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Jackson Pollock, the Macho Prodigal:
exploring the cycle of culture and psychology

by

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'Man for the field and Woman for the Hearth,
Man for the sword and the needle she:
Man with the Head and woman with the Heart,
Men to command and Women to obey:
All else, confusion'

Tennyson (The Princess) 1847

'Dry-eyed, the inveterate patriarch
Roused his men of skin and bone,
Barbs on the crown of gilded wire,
Thorns on the bloody rose-stem'

Sylvia Plath (Patriarch) 1958

Introduction

The Romantic myth and its urban derivative: the Bohemian placed the artist decisively in the sphere of the masculine - and we traditionally leave the placement of the artist to the Bohemian. The artist is imagined as a free agent outside of society, exercising a liberated sexuality, engaged in a primordial struggle for self-determination. In chapter one, an examination of historical, physical and psychological myths are outlined in order to discuss, in chapter two, Jackson Pollock's role as the macho anti-hero. With such figures as Pollock, later twentieth century myths of the artist reinforce the artist's masculine status, and moreover advance the debate to allow the paintings themselves offer a critique of the occasion, cultural or psychological, of their production. We shall see how collective culture influences personal psychology, yet how conversely instinctual elements have determined our cultural structures. In many ways Pollock's art was driven by a wish to resolve this dichotomy. An unease with, yet acceptance of, the parameters of male society, led him from Oedipal conflict to artistic rebellion.

In the first half of the essay we shall unveil the paradox of Pollock's identity; how his childhood doubts over the contract between father and son - the perpetuating machinery of patriarchal society - threw him into

inner conflict with male gender roles. His response was dual: to embrace with manic vigour 'machismo', the triumphal ethic of the ultra-male; yet also to evangelise a radical redefinition of artistic expression and understanding. This redefinition is confronted in the second half of the essay, and it is seen to be personal as well as cultural; indeed one feeds of the other in the intellect of one who possessed, subconsciously, grave doubts about the machismal system which he championed. Several versions of the concept of the artist are studied. The Romantic hero and the Modernist anti-hero are the primary images of such a figure in our recent history. Pollock dallied with these, and other oppositions - genius and adolescent, flouting social norms yet needing deeply to locate himself in society, stereotypically macho yet haunted by his own feminine sensibilities. These contradictions gave to his paintings a jagged brilliance; we shall see if they were truly in rebellion with their culture, or rather were they the apotheosis of the American Way.

chapter one

Machismo is a portmanteau term from Spanish to connote extreme male-ness, masculinity or male dominance. Though useful to describe the supreme chauvinist, 'machismo' is the Latin American term for the Mystique of Manliness. It denotes a configuration of attitudes, values and behaviour that includes: breaking the rules, violence, sexual potency and contempt for women. It is an expression - sometimes at the level of caricature - of the patriarchal system. It consists of establishing a certain superiority of men over women, by which men feel themselves to be privileged beings in society and in the family.

Machismo is an assertion of virility. Originally in Latin the word 'Virtus' meant the attributes of a man, much like our word 'virility'; it meant bravery or courage, esteemed as the greatest virtue among the Romans. The etymological link between 'virtus' and 'virtue' is in this light no accident. Gradually, however, this meaning has become less important, as another has gained significance: that expressing the purity or chastity of women. In Latin America, where the progress of these social terms can be traced back to their Imperial and Renaissance roots, it is now generally used as equivalent to Castitas or chastity, a characteristic not generally ascribed to men.

Popular opinion, from primitive times to our own,

considered the male to be the superior animal. because he possesses the strongest bones, muscles, and because a nation's power is proportional to the number of its warriors and workers. Yet science has demonstrated that biologically the woman is the 'higher manifestation of life' (Morris, pp230-8)

Normatively a man has a more powerful and sustained sexual appetite than a woman. His love is sensual, physical, carnally desirous and is aroused by the physical attractiveness of the woman. He therefore is attracted by every pretty woman, and his love is inconstant. He loves variety. He has no periodic states of sexual interest with intervening periods of inactivity or apathy, and he is always ready and generally willing to indulge in sexual union. History, religion and the nature of man show a disposition toward polygamy. Church teaching, in application if not in principle, still identifies the female as inferior, made for the benefit and support of the male; as St. Paul says "the natural use of the woman is coition" (Romans, Ch. i v. 27). We can account for the age-old injustices perpetrated against women under man made laws:

"Speak unto the children of Israel, saying,
if a woman has conceived seed and born a man
child; then she shall be unclean seven days;
and in the eighth day the flesh of his
foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall

then continue in the blood of her purifying
three and thirth days; she shall touch no
hallowed thing; but if she bear a maid-
child then she shall continue in the blood
of her purifying three score and six days."

(Leviticus Ch. 12 v. 2-5)

In other words, the Biblical theory was that giving birth to a girl makes the mother twice as unclean as giving birth to a boy, and her spell in 'decontamination' is twice as great.

Man, on account of his physical strength, subjugated 'his' (sic) women and children, so that they looked up to t he head of the family with awe, as to a sort of household divinity. In many tribes, as in 'advanced' society, the man held/holds absolute sway over liberty and even the life of his family members.

Masculine Desire is on the precipice between determinism and disruption. Since Freud, it cannot be reduced to instinctual urges beyond rational control, nor yet can it be seen as a product of conscious will and planning. Freud (see 1947, p55 ff.) postulated that prehistoric leadership consisted of an all-powerful male, who had sole property in women and who drove out or castrated all the sons who challenged him. They hated and feared him , but also loved and honoured him, wishing to take his place (see James Fraser 'The Golden Bough' on The King Of The Wood). This ambivalence was the origin of the Guilt which actually increased the father's power over them. But they yet sought for themselves their father's inheritance. Out of this chaos a social contract was agreed where the role of the father was secured through primogeniture and symbolised through the

totemic meal. Subtly this maintains itself in an almost unchanged form with the hunter/breadwinner carving the Sunday roast. We all, Freud suggested, carry with us a phylogenetic memory trace of our archaic heritage. What his account can at best do is explain the reproduction of that symbolic position, not why it came about. Pshchic structures are already in place at the inception of cultural rulemaking, and it is difficult not to see these rules and taboos as products of basic psychological needs.

Humans have throughout their history been exposed to great and inexplicable natural phenomena - earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, forest fires and so forth. Out of these experiences there has developed an archetype of energy, a predisposition to perceive, and to be fascinated by, power; from rape to atomic energy - desire for, becomes anger at, the unobtainable.

Jung's concept of Transpersonal or collective unconsciousness contends that we have a storehouse of latent memory, traces inherited from our ancestral past; one that includes not only the racial history of the species but prehuman or animal ancestry also. Jung attributes the universality of the collective unconscious to the similarity of the structure of the brain in all races, which in turn is a consequence of a common evolution. To deny primordial memories, he asserts, is to deny evolution and the 'inheritance' of the brain.

Adler equated (male) feelings of inferiority with those of unmanliness or femininity, compensation for which was called "the masculine protest". This correlates clearly with Jung's theory on the personality halves 'anima' and 'animus', one obtaining dominance depending upon the gender of the individual. Under normal circumstances the feeling of inferiority or a sense of incompleteness is

the greatest driving force of mankind. In other words, humans are pushed by the need to overcome imperfection and pulled by the desire to mastery (for ideas on Adler and Jung, see Connell, Ch. 9, espec. pp 206-7)

During the early years of his theorising, when he was proclaiming the power-hungry nature of humans and the notion that the Masculine Protest was an overcompensation for feminine weakness (of the sort traditionally unsuitable to powerseeking), Adler was criticised for emphasising selfish drives and ignoring social motives. Striving for mastery sounded to some like the war cry of the Nietzschean Superman, a fitting companion for the Darwinian slogan of Survival of the Fittest. (Hall, 1957 p112ff)

The sharp division of behaviour into 'fixed' or 'innate' on the one hand and 'acquired'/'learned' on the other has now generally been given up, and the term 'learning' itself is being seen as too general and imprecise to be useful to a rigorous account of behaviour. Although we cannot give a straightforward answer to the central question "Is aggression an instinct? [particularly strong in males?]" we can say that, in man as in other creatures, there exists a physiological mechanism which, when stimulated, gives rise to both subjective feelings of anger and to bodily changes preparing the person for 'fight or flight'. This operation of the Sympathetic Nervous System is easily set off, and is instinctual.

From experiments upon animals it appears that there is a small area at the base of the brain in which the feeling of anger originates. The Hypothalamus co-ordinates emotional responses. In the ordinary course of events the hypothalamus is under the inhibitory control of the Cerebral Cortex, that is, the part of the brain which in evolutionary terms is most recently developed. It seems likely

that the release of adrenalin, noradrelanin, cortisone, and other hormones from the glandular system play an important role in sustaining anger.

Under the striated conditions of modern civilisation it is perhaps easier to arouse anger than to dispel it. The man who works off his aggression digging in the garden may seem psychologically naïve, but is acting wisely, for he is both giving his rage time to subside and performing some of the physical effort for which his body is now keenly prepared. We shall later see how this cycle of gender- and-culturally originated anger, and its dissipation through means not physically violent, corresponds closely to the style and production of Jackson Pollock's work.

At a rational level it may be true to say that one deplores getting angry; but the physiological changes that accompany anger give rise to a subjective sense of well-being and of purpose which in itself is rewarding. Appaling barbarities have been justified in the name of righteous wrath; but there can be no doubt that men enjoy the animating effect of being angry when they can justify it. It is as yet unclear whether the biochemical states underlying these tensions are aggressive or sexual, or indeed whether those areas share a biochemical foundation.

Kinsey lists fourteen bodily changes that are common to both sexual arousal and anger, and in fact can only discover four such changes which are distinct to one or other state (Kinsey 1948 p269). There must be differences in emotional perspectives between the animal in a state of sexual arousal and the animal spoiling for a fight; but

there is no evidence that, on a basic level, arousal of an aggressive nature need be any more or less instinctive than sexual response; and, as Kinsey suggests, they may indeed 'share' emotional or instinctual sources. Provided that the term aggression is not restricted to actual fighting, such responses may be a normal part of human identity, and be coterminous with the expressive physicality of sexual behaviour.

No other vertebrate habitually destroys members of his own species. No other animal can take pleasure in the exercise of cruelty upon another of its own kind. Humanity is the cruellest and most ruthless species that inhabits the earth. Yet no other animal 'creates' as humans do. This, in simple terms, is the paradox grounded in our instinct.

When a child rebels against authority it is being aggressive but it is also manifesting a drive towards independence which is a necessary and valuable part of human development. Our aggressive nature has been not only a vital safeguard against predatory attack; it is also the dynamo for intellectual achievement. In mastering mental problems, attacking difficulties, sharpening wits or penetrating to the heart of mystery, we are using energy, however peaceably, which in the last analysis is derived from the primeval aggressive drive to obtain mastery over the environment. And it is highly probable that the greater output by the male sex in intellectual

and creative areas, is due not solely to the advantages endowed by generations of patriarchal society, but also is due to greater degrees of aggressiveness in the male temperament.

The neurotic need for power expresses itself in the craving of power for its own sake, in an essential disrespect for others and in an indiscriminate glorification of strength and a contempt for weakness. People who are afraid to exert power openly may try to control others by intellectual means. Another example of the power drive is the belief in the omnipotence of the Will. Such people feel that they can accomplish anything, simply through the use of 'willpower'; a form of ambition traceable from Nietzsche's 'Ubermensch' to the American Way. In this case one's self-esteem is determined by the amount of public recognition received. The neurotic's need for self-sufficiency stems from having been disappointed in his attempts to forge positive relationships with people and primarily with his father, his first 'public', his would-be partner in the patrician contract.

This person sets himself apart from others, to minimise social anxiety, and the self-imposed isolation becomes 'appropriate'. That is: his unconscious comes to view his separation from the rest as a badge of his individuality - an individuality that he must announce to them, his public. Hence, a sensitivity to the repressiveness of patriarchal culture can 'slingshot' one into

a neurotic over-acceptance of that culture. Aggressive tendencies that could have been aimed directly against social injustices are detoured into art and released obliquely, in the guise of an otherwise highly masculine lifestyle. This may have been the case with Pollock, an aggressive yet expressive artist.

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The relationship between a boy and his father is an ambivalent one. In addition to the hate which seeks to usurp the rival father, a measure of tenderness, an certain affinity with him is also present. The two attitudes of mind combine to produce identification with the father. Thusly the perpetuation of the familial and social hierarchy is ensured, as the heir acknowledges the cyclical procedure whereby his own father attained his status. However, this understanding is not obtained without risk. Acceptance of the personal and social implications of male identity is in fact the acceptance by the child, of a submissive role in the present, with the promise of a dominant role in the future. This contract is therefore imposed, rather than spontaneously agreed upon. At a particular moment the child comes to understand that an attempt to remove the father - the will to which corresponds to the emergence of the Oedipus

Complex - would be punished by him: a symbolic castration. So from fear of castration, or the denial to him of the elements of his burgeoning identity, and hence of the means with which to achieve its aims, he gives up the will to possess what his father possesses - his mother. In so far as this wish remains in his unconscious it forms the basis of a sense of Guilt (usually expiated by union with another woman, onto whom is projected the fulfilment of the self-defining childhood desire). This is the 'normal' (?) way in which patriarchal society sustains and establishes roles for itself. Ironically, a problem early on in accepting its partisan and manipulative processes can either marginalise, or propel one into hyper-advocacy of its agendas. Such guilt eases itself in the indulgence in fantasy, but if dwelt upon, may be coerced by restrictive social orthodoxy into fetishism. This is not to place all fantasy scenarios at the Oedipal stage; however, for so long as it is true to say that we live in a patriarchal society we may be sure that we remain locked in the Oedipal matrix.

The art object in traditional (pre-humanist) aesthetics is an object of awe - part holy relic, part guilt-edged security. From such awe both Marx and Freud invoke a concept of fetishism. For Freud, the fetish is that which 'stands in for' the absent female penis, reassuring the male in his anxiety that the same loss might not befall him. Given the child's primitive state

of thinking, the idea that the female body is one from which something has been removed is an understandable hypothesis. In a patrician society the boy becomes increasingly aware of this 'added privilege' - his penis is not only a source of pleasure, but also the ticket of access to an exclusively male club. No man fully escapes castration anxiety; although few, sensing the conflicts within this social program, grapple with guilt severely enough to turn from the vaccine of fantasy to the possibilities of fetishism. It is not far-fetched to say that such darker understanding can galvanise an 'artistic temperament' in some. Coming from this source, it is possible to see the art of a painters such as De Chirico and Pollock as an extension of this paradoxical mental state: the will to champion patricianism by defeating it, or triumphing within it. Art of ostensible chaos, of discord, radically disrupting received sensibilities yet with an inner agenda, prone to appreciation by the previously-mentioned 'public', may be the manifestation of struggles with social structures through marginal yet privileged cultural forms. That is, through Art; in which aggression can be critiqued and released simultaneously, as with Action Painting.

Lacan observes that, from the moment we are expelled from the womb, our lives are a succession of experiences of Loss (chronologically the next painful separation we suffer is that of weaning from the breast, or its substitute). Such early experiences instil a sense of

'Lack' in all of us, men and women alike, and much of our subsequent behaviour may be seen as compensatory attempts to overcome this sense. Perhaps the artist, acutely aware, consciously or unconsciously, of these phenomena, 'creates' to compensate for the losses, the deficits that befall him as time passes. Which is not to say that all art is concerned with the development of human identity, for the psychological programmes examined here inevitably influence the nature of our societies, all that is around us, also.

* * * *

The particular task of Psychology is to decipher how we process and utilise our heritage of social ideas and Laws within the unconscious mind. The force of psychoanalysis is that it gives an account of patriarchal society as a trans-historical and cross-cultural enterprise. The word 'patriarchy' implies a universal and historical form of oppression which returns us to a biological, immutable view of civilisation in its defence. The biological differences in both the quantity and quality of male aggressiveness implies that they are not interchangeable. There is a biologically appropriate way for males to be aggressive and another for females. This accounts for our deep feeling that the ape like male with a club dragging off by her hair a conquered female has something 'right' about it, or at least in context carries few shameful connotations - while the image of

the 'big' female dominating the 'little' male reflects equal discredit upon both. Although we happen to live in a culture and at a time when the roles of the sexes are in flux, it is still true to say that dominance and a touch of ruthlessness are admired, by both sexes, in men. Whereas the same qualities manifested in a woman are generally deplored as unfeminine. It is often argued that this and other psychological differences between men and women are the product of culture and tradition rather than reflections of any biological dissimilarity. Equally it is true to say that men and women are born as 'tabulae rasae', to a degree, and ambisexual as Freud suggested, with a marked capacity for fitting into whatever role is expected of them.

In a reproductive relation between the sexes, the spermatozoa swim actively, while the ovum passively awaits its penetration. The nature of the sexual organs attests to the differentiation of the sexual role, a fact readily used by those who endorse a construction of society along gender-distinguished lines. Yet it may be a self-fulfilling prophesy, as the physical distinctions also endow the male with the hormonal impulses that find release historically in the imposition of their view of culture upon the community. In this regard, 'male' art like male-oriented culture can be seen as being in dialogue with itself, and its own sense of guilt.

Male sexuality, because of the primitive necessity

of pursuit and penetration, does contain an important element of aggressiveness; an element which is both recognised and responded to by the female who accedes to the traditional bargain.

Sexual self-confidence is seen as one of the yardsticks of masculinity, to the extent that performance anxiety is a leading cause of secondary impotence. At the same time the overemphasis of males on sexual success is clearly an indicator of relative gender fragility. Masculinity, or the male identity, is achieved by the constant, circular process of warding off threats to it; it is precariously achieved by the suppression of the 'anima' and outwardly of homosexuality. Terms such as Identity and Identity Crisis have become semantic beacons of our time, verbal icons or emblems illustrating our dissatisfaction with modern life, contemporary society; they point toward a need for authenticity, not unlike the beliefs of D. H. Lawrence, and against the life-denying principles of modernity. Patriarchy relies on such wavering opinions to bring it regularly back to the wellspring of biologically-defined communities.

The rise of the Macho style among gay men in the 1970s can be read as another episode in the ongoing guerilla warfare waged by sexual outsiders against the dominant order. By taking the outward signs of masculinity and eroticising them in a blatantly homosexual way, much mischief is done to the security with which the Male is defined in society, and by which their authority is assured.

As seen earlier, the artist, particularly an aggressively/Oedipally driven one such as Pollock, is marginalised like the sexually heterodox; similarly he may find himself playing with, parodying the attributes of masculine culture. This critique is inadvertant, however, as he enjoys a sense of privilege not afforded to the sexual outsider; it is an offshoot of the problems he had when in the oedipal stage, with the machinery of patriarchy. The culture ultimately still is in dialogue with itself, but such an artist may score some victories.

We must examine the relationship between the three traits around which our argument has centred: sexuality, aggression, and machismo. Of these, it is reasonable to contend that the first and second traits function as elements of personality that are combinations of instinct and historical, or social, programming, and that such instincts possibly suggested a method of (patriarchal) programming exploiting gender differences. The third of these traits, machismo, is, however, entirely 'learned', its development is due to exposure to specific social forces in specific cultures. That is not to say that all Macho-Men are artists or 'basically misunderstood' - far from it - but the suitability of art as a means of interrogating one's own psyche is evident. However, the Romantic notion of the artist as Genius transcends or ignores personality theory. To the artist is attributed a heightened sensibility and even a visionary capacity to see beyond surfaces, to probe human experiences -

expressed with a creative ability so great that it is assumed it must be innate. Art is the externalisation of the internal feelings and intellectual contents of this distinctive type of personality. Thus the primary subject of art becomes in fact art itself, and the artist whose being is expressed through it.

chapter two

By the fifties, a new new hero had risen from among us. The new hero is male, intellectual, tough. He is rude, crude and clumsy, he boasts of his political apathy and suspicion of all causes, and he is out to do noone any good but himself. His heroism is that he is honestly self-serving, and fiercely critical of all he sees as phoney or pretentious - a passion which expresses itself most easily in a rejection of all seen as feminine or domestic. He exudes a bullying contempt for women.

Pollock reached his artistic maturity at a point of social crisis in U. S. history. America was recovering from the Second World War. President Eisenhower was merely a superannuated combat hero. The appetite for a heroic figure was an insatiable one, but to a battle scarred nation a cultural hero seemed more appropriate; someone who could 'capture' the moral fragmentation of the times. In Europe, as in America, the forties could be characterised by the alienation of the individual - a positive faith in the reasonability of human nature was for many no longer possible. A feeling of uncertainty dominated the period. In popular culture the hero was finally, fully replaced by the anti-hero. If things seem to be breaking down or becoming insecure, it is the male ego that will fight its way to the forefront, with a 'mean' self-assertion, at the expense of everyone else. The neurotic intolerance of McCarthyism is unsurprising in this context.

The chief role, traditionally, of the hero, was to

act as intermediary between men and the gods. While men after death became insubstantial shadows, heroes retained their original qualities and could intercede for them (a task in the fifties performed by the characters of Marvel comics). Greek heroes, originally idealised males, decame at death demi-gods , and in the hierarchy occupied a position midway between mortals and the Olympians. That is, they inhabited a certain 'space', in neither immortal nor earthly zones but communing with both; nowhere but also everywhere.

Pollock's pictures represent the nothing that is everything - the unconscious itself. They seem to dwell in a in a time before the emergence of consciousness and being, or be fantastic landscapes of a moment long after the extinction of consciousness, or of consciously logical visual narrative (Jung, 1964 p308-9). Therefore, like the hero, they are placed on a threshold; their concern is not with creation or analysis but with the process, the action of painting.

Pollock was placed to be able to fulfil both the role of posturing folk-hero and that of sentinel to the twentieth-century pantheon of the unconsciousness.

The acceptance of modern art in the post-war world created an anomalous situation that has yet to be resolved. Not only was art in a 'difficult' self-regarding phase, but the inherited myth of modernism was one of revolt and despair at what was classically established and accepted. And yet modern art had become involved with the machinery of the state, as it imprisoned chaos, yet spoke of the the psychic disintegration felt in post-

war society. Although Pollock's work was an assertion of the rights of the individual: the interior world of dream was opposed to the exterior world of fact. The paintings themselves were a rejection of the mechanistic and ordered. Jackson Pollock the Romantic Hero envisaged the unattainable, beyond beyond the limits of society and human ability; pitting himself against the canvas as a hostile environment and, inevitably, at no time coming to terms with it. Pollock's work became an art of obliteration, an art of thematic erasure. The freedom of expression and existential violence that leap to the eye in the drip paintings were products of the impossibility of representation and the desire to avoid narrative expression. Action supposes a determinism; it inserts its efficacy into the chain of cause and effect. Pollock, the man of action, interrogates not the end, but the means. Action painting emphasised the importance attached to the physical process of painting, and the newly current existential attitude which held that artists grasp authentic 'being' through the act of creating rather than with a finished product. Jackson Pollock's outlook is characterised by a spirit of rebellion against affiliations with traditional styles of prescribed technical procedures, a renunciation of the ideal of a finished product subject to traditional aesthetic canons; an aggressive spirit of self-determination for art and artist. His was a strong demand for spontaneous freedom of expression, an activity which explored his personal

dilemmas, and the complexities of contemporary civilisation.

Humanist, Renaissance-based methodologies have proven seriously flawed when applied to the work of Pollock. Dependant as they are upon how artists handle certain 'literary' subject matter - specific mythical, religious, and historical material - in an exacting, realist manner, these approaches have engendered hostility and confusion when applied to 'America's greatest painter'. Pollock's opponents argue that his art is symptomatic of a breakdown in order and purpose all too commonly encountered in the Modern World (that for them should sustain and embody Order) and that his work moreover appears as an anarchic dissolution within modern culture.

Traditionally, Western artists followed procedures that grounded them in a fixed, stationary position before their canvases, and limited most movements to the wrist and arm so that they had complete control over all actions; physical exertion was avoided as much as possible. Pollock dramatically changed these practices by energetically mobilising his arm, his whole body, 'connecting' himself with his canvas. Harry Jackson, who had first encountered Pollock's work while recuperating from combat wounds, found his work completely authentic, honest, and real:

"This man felt deep and straight. He

 painted

painted tough, not from the fingertips.

Pollock's painting had what I felt in
combat, it was visceral"

(Naimeth & White 1989, p712)

For the great majority of Americans, art was Old Ladies business. They had inherited an aesthetic world shaped by Civil-War sentimentality and administered, almost exclusively, by women. Men who strayed into that world were considered, in the main, at best unproductive and at 'worst' homosexual. Given their upbringing, it was unsurprising that male artists of the Depression and Wartime years would be condemned to a constant struggle with their insecurities. They would all but exclude female artists from their company; they would pass women around like bottles of whisky; they would feel compelled to walk the barroom gauntlet, snarling insults and profanities, and picking fights in a running parody of masculinity. "In all that aggression and machismo", recalls Leslie Fielder (in Naimeth & White, *ibid*) who occasionally visited the Cedar Bar, "there was always a trace of hysterical desperation". No artist was more desperate than Thomas Hart Benton. Twenty years before Pollock drank, raged and bullied his way into popular iconography, Benton was the man's man. Such was his power that, despite rejecting his art and renouncing his political views, a generation of artists were shaped by his archetypal machismo. What Hemingway was to a gener-

ation of writers, Benton was to one of American painters; as drinkers, rebels, provocateurs - as Americans. Pollock, in his vulgarity, pugnacity and misogyny, proved a willing disciple.

Benton told a group of reporters in 1935 that the museums were run by "a pack of precious ninnies who walk with a hip swing in their gaits and affect a certain kind of curve in their wrists". No one painted on a grander, more ambitious scale. At the age of thirty, he began a cycle of seventy-five large panels in which he hoped intended to capture the whole sweep of American history: a suitably 'epic', masculine endeavour.

Jackson met Benton for the first time in September 1930. Benton was forty-one, and outwardly everything Pollock longed to be; an ideal combination of his father's exaggerated masculinity and his mother's artistic aspirations.

Later in the fifties and sixties Benton continued to vent his rage against the reign of pansies in the art world and recoiled at even the most casual contact with males. Though he found it increasingly difficult to disguise his preference for the company of younger men, and his virulent attacks on homosexuality began to sound shrill and defensive. It has been suggested that Benton fought in vain with his homosexual urges. To Jackson, however, who knew little, if anything, of Benton's private life, the ideal of the macho artist answered many dark, nagging questions. Was art a cissy activity? Benton's example was to expunge the feminine by exagger-

ating the masculine line: discussing art in hard-boiled hillbilly terms, sketching in a man's world of whorehouses and gymnasiums. Benton's ideal, inevitably, only exasperated the symptoms of Jackson's problems - the self abusive drinking and violent outbursts - without addressing the problems themselves. It succeeded in giving Pollock's rage a voice and character, not in giving it a rest.

The dynamics of personality consist of the ways in which psychic energy is distributed and used by the Id, Ego and Superego. Since the amount of energy is in limited supply, there is competition among the three systems for that which is available. As one system grows stronger the others necessarily weaken. If the Id gains control over a large share of the energy, behaviour will tend to be primitive and impulsive in character. If the Superego obtains the upper hand, personality will be dominated by moralistic rather than realistic considerations. Energy concentration in the Ego can lead one to live in a perpetual present and may tend to psychosis. The dynamics of personality consist of the interplay of the energy-acquiring forces, Cathexes, and restraining forces, Anticathexes. The conflicts within the personality may be reduced to the opposition of these two forces.

Although it is safe to say that the Superego certainly did not hold sway in Pollock's intellect, it is difficult to say with any certitude whether Id or Ego was dominant and to what degree. We could conjecture with some

confidence that the unconscious impulses which drove him posit the Id as the likely candidate: but Pollock learned to reduce these tensions by modelling his behaviour after that of someone else - Benton. We choose as models those who seem to be more successful at gratifying their desires than we are; a son identifies with his father because he appears to be omnipotent.

Creation is pure liberty. Prior to it there is nothing; it produces its own principles, and invents its own ends. This posits a libertine view of creation, one at a slant to the accepted definition, and was enunciated by Jean-Paul Sartre (Dempsey 1950 p59). Sartre writes that, upon growing to adulthood, we see our parents not as infallible figureheads but as the 'poor humans' that they are. Their judgements become mere opinions and our whole world has to be reconceived. The order of things is contested, and the child, no longer the object of divine attention, loses its personal essence, its 'truth'. He feels unjustified as an individual, and experiences a terrible liberty - a solitude in which to reconstitute himself. If the development of one's sense of role and identity was problematic, as Pollock's was, then this act of redefinition assumes a conscious centrality in one's life. The need to analyse one's felt marginalisation, and the need for an audience, steer one toward the temperament of the artist.

Pollock was unable to liquidate his Oedipus Complex, and he remained the eternal minor, an aged adolescent.

This is why, though he evangelised expressive freedom and strived to create ultimately himself, his self is one to be seen by others; even if this projected self was not truly that of his identity.

Pollock's macho posturing was in sharp contrast to his depiction of women. In Moon Woman Cuts The Circle, circa 1943, for instance, the boldness of the painterly image creates a powerful contrast with the ambiguity of the image's possible meanings. Who or what the moon woman is, and what she is doing, remain utterly mysterious, and such thematic multiplicity is oddly faithful to feminist principles from a visible misogynist like Jackson. She seems to be swiping with a yellow dagger at an animated yin-yang symbol. In an interview conducted many years after Pollock's death, Lee Krasner pointed out that many of his abstract paintings began with more or less recognisable imagery - parts of the body, fantastic figures.

"Once I asked Jackson why he didn't stop the painting when a given image was exposed. He said 'I choose to veil the imagery' "

(Friedman p7)

Birth, c. 1938-41, also seems to be a synthesis of both derived and invented images that resist clear meaning. The painting's title has encouraged some critics to search for a sexual, feminine imagery, and at least one Jungian critic identifies the cylindrical passage at the

lower right as a birth canal (see Judith Wolfe's book, 'Jungian Aspects of Jackson Pollock'). In Male And Female, 1942, Pollock remains ambiguous, if less violent, in his treatment of the human form. The figure on the left appears to be female, having breasts and a possibly bulging womb; that on the right less certainly appears to be male. A clear sexual identity for either figure remains elusive. The title does not solve matters, as the androgynous qualities of both figures deconstruct its cosy separation of gender identities.

Most of the recent interpretations of Pollock's 1938-41 work does not, in fact, derive from facts about the paintings but from the implication of biography. We cannot say what their elements refer to, other than to say that they refer to themselves, in auto-referential free association.

Pollock's depiction of women should not be viewed either as the Heroic struggle for individual expression or the equally painful discipline of purification and the innovation of style and self, but as a more fundamental discourse with the paradoxes and anxieties of masculinity which often hysterically and obsessively figures, debases and dismembers the body of woman.

conclusion

The central figure in art historical discourse is

Artist, who is presented as an ineffable ideal, complementing the bourgeois myth of the Universal Man. Creativity has been appropriated as an ideological component within patriarchal discourse, with masculinity the hallmark of the creator's personality. Femininity has been constructed as man's, therefore the artist's, 'subject'. In this ideological model, the woman is either the subject matter, the model or the muse.

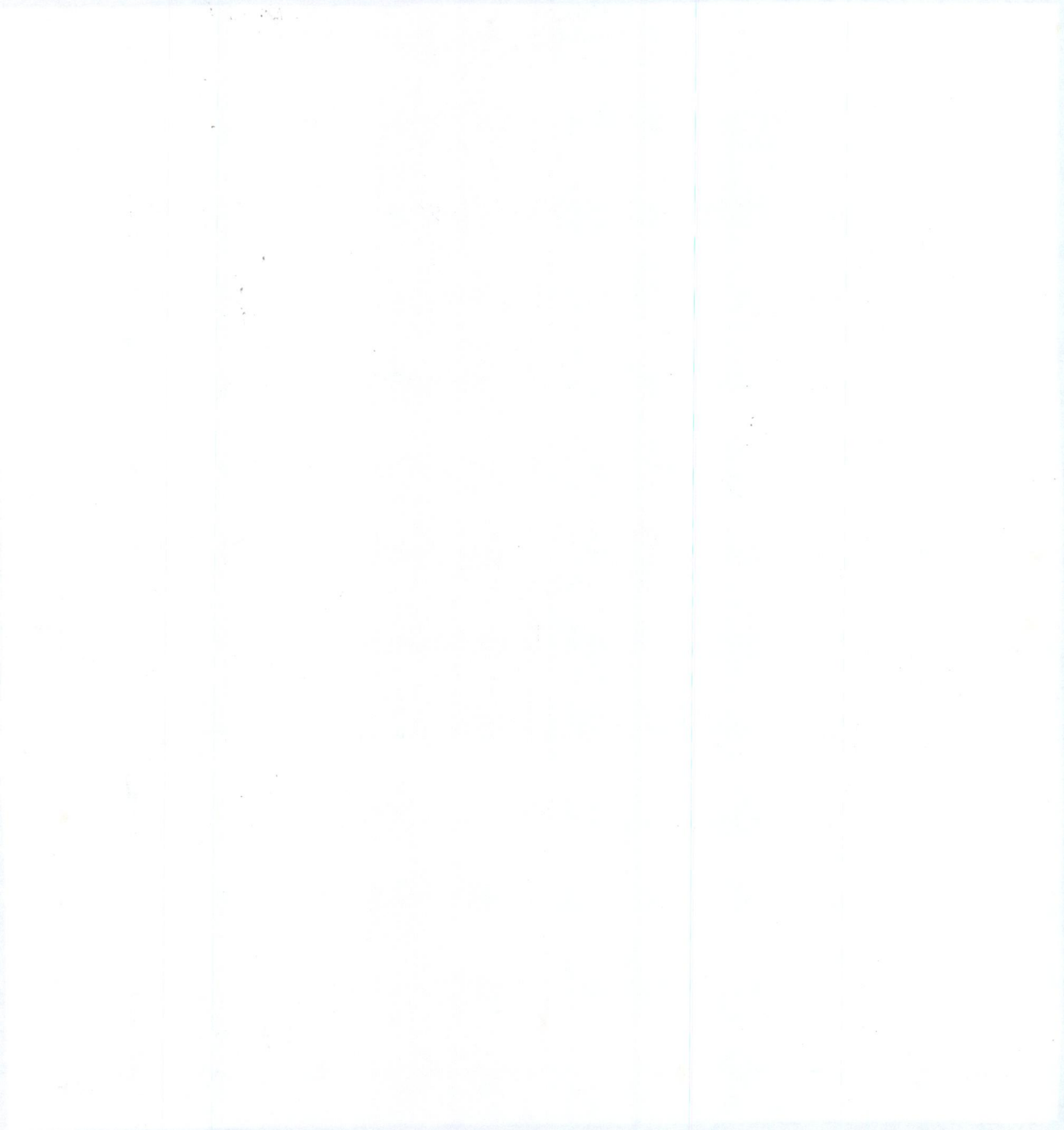
Jackson Pollock embodied the quintessential masculine determination to built testaments to the self. He discarded traditional Renaissance canons as irrelevant and outdated. The modern painter could not express his age, the aeroplane, the atomic bomb, in established forms that were themselves apparatchniks of the ideology of that age. He became the archetypal anti-hero in the realm of pictorial art, at a moment of social crisis in America. His exaggerated masculinity seems to have been an attempt to appease perceived insecurities by overcompensating for 'feminine' sensitivities.

Germaine Greer set out to explore the relationship between art production and the psychological structures of masculinity in 'The Obstacle Race'. In 'The Female Eunuch' eight years earlier in 1971 she argues that in patriarchal society women live as castrates, the damaged 'other' of men, psychically deformed, alienated from their own libidos. Greer delivers a mighty blow against the mythical ideal of the artist by revealing it as a socially sanctioned form of neurosis. She sees the artist

as the archetypal male personality structure - egomaniacal, posturing, overidentified with sexual prowess, sacrificing everything and everyone for something called his art. Painting in particular is a fundamentally masculine activity: the continual manufacture of monuments to, and dialogues with, the male self. Yet she confirms and accords with the inevitable masculinity of the artistic activity. "Western art", she writes, "is largely neurotic...but the neurosis of the artist is of a very different kind from the self-destructiveness of women" (Greer 1979 p327).



Moon Woman Cuts The Circle, c. 1943





Birth c 1938-41





Male and female c. 1942



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