hand. Different tools produced different flows depending on the way Pollock employed them, though one cannot reliably infer a given technique from a given mark. Although those issues deserve attention, our study focused on the artist's most characteristic and distinctive effects: the linear tracks that appear in the poured abstractions he created between 1947 and 1950.

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Energy threat from overpopulation

The mega-scale Desertec project (PHYSICS TODAY, July 2011, page 21) calls for solar energy collection in the Sahara. The solar energy will then be converted to electrical to be carried to Europe on high-voltage transmission lines and undersea cables. A leading proponent of Desertec is quoted as saying that one of the reasons for the project "is exploding population" (PHYSICS TODAY, July 2011, page 22). Serious questions need to be raised about some aspects of the proposal.

Instead of addressing "exploding population," a world-threatening problem, the proposal would accommodate it and thereby guarantee that the population will continue to grow. That will make everything worse.

Desertec might work in a peaceful world, but increasing overpopulation is a main driver of our current condition of perpetual war. Tall electrical transmission towers and undersea cables are tempting targets for terrorists. Remember that at the outbreak of World War I almost 100 years ago, one of the first things the British did was to send out naval parties to sever the undersea cables and destroy the relay stations that the Germans used to communicate with their African colonies. German naval raiding parties, meanwhile, were destroying the cables and relay stations the British used to maintain communications with their global empire.

We first need to deal successfully with the urgent problems of overpopulation (see my article, "Thoughts on long-term energy supplies: Scientists and the silent lie," PHYSICS TODAY, July 2004, page 53). Doing so will reduce the pressures for continuing war and increase the chances that Desertec might be a success.

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Siphoning off the last word

Before the whole siphon issue goes away (see PHYSICS TODAY, August 2011, page 10, and previous comments cited therein), I thought I'd point out why people often think that siphons depend on atmospheric pressure. In the most familiar examples, atmospheric pressure is required to set up the siphon, as one "sucks the liquid up" into the pipe, hose, or other conduit.

Once the siphon is set up, of course, the tensile strength of the liquid itself is what keeps it going. Liquid tensile strength is something that a lot of people don't understand, however, and they confuse the setup condition with the continuous operation of the siphon.

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