. The critique as outlined by Greenberg, Bell, and Read aligns formalist art with Kantian disinterest. Within disinterestedness, mimêsis, once both the measure and purpose of art, fell sway to plasticity and objectivity; the thinking, feeling subject now needs only to experience art’s forms. Content, subject, narrative, and all connections to the natural world were split off, eventually to be derided as being merely representational and uninteresting. The stability of mimêsis in terms of verisimilitude and idealism became disrupted among the diverse ‘isms’ of modern art. In its fullest identification, mimêsis is presently and generally regarded as mere copy or
illusion, symptomatic of a traditional and outmoded past and, among other things, separated from its broader roles of pointing and signifying.

With the decline of the importance of *mimēsis* from Kant onward came also a decline in an understanding of *mimēsis* in its fullest. Halliwell explains that,

> Within a self-consciously historicizing idiom … the semantics of “imitation” have been considerably narrowed and impoverished in modern usage (and equally, so far as I can tell, in all modern languages). Where once, in a neoclassical intellectual setting, “imitation” could, in the hands of the most subtle writers, possess a suppleness of meaning and resonance that it “borrowed,” so to speak, from the philosophical weight of tradition that lay behind ancient mimeticism, the standard modern significance of imitation tends almost inevitably to imply, often with pejorative force a limited exercise in copying, superficial replication, or counterfeiting of an externally “given” model. Notions of this narrow type, even though they have played some part in the history of mimesis (usually on the side of opponents rather than proponents of mimesis), cannot begin to do justice to (their objects, modes, techniques, psychological effects, etc.) that have been raised by arguments whose ancestry goes back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle. (14)

In its decline, *mimēsis* has become narrowly defined as mere imitation and its connection to knowledge and truth has been lost. As art experienced this rupture between subject-object, it became no longer a question of how imitation was to be employed, whether in a hierarchical structure as a conveyance for the elevation of the mind and soul, or as a representation of the
material nature of life. Imitation was just simply put out of favor and its role in art was denied altogether. *Mimēsis* is tangibly implicated in evidencing this split or schism and has found itself, in problematic ways, in service to both idealism and the representation of the cosmos and metaphysical presence as *mimēma*. While idealistic art seeks for underlying structures, representational art seeks to duplicate the sights, sounds, and flavors of the inner and outer experiences of life, and *l’art pour l’art* focuses on the forms of art. Within the discourse of idealism and abstraction, the representation of nature as verisimilitude fell into derision and gave way to formalism, pure abstract form. This is not to say art has not had other polemical debates in other eras, such as *disegno* and *colore* or *imatio* and *poesis* that continued throughout the Renaissance and Baroque eras, and the quarrel between Enlightenment Neoclassicism with its argumentative sister Romanticism. But never before has art been as diametrically opposed to itself and to its own nature and underlying mimetic structure. Split along representational and formal tenets, art became divorced from its role in representation. Art has blinded itself to itself. This rupture led to an avant-garde splintered between subjective and political experience and formalism. The subjective experience of the inner and outer lived experience is most evidently understood in terms of Surrealism, Social and New Objective Realisms, and Expressionism. Rationality and objectivity is most evident in avant-garde Cubism and a variety of its related abstract factions.

Within this broader context of a divided Modernism, it is only logical that Pollock’s drip works would be coined Abstract Expressionism, as if such a critique could unite the division in art along the notion of the expression of the inner experience of the artist within abstract terms. This logic seems to acknowledge the idea that Pollock addressed the schism in art through *mimēsis*, particularly in its idealist forms and modes. We have seen this
division in the historical trajectory of art and the critical review of Pollock. But the missing element in the division that created the schism, the radical separation of art into two primary irreconcilable camps, is the issue of representation or *mimēsis*.

*Mimēsis* is generally thought to mean mere representation, illusion, and/or copies of the natural world, but this is a relatively impoverished concept of *mimēsis*, particularly in light of Pollock’s drip paintings. Therefore, we have expanded our understanding of *mimēsis* as being fundamentally more than representing the empirical world. It means to encompass both naturalistic and symbolic or idealistic representation, both of which we call the forms of *mimēsis*. We have seen that symbolic representation encompasses various modes of representation including symbols and emblems, metaphors, allegory, and rituals as the reiteration of the allegory, allowing meaning to be attributed or recognized along several modes and varieties of representation. This view of *mimēsis* enables us to account for both the representational, symbolic, and allegorical elements in Pollock’s work. We have concluded that even Pollock’s drip paintings are allegories of the ritualistic destruction of Navajo sand paintings and sacred art. Just as Pollock makes allegories of ancient mythical rites, Namuth’s photographs and films also allegorize Pollock painting. In this way we see how fluidly allegorical works reiterate and extend the allegory (and the mythic) along various modes and through various techniques. Pollock’s engagement or recuperation of the indigenous spirit in art can be explained through an expanded concept of *mimēsis* that validates Pollock’s profound commitment to a unique artistic vision.

Our discussion on *mimēsis* has led us to look more deeply into all its possible ramifications pertaining to Pollock’s work, particularly the mythic quality of his primitivist and drip paintings. To broaden our understanding of *mimēsis* within a view of
We have also addressed the issue of mimēsis as mimeisthai or that which represents the un-representable through idealist form. Idealism leads us into a key issue arising from the concept of mimēsis, which is the issue of truth in art. We began our investigation into the nature of mimēsis and functions of knowledge in terms of recognition, mental image-making, and correspondence. We have also considered truth as transcendent, the mythos or myth, and the ways that art provides the structure or compositional framework in which the myth can be given form, which makes truth immanent. In this way, transcendent truth is immanent to art. Because mimēsis had fallen into ill-repute in modern theory our deeper account of mimēsis ultimately derives from ancient Greek concepts and our discussion has of necessity taken its point of departure from Plato and Aristotle, other Greek writers and their concepts, and subsequent philosophical traditions within phenomenology. Within this backdrop, we have furthered our understanding of the polemical modernist-episteme as one which flows from the Cartesian split, dualism, and its ramifications in philosophy and aesthetics. This divide in modernism between formal abstraction and the representation of inner subjective states detracts from the question of the representation of mythos and myth. These broader questions, regarding art and truth, have been lost to art in its mode as l’art pour l’art and the notion of pure form. With the decline of mimetic art, art’s role in cognition, learning, and giving form to life’s truths has been severed from art’s purposes. Art has been estranged from itself. This question of art’s traditional roles with philosophy, learning, and cognition was lost in Greenberg and the subsequent modernist and psychoanalytic critiques of Pollock’s work. But the decline of mimēsis is a broader issue than what we see in American modernism as its decline is implicated in a broader schism in modern art and art theory.
One of the key results of our study is that the work of art occurs in the event or the performance of art. This is significant because it is the event of art and all the striving within the dialectic of transcendence and immanence, that the *mythos* becomes evident in its myth or mythologizing structure or composition. Many descriptions of Pollock’s work allude to qualities of action, movement, and dance. For example, Harold Rosenberg’s essay “The American Action Painters,” characterizes Pollock’s work as an event (Rosenberg, “Action” 581). In this article Rosenberg sought to account for the motional quality of Pollock’s drip paintings. Further, he echoes Heidegger’s notion of “thrownness” in saying that “The work, the act, translates the psychologically given into the intentional, into a ‘world’ – and thus transcends it” (582). It is in the subjective intention of the artist that the objective work of art comes to be and this constitutes the “event” of art (582). Rosenberg’s two main points are key. First, art is an act or event, particularly in the works of Pollock. Even in making allegorical works of art, the event of art resides in the act of art. Second, as Rosenberg says, “what matters always is the revelation contained in the act’ or rather, the creative act makes a truth (revelation) known. Again, truth is immanent to a work of art (582). But it is the dialectic between immanence and transcendence within art’s subject-object unity that the event or truth as *alētheai* of art is made manifest.

Pollock’s work evidences the event of art as being one where art is in the making. The drip paintings particularly witness to the event of art as a process of allegorizing sacred ritual. Lee Krasner alluded to performativity, when in an interview with Barbara Rose; she characterized Pollock’s work as being some form of a “dance” (Rose 45). Pollock’s “dance” leads to the conclusion that it is the dance, and not just the application of paint, that is the reiteration or allegory of the ritual. In other words, the dance is captured in paint, leaving its
Pollock suggested this fact when he claimed that, “Technic is the result of a need—new needs demand new technics—total control—denial of the accident—States of order—organic intensity—energy and motion made visible—[as] memories arrested in space…” making “energy and motion visible” (qtd. Soussloff 71). This to say that Pollock leaves in paint the trace of an ephemeral happening of\textit{\textbf{alētheai}} or the event of truth is in making. That Pollock’s allegorical dance constitutes the act of art wherein the act is retained in its trace is reiterated in Benjamin’s tenet that, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens” (Benjamin, “Mechanical” 514). This issue of an act or allegorical performance is further stressed in the uncovering and covering, even in Pollock’s latest works wherein his early images are revealed within the layers of applied paint (Karmel, “Interviews” 79). In these lush paintings, hidden figures within the depths of a blackened background are revealed by the act of Pollock removing paint, which had been previously applied for the express purpose of covering and unveiling the figures beneath (Fig. 78).

In the August 1949, \textit{Life Magazine} article “Jackson Pollock; is he the greatest living painter in the United States?” the article exposed current assumptions about modern art. First, it questioned the issue of modern art as merely pure form. Second, by comparing Pollock’s drip paintings to “yesterday’s macaroni” the article questioned the correspondence between verisimilitude and art. Confused that the dripped paintings looked like “piles of spaghetti,” viewers questioned the lack of recognizable subject. Pollock’s drip paintings confronted viewers directly with issues of recognition, cognition, and memory while disclosing art’s mimetic forms and modes as natural and symbolic representation, symbolism, allegory and performance, along with the expression of the unveiling \textit{mythos} as constituted within the
dialectic of transcendent and immanent art. As Heidegger explains, “The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory” (Heidegger, “Origin” 145-6). By bringing together the naturalistic and symbolic representation with allegory and its meaning to which it points to, art is a bringing “together” of what is hidden by what discloses. This bringing together constitutes the act, event, or happening of art (Fig. 79). The work of art, for Heidegger, manifests an original idea given form in a way similar to Aristotle’s claim in the Poetics that mythos is given form in the myth and gives form to the myth, for the work of art makes known “everything present in its presencing” (172).

In summary, Heidegger sees art as a process between its materials, forms, acts of the artist, and the way in which these combine to present meaning. But because meaning is ascribed in its revelation, rather than a direct correspondence to the world by viewers in the world, the event of truth in a work of art is historically contingent and therefore an event in time. It is in the dialectic of being, between the ideal and its manifestation in form, that the work of art gives mythos to myth and constitutes the event of art. When applied to our understanding of
Pollock’s performative dance, or allegory of an indigenous ritual, the event or happening of
truth of the work is revealed. For us today, the tracery of paint in the drip paintings, and the
removal of paint in Pollock’s later representational works, reveal the concealment and
unconcealment of hidden figures and performative allegories. It is in the act of painting that
the mythic or ‘revelation’ is revealed, rather than in the final form. We retrace the act of
Pollock painting in the finality of the picture’s form that documents the performance, for it is
the performance of art which discloses the location of the unveiling of truth or alêtheai. It is
through the recuperation of the spirit of American Indian arts and subjects via mimêsis and
all that it entails, including in its subject-object, transcendent-immanent forms, that Pollock
bridges the schism in art. Through mimêsis I argue that Pollock reveals the spirit of the
American Indian aesthetic as mimêsis; that which pertains to learning, cognition, recognition,
and memory, truth and myth, allegory, reiteration, ritual, and the dialectic of striving in
transcendence and immanence in art.

Although the visual and theoretical evidence elucidates the allegorical content in
Pollock’s work, unveiled by the passage of time and hindsight the works of Pollock’s
immediate progenitors further indicate the true nature of Pollock’s methods and paintings.
Artists such as Alan Kaprow and others were well aware of Pollock’s ritual dance, such that
the phenomenon of the aesthetic of Happenings is a direct inheritor of Pollock’s aesthetics.
Nowhere is this clearer than in Kaprow’s tribute, The Legacy of Jackson Pollock, 1958 and
in his Yard, which was performed in 1961 at the Martha Jackson Gallery (Fig. 80). In Yard
viewers participated in the work of art by traversing and circumambulating a field of used car
tires which were strewn about the gallery floor. In this way viewers participated in the ritual
of Pollock’s drip paintings, being at once viewers, dancers, and participants in the making of
art. Making an allegory of Pollock’s drip paintings, Kaprow doubled or reiterated the allegory in the performance or ritual of that allegory.

Alan Kaprow fully understood Pollock’s ritual and performativity in art, which he expressed in the article for ARTnews titled The Legacy of Jackson Pollock. Kaprow’s article described a finer understanding of Pollock’s relationship to subject, representation and allegory than Rosenberg imagined. Kaprow wrote, “Pollock… left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life…. [showing us] the world we have always had about us [a world of] happenings and events” (Kaprow 9). If Pollock ventured an aesthetic of iconic indigenous ritual, Kaprow developed that aesthetic to focus acutely on the ephemeral experience of art making. Kaprow developed Pollock’s mythologies into a discourse on the rituals and materiality of everyday life.  

Fig. 80 Allan Kaprow, Yard, 1961, “Environments, Situations, Spaces Series”, Sculpture Garden at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, Photo: Ken Heyman
Kaprow was not the only postmodern artist to experiment with ritual art. John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg also made ritual art that allegorized the juxtaposition of the occurrences of everyday life with art making forms and modes. In view of Pollock’s allegorical rituals, we must re-evaluate the onset of Postmodernism in terms of the forms, modes and functions of art and its capacity to represent various modes of storied life concepts. But most importantly, we must re-evaluate the role of the American Indian in the making of a forgotten historical episteme and Pollock’s timeless tribute to their art and art forms. For this reason, it is important that we rethink the traditional divisions between so-called Western and Non-Western arts. For Non-Western art presently is in need of a critical theory. It is hoped that building on the foundation of this theory of mimêsis (with its forms, modes, and mythos) we can find uniting tenets that bridge the divisive gaps between the polemical-modern theory and between Western and Non-Western art. For in Pollock, pure form, so praised by Greenberg, is actually mimetic representation that leaves its trace of transcendent truths within forms and modes: events in time, stilled as only time can do in the ephemeral transcendent of the immanent moment.
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APPENDIX A

Art and *Mimēsis*: Medieval to Neoclassicism

Throughout the early Christian and Medieval arts, Plotinus’ ideals are at play through the reinterpretations by Dionysus the Areopagite and later the Abbot Suger of Saint Denis. In *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysus the Areopagite explains that the glory of God is inconceivable to the finite mind and therefore one must make use of imitation and allegory in order to explain the character of God. For example, one might say that “Christ is like a worm” in order to show the humility of Christ. (Williams, 47) Medieval art is filled with iconic symbols that explain the attributes of Christ: the peacock explains immortality, the sunflower expresses God’s love, the lamb demonstrates Christ as a shepherd of men or the sacrificial lamb of the atonement, etc. (Williams, 47) Thus *mimēsis* is both the representation of an ideal through metaphor and the representation of an object from nature. It encompasses a wide range of signifiers including symbols and signs. It directs from one object or the signifier to the sign (or original object or idea) being signified. Or it directs the contemplation of one object towards a higher or more ideal or beautiful object, moving upward in a progression to ultimate Beauty, Divinity, or Truth. Because of this, Abbot Suger could intend that the materials and forms of the Gothic cathedral could be imitations of the glory of heaven. In the process of contemplating the beautiful materials of the cathedral and its ornaments, beauty would lead the viewer to contemplate the Divine. He explains,

Thus when, out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God, the loveliness of the many-colored gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy mediation has induced me to reflect – transferring that which is
material to that which is immaterial – on the diversity of the sacred virtues:
then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange
region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth
nor entirely in the purity of heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be
transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner.
(Panofsky, 63)

Suger’s use of analogy and metaphor retains a Platonic hierarchical relationship between
imitative forms and ideas regarding eternal Forms and Truths, embracing art’s material role
and ignoring its potential to deceive through the same use of analogy or imitation. Suger’s
analogy echoes that of Plotinus’ conviction that the higher forms give purpose and form to
lower forms, which in turn strive upward towards the Divine. While we think of Plotinus and
Suger in terms of Platonic hierarchical and idealist thought, each echo Aristotle’s views that
art and imitation are didactic tools in the acquisition of knowledge or wisdom.

In the early fourteenth century artists found a renewed interest in imitating the natural
world more directly, not as a means for meditation but through a humanist interest in nature.
The artist Giovanni Pisano praised God through imitating nature in his pulpit in the Pisa
Cathedral. Pisano’s act is a celebrated turning point in Western art where he returns art from
the idealism of the Gothic age to naturalism with its stress on verisimilitude. (Williams, 102-
10) From Pisano to Leonardo da Vinci, artists intensified their interest in nature, human
anatomy, verisimilitude in portraiture, landscapes and still lifes. Leone Battista Alberti
succinctly summarizes a new Aristotelian interest in nature and imitation in his influential
treatise, On Painting, 1453. Alberti writes that,
If you despise painting, which is the sole imitator of all the visible works of nature, you will certainly be despising a subtle invention which brings philosophy and subtle speculation to bear upon the nature of all forms, sea and land, plants and animals, grasses and flowers – which are enveloped in shade and light. Truly, painting is a science, the true-born child of nature. For painting is born to nature; to be more correct we should call it the grandchild of nature, since all visible things were brought forth by nature and these, her children, have given birth to painting. Therefore we may justly speak of it as the grandchild of nature and as a descendant of God. (qtd. Williams, 61)

Just as nature inspires imitation in Aristotle’s Poetics, nature inspires art in Alberti’s On Painting. While many other arguments concerning art and poetry ensued throughout the Renaissance and Baroque eras, the predominant interest from Pisano until the mid-nineteenth century was that of mimetically representing the natural world and reinforcing the connections between verisimilitude and mimêsis. From Platonic idealism to Aristotelian mimêsis as representation of the natural world, the history of Western art is a process of locating the value of mimêsis, particularly in its diverse forms. Any critique of modern art has and must situate itself within this larger discourse of mimêsis because of the fact that it has been a primary mode of art and aesthetics since Pre-Socratic thought.

We see the perfect union of mimêsis in both its primary forms; (its representation of the ideal and natural) in Neoclassical art, particularly in the revolutionary works of Jacques-Louis David. In David’s Oath of the Horatti for example, we see verisimilitude in the likeness between the men taking oaths to fight and protect the homeland, and the resignation of their wives and what we know to be the postures of both types of figures in such
emotional, psychological, and physical states. But we also see the ideals of loyalty, patriotism, and self-sacrifice (outside of the painting) which in idealist ways the painting points to. *Mimēsis* then, is a more broadly applicable to the function of art by accounting for not only representation but idealism as well. Neoclassicism is the binding of two forms; before the schism of mimēsis from art. But this was not without art attaining its highest manifestation in Neoclassicism. It is this binding or balancing of idealist and naturalistic tendencies that forms the basis of Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s praise for classical Greek art and his theory of art and art history. This notion of the balancing of natural and ideal also forms the basis for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s theory of art.
NOTES

Introduction

1 Howard Devree, writing for the New York Times, wrote that “These big, sprawling coloramas impress me as being surcharged with violent emotional reaction which never is clarified enough in the expression to establish true communication with the observer.” (Devree, Howard, “Among the New Exhibitions.” The New York Times, March 25, 1945, SEC. 2, P. 8, as quoted in Jackson Pollock Interviews, Articles, and Reviews, MoMA, edited by Pepe Karmel.

2 Hofmann taught at the Students Art League before opening his Hofmann School of the Arts. He taught both Greenberg and Rosenberg who attended his evening lectures. According to Friedman, it was through Hofmann’s classes that Lee Krasner met both Greenberg and Rosenberg. See Friedman, 70-72, 108-109, 136-137.


Chapter One


6 The term ‘Geist’ is used intentionally for its Hegelian resonances. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel uses the German term ‘geist’ in his book on aesthetics, The Phenomenology of Spirit to denote the general spirit, tone, or timbre of an age. It can also be thought to be like unto Foucault’s notion of episteme wherein each age has a set of underlying values and mindsets from which knowledge and the materials of world and culture are defined and explained. With this in mind, Pollock’s work can be viewed as a sign or symbol of the spirit or episteme of the age. This present chapter helps to define this geist or spirit of the era, which is one of incorporating the notion of the American Indian within a seeking for a nascent national identity.

7 We might consider this to some degree along the lines of Heidegger’s notion of ‘thrownness’. In Heidegger’s philosophy, particularly as outlined in his essay Being in Time, 1927 Heidegger believes that individuals are ‘thrown’ or born into a preexisting world or social condition and attitudes. Freedom for Heidegger is of utmost importance for it enables the individual to choose to transcend one’s social world and live an authentic life. For our purposes here, we are looking at the socio-political world from a neglected view of the importance and contemporary social role of the American Indian.

8 Old World ethnographies refer to the tradition, stemming from the early 17th century ethnographic writers, of arranging ethnographic data into hierarchical schemes which placed European cultures at the top, with Muslims and Jews, and Indians and Asians following, and lastly, studies of tribal cultures. This arrangement suggested a hierarchy based on religious values and technological advancement. One of the most comprehensive ethnographic studies was written by the Dutch minister Francois Valentijn, 1726, Amsterdam. See LaBarge, Maria S., Francois Valentijn and the 18th Century Dutch Frontispiece, May, 2008.

9 Octavio Paz gives José Vasconcelos credit for initiating the Muralist movement in Mexico by commissioning the best-known painters in 1921 to decorate the walls of public buildings. The commissions were politically motivated—they aimed to glorify the Mexican Revolution and redefine the Mexican people vis-à-vis their indigenous and Spanish past. The first of these commissioned paintings were at San Ildefonso done by Fernando Leal, Fermin Revueltas, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera. See Paz, Octavio Essays on Mexican Art. Helen Lane (translator). New York: Harcourt Brace and Company. 1987. 11.

10 The Department of the Interior is responsible for the management and conservation of most federal land and natural resources, and the administration of programs relating to American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians. Within the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs currently provides services (directly or through contracts, grants, or compacts) to approximately 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.
Organized in 1830, the Bureau was originally designed to be an organization that protected Indians’ rights. Historically, however, the Bureau’s programs have instead aimed to facilitate processes of acculturation and assimilation. These programs included placing Indian children in boarding schools, restricting Indian rituals and religious beliefs, and legalizing the confiscation of Indian hunting lands under the General Allotment or Dawes Severalty Act, (1887).

11 Perhaps the most iconic ethnographic image of the American Indian within the view of a dominant Western power is the Indian Head penny. Minted by the United States from 1859 to 1909, the penny features a bust profile of an Indian chief in full head dress. This penny is just the type of Southwestern treasure youngsters (like Pollock) liked to find. It is an exoticized portrait of an Other living within margins of a dominant culture, close enough to see firsthand, but remote from one’s experience outside its iconic representation, a reminder of the American Indian ensconced in reservations near Pollock’s home, viewable from a distance, yet foreign and iconic. While this depiction acknowledged the loss of tribal cultures, it suggested the assimilation of the American Indian, in the form of an iconic ethnographic portrait into the dominant political-economic culture which sought to preserve the past.

12 Simon Schama discusses the Dutch striving for a national identity that led the nation to embrace an ancient semi-mythic tribe as their founding forebearers. Having successfully defended themselves from the Romans, the Germanians were paragons for independence and valor, ideals the Dutch eagerly adopted after their independence from Spain. See Schama, The Embarrassment of Riches, An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., NY, 1987.

13 It was no accident that one of the first reforms of the New Deal policy was The Indian Reorganization Act, 1934. This Act was intended to overturn the Dawes Act of 1887, which had allowed the United States government to survey and divide Indian lands. The Reorganization Act forbade government intrusions into Indian land and turned American Indian holdings over to local (and regional) self-governing tribal jurisdiction. This act embodied the idea that the American Indian could be assimilated into the existing culture and given autonomy to regulate their ‘own affairs.

14 Today White’s estate is now the home of the School of American Research and the SAR Press.

15 See also Horton, Jessica L. and Janet Catherine Berlo, “Pueblo Painting in 1932; Folding Narratives of Native Art Into American Art History,” A Companion to American Art, edited by John Davis, Jennifer A. Greenhill, Jason D. LaFountain.

16 The Santa Fe Indian School, which was established to educate Indian children from surrounding Santa Fe reservations, came to be a center that promoted traditional and multi-cultural arts. For example, Datus Myers was an artist living in Santa Fe who traveled to Pueblo reservations to recruit painters, potters, and weavers to work at the Santa Fe Indian School. Looping back to politics and government bureaucracy, Myers later became the field coordinator for the Indian Division of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) and used his position to further create social awareness and support of Indian arts. Part of this awareness effort included collecting Indian wares to sell in Ickes’ Department of the Interior Building’s Indian Craft Shop.


Chapter Two

18 Films such as Northwest Passage, 1940 and Broken Arrow, 1950 feature American Indians as both noble and villainess. Following World War II, the Cold War ushered a new Golden Age of the Hollywood Western with ever-increasing numbers of movie productions each year, reaching nearly 50 projects a year by 1956. (Richard Slotkin, “Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-century America”, (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK, 1998), p. 347). Disney’s 1950 animated film Peter Pan contains a clip where Peter Pan and his lost boys celebrate around a recreated Native American Indian camp. The films of the 1950s feature no less American Indians, but such portrayals are more sympathetic to Indian viewpoints, characterizing them as targets of racism and conquest. (Elizabeth DeLaney Hoffman, American Indians and Popular Culture, 2012, p. 44) The growth of the Western was a main element in the TV fare of the 1950’s and 1960’s, where it ranged from 15% to nearly 25% of the total series produced in any given year ( Slotkin, ibid, p. 348) This use of
mass media entertainment to popularize the American West and its cultural elements continued largely uninterrupted until the early years of the 1970’s, ensuring the Western remained the pre-eminent mass-culture genre for “the making of public myths and for the symbolization of public ideology”. Slotkin, ibid, p. 278


Adams explains Benton’s treatment of the human figure, indicating that in 1911 (?) Benton became aware of the experiments of Erhard Schon (1491-1542), a pupil of Durer, and Luca Cambiaso (1527-1585), who broke down the human figure into a series of cubes as an aid to correctly depict positions and movements. Pollock too employed this device in his sketchbooks down into the late 1930s. (See Pollock’s sketchbooks and Untitled, 1933-38)

Adams writes, “It was my wife, Marianne Berardi, who first saw the letters. We were looking at a reproduction of Jackson Pollock's breakthrough work, Mural, an 8-by 20-foot canvas bursting with physical energy that, in 1943, was unlike anything seen before. I was researching a book about Pollock’s lifelong relationship with his mentor, Thomas Hart Benton, the famed regionalist and muralist, when I sat puzzling over a reproduction of Mural after breakfast one morning with Marianne, herself an art historian. She suddenly said she could make out the letters S-O-N in blackish paint in the upper right area of the mural. Then she realized JACKSON ran across the entire top. And finally she saw POLLOCK below that… I’m now convinced that Pollock wrote his name in large letters on the canvas—indeed, arranged the whole painting around his name. As far as I can tell, no one has previously made this assertion. Nor is there evidence that Pollock himself, who was loath to talk about his art and left behind few written records, ever mentioned this coded gesture. In fact, his decision was curiously logical and straightforward. He simply wrote the words “Jackson Pollock” very large across the canvas. Thanks to my wife, Marianne Berardi, who observed these hidden letters while she was looking at a reproduction of the painting with me. Curiously, at the time she was looking at the painting upside down. By a coincidence, both first and last name had the same number of letters, so it wasn’t hard to make them fit. So as not to make the effect too obvious, he introduced some dazzle patterns, like those used to camouflage a ship, which makes the outlines a little difficult to read, but the “son” on the right is not too hard to make out, the big J on the right is quite clear when you know that you should look for it, and with a bit of examination it’s not too hard to make out the other letters one by one. “Jackson” is written more clearly than “Pollock,” but with careful looking that also becomes visible. This could hardly be random coincidence, since while some letters, like O form shapes that are easily found in most triangles of line, this is not the case with letters like K or N, and to find all these letters in the right order just by accident seems extremely unlikely. And it isn’t possible to spell out any other names in the painting, so far as I can discern.” (Adams, “Decoding” 56)

Jones points out that Hofmann’s influence on Greenberg was immeasurable; however, Greenberg’s tendency was to ignore Hofmann’s tripartite view of space (space in front, in, and behind objects) in favor for the absolute flatness of analytical Cubism. Greenberg made analytic Cubism “bear the burden of modernism’s entire evolutionary trajectory from illusion to abstraction.” p. 181.

Freud writes, “The plastic arts of painting and sculpture labour, indeed, under a similar limitation as compared with poetry, which can make use of speech; and here once again the reason for their incapacity lies in the nature of the material which these two forms of art manipulate in their effort to express something. Before painting became acquainted with the laws of expression by which it is governed, it made attempts to get over this handicap. In ancient paintings small labels were hung from the mouths of the persons represented, containing in written characters the speeches which the artist despaired of representing pictorially.” (Freud,328)

Jung writes, “evidently live and function in the deeper layers of the unconscious, especially in that phylogenetic substratum which I have called the collective unconscious. This localization explains a good deal of their strangeness: they bring into our ephemeral consciousness an unknown psychic life belonging to a remote past. It is the mind of our unknown ancestors, their way of thinking and feeling, their way of experiencing life and the world, gods and men. The existence of these archaic strata is presumably the source of
man’s belief in reincarnations and in memories of “previous experiences”. Just as the human body is a museum, so to speak, of its phylogenetic history, so too is the psyche.” (Jung, 286–287)

25 This point crops up in nearly all of the biographies on Jackson Pollock.

26 Henderson writes, “Early in my psychiatric career, a friend asked me to see a young artist professionally while he was convalescing from a mental breakdown. Since he was extremely un-verbal, we had great trouble in finding a common language and I doubted I could do much to help him. Communication was, however, made possible by his bringing me a series of drawings illustrating the experience he had been through. They seemed to demonstrate phases of his sickness and they were followed by others showing a gradual development during therapy into a healthier condition, a psychological reintegration, which allowed him to recover to a considerable extent during the next two years. In contrast to these there were a number of sketches which reflected the influence of Picasso in his “Guernica” period, or of Orozco, and would have to be classified as experimental works…

… It sounded as if I had set Pollock the task of portraying the unconscious in these drawings. This was not the case. He was already drawing them, and when I found it out, I asked for them. He brought me a few of the drawings each time in the first year of his treatment, and I commented upon them spontaneously, without establishing any psychotherapeutic rules. He did not have free associations, nor did he wish to discuss his own reactions to my comments. He was much too close to the symbolism of the drawings to tolerate any real objectivity toward them. I had to be content with saying only what he could assimilate at any given time, and that was not much. There were long silences. Most of my comments centered around the nature of the archetypal symbolism in his drawings, I never could get onto a more personal level with him, until after he stopped bringing the drawings. So you see my role was mainly to empathize with his feeling about the drawings and share his experience without trying to “interpret” them in the ordinary sense. They provided a bridge to communication, and it gave him the assurance that at least one other person understood something of their abstruse language.” (qtd. Friedman, “Energy”, 42)

27 Kramer explains that Rosenberg, “proved to be very seductive nonsense. For its effect was to provide the Abstract Expressionist movement with an exciting new dramaturgy in which the artist now emerged as an existential hero and his painting was to be seen not as an aesthetic endeavor but as the cynosure of a heroic private action that was not to be judged by aesthetic standards. It was, alas, a very ‘European’ theory, which derived from ideas to be found in Breton’s surrealism, Freud’s psychoanalysis, and Sartre’s existentialism, yet it proved to be so appealing that it was somehow exempted from any negative association with “the old parenthood of Europe.” (Kramer, 12)

28 Originally written as a doctoral dissertation at Princeton University in 1955, Seitz's Abstract Expressionist Painting in America was not published as a book until 1983, when Harvard University. Press brought it out with a forward by Robert Motherwell and an introduction by Dore Ashton.

29 This view is very similar to the one put forth by Rausalind Kraus, in “The Originality of the Avant-Garde,” Art in Theory, 1060-1065).

30 Raverty cites other examples writing that, “The poet Frank O’Hara, curator at the Museum of Modem Art in the 1960s, wrote a monograph on Pollock, concluding it with the following. “The effort to achieve such a state [of spiritual clarity] is monumental and agonizing.” The art historian Sam Hunter, in the Bulletin of the Museum of Modem Art wrote that, “Because he [Pollock] was so sensitive to his own artistic purpose and fundamentally uncompromising, when the impulse to paint suddenly eluded him ... he was desolated by anxiety and his own self-rebukes.”

Chapter Three

31 With the Age of Exploration, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and Dutch travelers eagerly laid claim to foreign colonies and collected vast collections of information about lands and peoples abroad. They subsequently gathered a large amount of geographic, biological, and anthropologic information about the world. Dutch traders were particularly eager to collect and trade in rarities or naturalia; bits and pieces of exotic plants, shells, minerals and precious stones, and tribal art objects or artificialia. These precious objects were collected by royal and amateur collectors all over Europe. Kept in wunderkammers, cabinets of curiosity or even whole rooms devoted to such collections, these bits of information and precious materials, along with extensive printed materials such as maps, atlases, biographic and anthropologic treatises and globes, presented views of distant lands and peoples to interested parties far afield. Geographers, collectors, and mapmakers simplified such studies, dividing the world into four massive continental regions known as the Four Continents. Beginning
with Cesare Ripa, author of the *Iconologia*, artists began personifying the Four Continents with renditions of female figures dressed in regional dress and accompanied by regional animals and materials goods. For example, Europa wore a crown of architecture and road upon a horse, symbols of European culture and agriculture. Sometimes she is dressed in a helmet and carries Apollo’s caduceus, a symbol for commerce. The Americas was personified with a bare-chested female dressed in a grass skirt with a full feathered headdress upon her head. She rides or sits upon either an armadillo or a beaver and carries symbolic trade goods such as silver coins and corn. Africa comes with tusks and the turbaned Asia carries incense. The tradition of personifying the land, linking the land with a type of mother-earth regional figure is still seen today in nineteenth and twentieth-century cigar boxes and nineteenth-century Orientalism and primitivism. Cesare Ripa, and Edward Andrew Maser. *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery. The 1758-60 Hertel Edition of Ripa’s ‘Iconologia.’* New York: Dover Publications, 1971. Print. Maria LaBarge, *Francois Valentijn’s Oud en Nieuw Oost Indien and the Dutch Frontispiece in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Coral Gables, FL, 2008. Print.

32 Jörg Breu created the illustrations for the 1515 edition of Ludovico de Varthema’s account of his voyage to the Middle East, India, and the East Indies (*Die ritterlich uñ lobwirdig Rayss “The Noble and Praiseworthy Journey”). The images are specifically designed to demonstrate the “otherness” of the people of the Near and Far East, to educate non-travelers as to the nature of the broader world then being discovered and explored. His text is one of countless travel records published in Germany and The Netherlands during the era. A review of this literature reinforces the degree to which illustrations of the era help to establish the notion of the exotic from European points of view. See Lisa Voigt and Elio Brancaforte, *The Traveling Illustrations of Sixteenth-Century Travel Narratives*, PMLA, Volume 129, Number 3, May 2014, pp. 365–398 (34).


34 According to his *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, Alfred Rosenberg espoused a theory of race and biology that asserted the Aryan as the Platonic ideal with each successive racial type being a deviant form or variation on the idea.

35 Said develops a critical theory that claims that Oriental studies are based upon the views of ruling elite Arab scholars who promote Euro-centric viewpoints that romanticize the Middle East. He calls for less subjective viewpoints drawn from more objective scholars from among and within the study groups. See Edward W. Said, Orientalism. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

36 In his review of alterity and *mimeis*, Taussig explains the difficulties of representation in Primitivism and its studies. He writes, “from First Contact time with Darwin on the beach, through the invention of mimetic machines, to late twentieth-century Reverse Contact now-time, when the Western study of the Third and Fourth World Other gives way to the unsettling confrontation of the West with itself as portrayed in the eyes and handiwork of its Others” the balance between imperial power and Magic and the ensuing indigenous economies that are thereby disrupted. Thus this study looks not to issues of alterity and its representation to excavate the balances of power and accuracies of representations, but rather looks at a phenomenological basis in aesthetics upon which the arts of both Western and Tribal peoples can be theorized.

37 Because the complexities of the relations of Colonial, Postcolonial, and Orientalism are implicated in the historiography of primitivist art, a brief explanation of the basic premises of each may be helpful here. Colonialism denotes the practice of subjugation or domination wherein a social group (most often a tribal group) is subsumed into the political and economic system of the colonizer. Colonialism is particularly implicated in the Primitivism art style (colonial arts from the Early Modern to the Modern eras) and particularly in colonial travel literature such as geographies, atlases, travel literature, and maps. Such colonial and primitivist works largely represent two underlying premises. First it portrays the dominated or dependent culture as being personified by the exotic female. Second, the dress, accoutrements of the female, along with the flora and fauna or representation of exotic or defining architectural settings symbolizes the geography or land of the dependent group. The act of portrayal can also be considered an act of possession wherein the viewer takes the position of the power by being enabled to gaze at will upon the subjugated. In response to the underlying (epistemic) power structure and the way the arts support such as inherent Colonialism, Postcolonial theory, also known as Orientalism (as defined by Edward Said) contests such premises. Said applied the principles of Foucault’s theory of episteme and the production of knowledge to colonial studies (or the study of power structures in terms of domination of tribal and small-scale societies for economic purposes). Said found that scholars of the Middle East had a tendency to perpetuate assumptions and theories about colonized peoples and the cultural “other” that theoretically perpetuated the foundational tenets of Colonialism or imperialism. We see
these issues of domination in primitivist artworks and how they support such domination. Said called for a close analysis on how colonial texts were being interpreted to deconstruct their underlying assumptions and the manufacture and perpetuation of colonial discourses. Studies that analyze colonial arts and literature fall under Postcolonialism or Orientalism. However, Postcolonialism looks at the consequences of colonialism and its consequences on the colonized whereas Orientalism analyzes the ways in which studies reproduce and perpetuate the tenets of colonialism.

38 This view depends upon the ideas within Michel Foucault’s writings regarding epistemic knowledge. Foucault, in The Order of Things, considers the early Modern era as being an era of classification. He claims that history possesses certain underlying conditions that constitute what knowledge is considered acceptable and true. These conditions change over time, sometimes in sudden shifts.

39 Read’s sentiments largely echo Kant’s claims that representation obstructs one’s perception of the forms of art. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 1781.


41 See also the work of W. Jackson Rushing, such as his Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde, and his article “Ritual and Myth: Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism” in The Spiritual in Art, Abstract Painting: 1890-1985.

42 While Foucault mainly cites texts such as newspaper articles, monographs, letters, advertisements, and other publications, he means to say all types of cultural artefacts which, according to art historians, include art images and objects. See Harrison, Primitivism, cubism, Abstraction; The Early Twentieth Century, for a broader discussion on art and discourse.

43 See John D. Graham to John Sloan, 17 November 1939 and 21 April 1949; and John D. Graham to Helen Farr Sloan, 5 October 1951, JSA.

44 The Haida people, indigenous to the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America, and specifically the Queen Charlotte Islands and northern British Columbia into coastal Alaska, are known for constructing monumental totem poles and for a highly stylized abstract animal forms based on precise symmetries. Whereas the Navajo, who settled in the West, from the northeastern part of Arizona, to southeastern Utah and northwestern New Mexico, create intricate patterns, stylized geometric forms and pictographic signs.

45 See Appendix A.

Chapter Four

46 In the dialogue, the drinking party honor Agathon who had recently won a prestigious poetry competition and they also discusses the attributes of love. Phaedrus, a heroic poet, is the first to comment on objects of beauty. (Howatson, Sheffield ed., Howatson trans., “Introduction”, The Symposium, vii) Phaedrus believes that a lover inspires one to virtuous public acts. He says, “For those feelings which ought to be the lifelong guide of men whose aim is to live a good life cannot be implanted either by advantageous connections or public honours or wealth or anything else so well as they are by love.” (Howatson, Sheffield ed., Howatson trans., Symposium, 178d) In such a case, the lover is an object of desire which stands in for or represents Love which is that which inspires virtuous acts. While Plato does not make a case for how Love inspires virtuous acts, the lover is the sign or representation of the ideal of Love. Love is the telos or final aim of desire. (Howatson, Sheffield ed., Howatson trans., Symposium, viii) Other speakers connect objects of love, namely lovers or beautiful objects with the attainment of some virtue. The politician Pausanias believes that love helps men become lovers of good public deeds and the cultivation of wisdom. (180c-185c, 184d). His discussion looks to Aphrodite the Heavenly and Aphrodite the Common. Both goddesses are personifications of or illustrations of sexual love. In such case, the object of love or desire is an imitation or a lower form of characteristic good acts, inspired by the gods. (184d) The physician Eryximachus considers love that which enables the ordering or harmonizing of the humors or elements of the body. (186a-188e) Love is mimetic of that which harmonizes. Aristophanes, the comic poet explains that all human are severed souls and desire their other halves, their soul mates to become complete and whole (189c-193d) Aristophanes says that, “It is Love who in the present confers on us the greatest benefit by leading us to that which is nearest to ourselves, and for the future gives us high hopes that if we show reverence to the gods, he will restore us to our original state, and heal us and make us blessed and happy. (193d) Each person then becomes a personification of a wounded severed soul. The body is representing the inner seeking and desiring soul. Agathon (194c-198a) seeks that which one does already possess, beauty, virtue, producing beautiful and fine things, inducing others to create such things, wisdom or poetic skill He
declares that at the touch of Love every man becomes a poet “though formerly unvisited by the Muse”. (196d-e). The muse and love both become models, personifications, or representations of the concept of inspiration. Personifications are common in Greek art and thought. Nike is the personification of victory for example. Victory is represented as a winged female deity, such as we see on the Temple of Athena Nike, Acropolis, and Athens, Greece. Athena is the goddess of wisdom and war, or in other words, a personification of the abstract concepts rendered mimetically in the form of a woman.

It may perhaps be argued that in Picasso’s later works he experimented with mimetic representation in varied ways. For example, Picasso’s “Still Life with Chair Caning” of 1912, inaugurates a period of papier collées or collages wherein Picasso, in collaboration with Georges Braque, applied diverse materials such as wood, chair caning, paper, newsprint, and other objects onto the canvas. In this case one must question if the materials are intended to be representative of that which they are or are merely artefacts of themselves. These experiments exemplify the point that mimesis and representation were in decline, but were still an inherent part of art and its functions, thus warranting such experimentation.

As Coleridge writes, “The composition of a poem is among the imitative arts; and that imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the SAME throughout the radically DIFFERENT, or the different throughout a base radically the same.” (qtd., Halliwell, 365-66) For more details on German Romanticism, the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and idealism in art, see Stephen Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis, Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. Princeton UP, 2002 and Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*, New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*, 1818, describes the world as the manifestation of Divine or metaphysical will, or a driving force. Music is the clearest representation of that driving spirit.

Paris, the essential birthplace of modernity, had, in the mid-1800s, grown exponentially into a massive urban cultural crossroads. The overcrowded city was largely structured as it had been since the medieval era and struggled to accommodate massive population growth and immigration. The French social reformer Victor Considerant wrote in 1845 that “Paris is an immense workshop of putrefaction, where misery, pestilence and sickness work in concert, where sunlight and air rarely penetrate. Paris is a terrible place where plants shrivel and perish, and where, of seven small infants, four die during the course of the year.” (cited in Patrice de Moncan, *Le Paris d’Haussmann*, p. 10) Riots, disease, crime, and squalor racked the city. This was the city that intrigued Baudelaire. He found beauty in the experience of the contemporary in all its scenes, scents, and sights. His verse and prose poems “vividly describe the spectacle of modern Paris: its degradation and depravity, but also its fascination and strange, endlessly surprising beauty.” It was Baudelaire, “one of the greatest and most influential” voices of the new modernity that articulated that the subject of modernity was sensual experience itself. The articulation of such was a sign of artistic authenticity and inner life, the pre-reflective expression of the mind or soul of the artist. (Wood, *Art in Theory*, 15) Part dandy part flaneur, Baudelaire and his fellow artists and writers, without agenda or forethought, moved about Paris experiencing the diverse flavors and people of the growing city. The subjective sensual experience, a sort of experience for experience’s sake, or what came to be known as the Aesthetic movement, was paramount, as evident in Baudelaire’s poem Glazier, “The first person I noticed in the street was a glazier whose piercing and discordant cry floated up to me though the heavy, filthy Paris air.” Intensity replaces morality, sensation replaces idealism. Such sensationalism or authentic experience became the hallmark characteristic of art.

The Surrealists, the German Expressionists and Social Realists claimed art for the expression of the inner experience of the subject within the outer lived political life. Jean-François Millet, Gustave Courbet, and Honoré Daumier in France had established this pursuit by provoking viewer sympathy through the representation of the pathos of the poor and peasant classes. Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Max Beckman, working under the New Objectivity style (otherwise akin to Social Realism) portrayed German society in distorted, satirical, and expressive ways that emphasize the political and moral experience in a corrupted Weimar culture. Meanwhile the Regionalists in the United States, including Pollock’s mentor Thomas Hart Benton, appropriated realism to portray the human condition in its inner experience and political outer forms. Mimetic art in general is applicable to at least five distinct categories of creative production, visual resemblance and figuration in art, emulation or imitation in behavior, dramatic reproduction in art or musical and vocal performance, and an underlying metaphysical conformity.

Modern art’s claim to pure form has a very long genealogy that gives its micro-origins to Cezanne, to be further developed by Picasso’s Cubism and down to Joseph Alpers, Hans Hoffman, and beyond. The irony is that the most vocal supporter of modern art as pure form was Clement Greenberg, Pollock’s most enthusiastic.
supporter. However, it is apparent in Greenberg’s writings, that he saw the second-generation abstract painters as best expressing modern art’s purity.

55 Soussloff and Polcari, to name a few, have suggested that Pollock’s work is a direct ritual performance. However, we can modify this interpretation through the terms and functions of mimêsis bypassing interpretations for a critique on modern and postmodern art and criticism.

56 The Renaissance literature on ciphers, hieroglyphics, and emblems is too long to list here, but the reader can begin with the Omnia Gentium Mores, Leges et Ritus by Johann Boemus, published in 1520 wherein the author notes the importance of ancient hieroglyphics from around the world which were thought to contain secret and mystical truths.

57 Of course, Heidegger’s main point concerns alêtheai or the event of truth; in some cases, he does recognize the value of correspondence. But for our purposes here, we look to Heidegger for his historiography of truth and particularly truth as correspondence prior to his argument for alêtheai. See Heidegger, On Truth.

58 A distinction should be made here on the difference between what Rauschenberg was doing and the work of Kaprow. Rauschenberg took out of his everyday life experiences the materials for making art such that the emphasis remained in the material form of his Columbines. Kaprow left no trace of his works other than photographs, as the material was always in a state of ongoing progression in time.