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A WORLD UNSUSPECTED: GERTRUDE STEIN,
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, AND THE
RISE OF AMERICAN MODERNISM.

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HENRY MARSHALL SAYRE

1976

A World Unsuspected:

Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and the Rise of
American Modernism

by

Henry Marshall Sayre

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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(Chairperson of Supervisory Committee)

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We have carefully read the dissertation entitled A World Unsuspected: Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and the Rise of American Modernism

_____ submitted by
Henry M. Sayre _____ in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
and recommend its acceptance. In support of this recommendation we present the following joint statement of evaluation to be filed with the dissertation.

This dissertation attempts to show the impact of abstract art on the poetry of William Carlos Williams. It argues that Williams' poetry is the product of an effort to reconcile the design and unity of abstraction with the chaos, fragmentation, and multiplicity of reality. Williams believed abstraction to be the means best suited to the artist for the revelation of the human mind's ability to order and design its world. His concern with the idea of abstraction, influenced in large part by modern painting but also by the example of Gertrude Stein, helped him to develop a poetic form--the triadic variable foot--which allows the orderliness of abstract design to exist simultaneously with the disorder of reality. The simultaneity testifies to the separation of mind and matter, while the poetic form discovered reveals a way for art to bridge--or measure--the distance between them. Thus, without ever denying their separation, Williams is able to unite mind and matter, and abstraction and reality.

Chapter I, "The Example of Gertrude Stein," details the efforts of the first American writer to adapt the techniques and aesthetics of modern painting, Hermetic Cubism in particular, to the art of writing. It examines Stein's efforts to design her prose on repetitive patterns, her sense that all nouns possess an innate verbal quality, her desire to make her portraits represent not the person but the mind of the person, and the consequences of her decision to strip language of its connotative and denotative functions and to treat words as purely plastic material.

Chapter II, "Williams and the Idea of Abstraction," concentrates on Williams' reaction to Stein's example, his unwillingness to completely dismiss language's denotative functions, and his early attempts to treat language abstractly. Williams shifts from the example of Stein to the example of Juan Gris. He attempts to find a means for the poem to be a

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"conversation" between abstraction and reality--"conversation as design."

Chapter III, "The Americanization of a Poetic," details the aesthetic necessity for treating things in the poem as the only way to develop a sense of place in the poem. It examines the consequences of treating the American idiom as a thing--by way of Stein's willingness to treat language as a thing--and the consequent ability to design things in such a way as to create a recognizable poetic space. By treating things--wordsthemselves and the things which words denote--plastically, Williams defines the difference between mere saying and poetic saying.

Chapter IV, "The Achievement of Paterson," argues that Paterson is constructed around the tension between abstraction and reality, a tension reflected in the poem in terms of the country and the city, the language of the falls and the language of the people, and poetry and prose. Through four Books, Williams' inability to fuse abstraction and reality makes for a constant "beginning again." But in Book Four, inspired by Curie's discovery of radium in the dissonance of uranium and the notion of "antagonistic cooperation," Williams intimates that only in Art can the two sides of human experience co-exist. Thus, when he begins again, in Book Five, it is "A World of Art" he celebrates, a world of activity which he equates to the Action Painting of a Pollock or a Motherwell, a world in which abstraction and reality cooperate antagonistically and with purposeful dissonance in the formal structure of the triadic variable foot.

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Doctoral Dissertation

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Introduction

Not long before New York's 1913 Armory Show, but in time for their work to have an impact on that famous exhibition, four European painters-- Robert Delaunay, Franz Kupka, Wassily Kandinsky, and Francis Picabia--decided that representation of the objective world had no place in painting. With that decision the modern phenomenon known as "abstract art" was born. Depending on one's perspective, the decision can be seen as either the culmination of one epoch or the beginning of another. On the one hand, an art which gives up the objective world is an extreme version of Romantic subjectivity and the aesthetic purity of French Symbolism, a final reconciliation to the idea that mind and matter are as irreconcilable as Cartesian rationalism and Lockean empiricism seemed to be in the eighteenth century. Abstract art is the mind's most self-assertive and triumphant gesture. On the other hand, the birth of abstract art and the history of its gradual acceptance in the twentieth century is an almost imperative touchstone for any description of what we have come to call "modernism." Ours is an era perhaps as well defined by its experimentation with and faith in the mind as any other. And if ours is also an age of uncertainty, that is because the human mind is no certain place to dwell. In an era of psychology (Freud and Jung), formalism (the New Criticism and Structuralism), and mathematic theory (Einstein's relativity and Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty), abstract art is the aesthetic manifestation par excellence of the mind itself at work. No writer--neither Gertrude Stein nor William Carlos Williams--could afford to ignore it. Words, of course, point to the

outside world, but as abstract art affirmed the value in turning away from the outside world, the writer had to discover a way in which to make words themselves turn inward. The emphasis abstract art placed on form and pattern was the writer's example.

Like all art, modern abstract art sought to reveal the "beautiful." In large measure, that is why it left the objective world behind. As the beauty of the objective world seemed more and more to fade away--first with the Industrial Revolution and then with the wholesale destruction of the First World War--the only possibility for the restoration of the beautiful seemed to be in the human mind itself, despite the fact, as Eliot's Prufrock knew, the human mind seemed for the moment to be "etherized." Abstract art meant to recapture the mind's dreams, reveries and idealisms--man's spirituality--and put them back into the world in the very presence of its canvases. Here, in the painting, was evidence that order and harmony could come into being, and here was testimony against the disorder and decay of the objective world itself. In this sense, abstract art sought to "purify" the world. It trusted that the spiritual essence of man was no illusion, and it modelled itself after the "purest" of the arts--that is, the one which bears the least relation to the objective world and which also seems to capture the beautiful--music. From Kandinsky's Concerning the Spiritual in Art (written in 1910 though not published until 1912), through Mondrian's Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art (1937), to Abstract Expressionism ("Pure painting is a formal problem . . . and it is a color problem . . . their interplay leads to a pictorial consonance comparable to harmony and counterpoint in music"--Hans Hofmann¹), the notion that the emotive and spiritual power of all the arts derives from the same abstract arrangements

which give music its emotive and spiritual power is one of abstract art's fundamental beliefs. Ezra Pound, in his 1916 memoir of the sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska, put the case as succinctly as anyone:

It is no more ridiculous that a person should receive or convey an emotion by means of an arrangement of shapes, or planes, or colours, than that they should receive or convey such emotion by an arrangement of musical notes.

I suppose this proposition is self-evident. Whistler said as much, some years ago, and Pater proclaimed that "All arts approach the conditions of music."²

By 1910 the Cubists were on the verge of a totally abstract art which would convey emotion solely by means of the arrangement of shapes, planes and colors. In the 1910 and 1911 hermetic still-lives of Picasso and Braque, the representational elements of the paintings are so absorbed into abstract design that we can recognize them only with the help of the paintings' titles. Braque's 1911 Le Violin, for instance, initially seems to be a rebus, with no recognizable elements in it at all--but careful study reveals the violin itself portrayed in large blocks of color and line: a single s-curve represents one of its slats, another line represents its shoulder, which is connected to two parallel lines culminating in a scroll that must be its neck. The musical instrument is one of the Cubist's main themes, and notations from musical scores proliferate in Cubist painting of this period--their painting consciously participates in the non-mimetic "conditions of music." Cubism was also, as its name implies, an art very much concerned with the world of form: a conscious analysis of the geometric underpinnings of reality; an attempt to reveal the primary forms that abound in even the most mundane of objects--a glass, or a cup, or a table--and the power that these objects thereby exert. The Cubists were so drawn to the idea of total abstraction that the Cubists Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger

wrote in their 1912 history of the movement: "Let the picture imitate nothing and let it present nakedly its raison d'être!" The picture's raison d'être, they asserted, should be the artist's imagination, not the arbitrary object upon which that imagination works. "Nevertheless," they continue, "let us admit that the reminiscence of natural forms cannot be absolutely banished; as yet, at all events. An art cannot be raised all at once to the level of pure effusion."³

The poet Guillaume Apollinaire also saw Cubism as moving toward "pure effusion." In his own 1913 history of the movement, The Cubist Painters: Aesthetic Meditations (for the most part, incidentally, a collection of articles on modern art which had appeared in various newspapers and magazines from 1908 to 1912), he speaks of the birth of a new painting, a "pure painting," which will be to "old painting" what music is to literature, for "music is literature purified."⁴ For Apollinaire, the man whose work exemplified "pure painting" most fully was Robert Delaunay. Delaunay worked in the Cubist idiom, but his style (Orphic Cubism or Orphism, as Apollinaire called it, Simultaneism, as Delaunay called it) carried Cubism away from the object toward pure abstraction. In the December 1912 Der Sturm, Apollinaire published an article on Delaunay entitled, "Reality, Pure Painting." The article quotes in full Delaunay's aesthetic declaration "on the construction of reality in pure painting." The basis of pure painting is the "simultaneous contrast" of colors: "it is the most powerful means to express reality" because it is "no longer dealing with effects . . . or with objects . . . or with images. . . . We are attaining a purely expressive art, one that . . . is becoming a plastic art with only one purpose; to inspire human nature toward beauty."⁵ In two

series of paintings, Circular Rhythms and Simultaneous Discs, both initiated in late 1912, Delaunay turned to totally abstract arrangements of primary color in which the colored circles exist independently of one another and simultaneously interpenetrate to give the impression of a whole--hence "simultaneous contrast." Elsewhere Delaunay would write: "Everyone has sensitive eyes to see that there are colors, that colors produce modulations, monumental forms, depths, vibrations, playful combinations, that colors breathe . . . goodbye to Eiffel Towers, views of streets, the outside world We no longer want apples in a fruit bowl, we want the heartbeat of man himself."⁶

The Czech Franz Kupka, a friend of Delaunay's and likewise an Orphist, arrived at this abstract style by way of a careful study of Seurat's Impressionism, the pointillist investigation of the relationships among primary colors. In 1912 he painted the Newton Discs, non-representative, concentric circular forms in pure colors. In the same year he exhibited Fugue in Red and Blue at the Salon d'Automne, also a circular pattern of colors. A year later he explained this painting to the New York Times: "I think I am able to find something between the vision and the eye and that I am able to produce a fugue in color like Bach has made in music."⁷

Kandinsky and Picabia reached similar conclusions at almost the same time. Picabia, through his wife Gabrielle Buffet who had studied music in Berlin from 1906 to 1908, was introduced to the German notions of "pure" art which were then being expounded by Arnold Schönberg, among others, and which were also among Kandinsky's major inspirations.⁸ From 1908 to 1912 Kandinsky and Schönberg had worked closely together. Schönberg developed the twelve-tone row at this time, finishing his theoretical explanation of

it in 1910 almost simultaneously with Kandinsky's completion of Concerning the Spiritual in Art. Schönberg even took to painting for a time, joined the Blaue Reiter group, and exhibited with them on a number of occasions, including the first Blaue Reiter exhibition on December 18, 1911. He and T. V. Hartmann contributed articles on the liberation of music to the 1912 Blaue Reiter Almanac. The Almanac also gave Kandinsky the opportunity to promulgate what he called the "total work of art," which consisted of his own libretto ("The Yellow Dog"), dance, colored light orchestrations, music, and abstract stage designs. This "total" work would emphasize the common ground of all the arts, abstraction.

In Reminiscences (1913), the most autobiographical of his writing, Kandinsky recalls three sources for his interest in abstraction. The first was the division of the atom: "I would not have been surprised if a stone had dissolved in the air in front of me and become invisible." The second was his understanding of Claude Monet's Impressionist Haystack: "Unconsciously the object was discredited as an indispensable element of a painting." And the third was his reaction to a performance of Wagner's Lohengrin: "I saw all my colors in my mind's eye. Wild, almost insane lines drew themselves before me."⁹ His definition of the art of abstraction, the art of "the composition," indicates his desire to bring painting as close as possible to music, to match the emotive power he had experienced on hearing Lohengrin: the painting "derives mostly or exclusively 'from within the artist,' as has been the case in music for centuries. In this respect painting has caught up with music, and both have a constantly growing tendency to create 'absolute' works, that is, completely 'objective' works which like the works of nature, grow 'from themselves' purely according to laws as independent

beings."¹⁰ Francis Picabia defined art such as this as the "objectivity of a subjectivity" almost simultaneously in the June 1913 number of Camera Work, the photographer Alfred Stieglitz's American magazine. For both of them, this new "objectivity" required a gradual disenfranchisement of the old "objectivity," the replacement of material reality by psychic reality.

This substitution was no easy accomplishment for either Picabia or Kandinsky, trained as they were to seek their inspiration in nature. At the elementary level, seeking one's inspiration in nature meant "copying" nature, or at a most sophisticated level "interpreting" it. Kandinsky describes a time, probably between 1910 and 1912, when he came into his studio at dusk and saw against the wall an "indescribably beautiful" painting which was "nothing but forms and colors, and whose content was incomprehensible." In this instance the dusk, together with the fact that the painting was resting on its side, caused him to misapprehend the objects present in his interpretation of nature. In fact, he saw no objects at all. "Now I knew for certain," he writes, "that the object harmed my paintings."¹¹ Kandinsky's Improvisations, Compositions, and Abstractions of the period 1910 to 1912 all show signs of objective experience--elements of landscape, including perspective and moving figures. When he wrote, in Concerning the Spiritual, that "composition is a combination of colored and graphic forms which exist independently, which are summoned up by an inner necessity and, thus living together, come to form a whole that we call a picture," he did not preclude the possibility that this "inner necessity" might be provoked by the world of objects. To the contrary, he endorsed the idea: "To deprive oneself of this possibility of causing a vibration would be to impoverish the arsenal of our means of expression."¹² But his 1913 Composition VI is

total abstraction. Provoked by experiences such as the one he describes in Reminiscences, he finally turned away from all reference to the physical world and replaced the reality of that world with the reality of his own mind.

The history of Picabia's painting is strikingly similar. In late 1908, shortly after she had met him, Gabrielle Buffet reports that Picabia told her that he was bored with his painting. He was to this moment a highly respected and successful Impressionist in the manner of Sisley. "There is," he told her, "another kind of painting." To her intrigued inquiry as to what that might be, he replied, "Of forms and colors freed from their sensory attributions; a painting situated in pure invention which recreates the world of forms according to its own desire and its own imagination."¹³ At about this same time, she claims that she introduced Picabia to the notion that music is like painting, "la musique est comme la peinture," which would be the title of one of Picabia's abstract works of 1915.¹⁴ In the "Preface" to his own exhibition at Stieglitz's Photo-Succession Gallery in March 1913, Picabia wrote a description of abstract painting:

The simple and direct perception of the outside world does not satisfy us any longer, and we try to go deeper into the essence and quality of this simple perception. . . .

For example; when we look at a tree we are conscious not only of its outside appearance but also some of its properties, its qualities, its evolution. Our feelings before this tree are the result of this knowledge acquired through experience, through analysis; hence the complexity cannot be expressed simply by objective and mechanical representation.

The qualitative conception can no longer be expressed in a purely visual or optical manner: and in consequence pictorial expression has had to eliminate more and more objective formulae from its convention in order to relate itself to the qualitative conception.

The resulting manifestations of this state of mind . . . cannot . . . be anything but abstraction. . . .

But expression means objectivity otherwise contact between beings would become impossible, language would lose all meaning.

This new expression in painting is the "objectivity of a subjectivity." We might better understand it by comparing it to music.

If we seize without difficulty the meaning and logic of a musical work, it is because this work is founded on the laws of harmony and composition, the knowledge of which we have either acquired or inherited. These laws are what is today the objectivity of painting. . . . The laws of this new convention have not as yet been completely formulated, but little by little they are coming to be defined, as the laws of music have been better defined, and very rapidly they will become as comprehensible as the objective representation of nature once was. This is why, in my paintings, the public should not look for a "photographic" memory of a visual impression or sensation, but must regard them as an attempt to express the purest abstract reality of form and color considered in themselves.¹⁵

Picabia had been moving toward this "pure" abstraction since 1908 when he had painted Caoutchouc, a pattern of colored planes surrounding ten interlocked circles, often regarded as the first truly abstract and non-objective painting. Gabrielle Buffet has testified otherwise, stating that the subject of the painting was in fact several oranges on a table.¹⁶ This is probably true, considering that Picabia's other "abstract" work until 1913 draws its inspiration from nature--landscapes and figures reduced to such elemental forms that without the titles many would appear as abstract as Caoutchouc.

But early in 1913, simultaneous with his coming to America for the Armory Show where he was to be the semi-official spokesman for the European contingent (Picabia was independently wealthy and Walter Pach had recruited him for this purpose largely because he was the only French artist with sufficient funds to accept the stipendless invitation), Picabia gave up all pretension of representation. Udnie, Etaosnisl, Révérénces, Catch as catch can, Culture physique, New York, Etude pour une étude de New York, New York perçu à travers le corps, and Chanson nègre, while admittedly inspired by his

visit to New York, all "represent" only states of mind, complex geometric realizations of the tumultuous movement which the city had impressed upon him. With the more "representational" works that he had displayed at the Armory Show--Procession à Seville and Danse à la source among them--most of these were shown at Stieglitz's in March 1913, an impressive three months' production. Interviews with Picabia on the subject of abstraction, often illustrated by his work, appeared in newspaper and magazines across the United States.¹⁷ These, together with the works by Kandinsky and Delaunay on display at the Armory Show (100,000 people visited it in February and March of 1913), introduced the United States to abstract art fully a year before Pound, in London, wrote in his memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska that he would like to "found a new school of 'non-representative' painting."¹⁸ The avant-garde in the United States had witnessed "non-representative" painting first hand, in fact, two years before the Vorticists held their one and only exhibition at London's Doré Galleries on June 10, 1915. In his Autobiography William Carlos Williams described his reaction to the Armory Show very simply: "I was tremendously stirred" (A, 138).

This study is an attempt to measure just how "tremendously stirred" Williams was, an attempt to measure the impact of abstract art on his poetic achievement.¹⁹ It is also meant, at least in part, as a rebuttal to J. Hillis Miller's essay on Williams in Poets of Reality, probably the most influential study of Williams' work to date.²⁰ Like myself, Miller sees Williams' poetry as an effort to define "a space both subjective and objective, a region of copresence." But Miller insists that Williams accomplishes this by means of a "leap into things" which allows him to "give up the ego," and thereby "also give up those dramas of the interchange of

subject and object, self and world, which have long been central in Western philosophy and literature."²¹ Williams, however, constantly resisted the "leap into things" of which Miller speaks, just as he constantly resisted the leap into the mind or ego which abstract art represents. Rather than giving up the dualism of subject and object which is so central to Western thought, Williams embraced it: he leapt both ways--simultaneously. Williams' aesthetic was based on an unresolvable dialectic: his thesis was the mind, the imagination, and its potential to create beauty; his antithesis was the world, fragmented and chaotic. By the end of his career, Williams had realized the futility of trying to achieve a synthesis of self and world. He had become the perfect anti-Hegelian, giving thesis and antithesis more or less equal time, but choosing neither. To close the argument between self and world would not only resolve the interchange central to Western philosophy and literature, but the implication of his poetic effort is that without the interchange, and the ambiguity and tension upon which it rests, philosophy and literature would simply cease to be. The "space" of Williams' poetry is both subjective and objective, but it is not a "space" created by any synthesis of the two. It is, rather, like the bridge between Juarez and El Paso in "The Desert Music" (PB, 108-120), a path which measures the distance between these two poles of human experience. It is, in alternate terms, a choreography without which the two poles cannot dance, a dance which depends as much on the distinct identity of each partner as it does on the co-ordination of their movements. The "pigment" of the poem, Williams writes in his 1944 poem "The Last Turn" (CLP, 44), is the "distressing" range of "detail" which makes up the world, and against this detail "rages the fury of / our concepts." This conflict is the generative source of Williams'

poetry, and he never obliterates it. Thanks to Miller's essay, we can safely take Williams' interest in the "things" of objective reality for granted. This study is an attempt to show how abstraction comes to dance separately, but in unison, with that reality.

In the first chapter of this study I discuss the work of Gertrude Stein in order to present more clearly the implications--both positive and negative--of total abstraction for the writer. By 1913, Stein had given up "representational" prose altogether and had begun to treat language as a plastic medium which could be composed in such a way as to reveal the abstracting capabilities of the human mind alone. Williams was very sympathetic to Stein's work. He saw it as a kind of necessary descent, the first step to be taken in rescuing language, a language which he felt was "in its January" (I, 280). "Stein's theme is writing," he would say, but "it is simply the skeleton, the 'formal' parts of writing, those that make form, that she has to do with, apart from any 'burden' which they carry" (SE, 115). Her writing transcends "logicality as a basis for literary action"; she "erases . . . stories"; and she has "unlinked" words "from their former relationships in the sentence" (SE, 116). The result is that her writing "has much the same quality of movement to be found in Bach--the composition of the words determining not the logic, not the 'story,' not the theme even, but the movement itself" (SE, 117). In Paterson V, Williams cites Stein's "rout of the vocables" as part of a necessary "cure" which began "with the abstraction / of Arabic art" (P, 222). Williams would go so far as to say, more than once in his Autobiography, that it was Gertrude Stein who "found the key" for the modern writer "with her conception of the objective use of words" (A, 241). What was important to him was that

she treated words as plastic material to be shaped into abstract patterns regardless of their meaning.

Williams' recognition of the "plastic" quality of Stein's prose brings me to the second reason why I have dedicated an entire chapter to her work. Of all the American writers in the opening decades of this century, Stein was far and away the most closely associated with modern painting, and in forging a new art, as Williams admits in his Autobiography, "painting took the lead" (A, 134). Twice in the Autobiography, when he is speaking about Stein's "objective use of words," he does so specifically in connection with abstract art, the aesthetics of which were exemplified by what he called the "Hartpence story" (A, 380). Alanson Hartpence was an employee of the Daniel Gallery in New York and a minor poet in the group which formed around the little magazine Others which Williams edited on occasion. Hartpence was helping a customer in the Gallery one day, a woman in her fifties who was very interested in a particular painting. Something, however, disturbed her about it. Finally she asked, "But Mr. Hartpence, what is all that down in the left hand corner?" Hartpence considered the problem area for a moment, then replied, "That, Madam, is paint" (A, 240). For Williams, "it is our failure to take this step," our failure to admit that paint and writing need not "represent" anything, "that blocks us in seeking to gain a full conception of the modern in art" (A, 240). What we have to come to understand is that "a picture [is] a matter of pigments upon a piece of cloth stretched on a frame" and, likewise, a poem is a matter of words "on the page . . . that which has been got down" (A, 380-381). When, after the Armory Show, Williams was himself closely allied to the painters, he simply could not ignore the example of Stein's adaptation of the painters'

discoveries to her own medium--words--for his closest associates admired her work immensely.

It was Alfred Stieglitz, the New York photographer and art dealer, who first introduced Stein's writing to the American public. In August 1912, he devoted a Special Number of Camera Work to Stein's writing. Stieglitz chose to represent her work with what would become her two most famous portraits--the portraits of Picasso and Matisse--together with fourteen reproductions of drawings and paintings by these two artists. In his editorial introduction to the number, Stieglitz writes that the portraits themselves, "and not either the subjects with which they deal or the illustrations which accompany them, are the raison d'être of this special issue." The "intellectual and aesthetic attitude" of which Stein's writing is "an integral part" may have "found its first expression in the field of painting," but in Stein's prose it has been extended to literature, "whose raw material is words" [my emphasis].²² It was probably Stieglitz who showed Williams the importance of Stein's work, probably in fact provided him with the critical vocabulary with which to deal with her. For Williams, throughout the 'teens and into the early 'twenties, saw a great deal of Stieglitz, visiting him at the gallery on Fifth Avenue: "I did this fairly regularly at one time. . . . We'd talk about the pictures, about John Marin and what he was doing then. Or another day it would be a Hartley show. . . . Or we'd visit the tapestries at The Cloisters. After that I'd come home and think--that is to say, to scribble. I'd scribble for days, sometimes, after such a visit, or even years, it might be, trying to discover how my mind had readjusted itself to its contacts" (A, xii-xiii). Stieglitz's description of the word as "raw material" and his conviction that Stein was

the first to extend the discoveries of painting to literature in a successful application of this concept, were quite likely among these "contacts."

If it was not Stieglitz himself who directed Williams to Stein, it was probably the painters Marsden Hartley and Charles Demuth, both of whom were Stieglitz's protégés. According to Stein's testimony, they had both shown an active interest in her work when they were in Paris from 1912 to 1914. She recalls lending Hartley her manuscripts (AABT, 94), and that Demuth, "more interested in writing than in painting," was particularly interested in the plays she began to write in the winter of 1913 (AABT, 125). She thought highly enough of Hartley to write a "play" on him for the catalogue of the Marsden Hartley Exhibition at Stieglitz's gallery, January-February 1914, which Stieglitz later reprinted in Camera Work.²³ As for Demuth, he apparently never forgot his acquaintance with Stein. In 1928 he painted a "poster-portrait" of her, Love, Love, Love (Homage to Gertrude Stein), in which a mask floats above the three title words and three numbers "1 2 3." In her own Autobiography Stein would write: "Gertrude Stein has never seen Demuth since [1914]. . . . Demuth always sent word that someday he would do a little picture that would thoroughly please him and then he would send it to her. And sure enough, after all these years, two years ago [1930] some one left at the rue de Fleurus during our absence a little picture with a message that this was the work Demuth was ready to give to Gertrude Stein" (AABT, 125). Williams' close affinities to both Hartley and Demuth and their influence on his art should not be underestimated. It was upon arriving at Hartley's studio for a visit in the summer of 1918, for instance, that Williams heard a fire engine, turned to see "a golden figure 5 on a red background flash by" (A, 172), and composed on the spot

"The Great Figure" which Demuth would in turn use as the theme of his famous 1928 "poster-portrait" of Williams, I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold, painted the same year as his "poster-portrait" of Stein.

Whatever the source of Williams' interest in Stein's work, it was an interest sustained by his ties to painting and Stein's early and successful application of technical and aesthetic principles developed by the painters to literature. Williams considered his own early Imagism, and its "representational" effects, to be a kind of Impressionism, and although it "fascinated us all," he says, it left writers like himself "restless and constrained" (A, 148). He turned instead to the "mind saving" art of Gertrude Stein (SE, 179), for here he found an affirmation of his belief that words could be presented in an abstract pattern which was in itself significant beyond whatever the particular words might "represent." In 1928, Williams would compare Stein's work to that of George Braque: "French painting . . . can be highly instructive to the writer and has been to me. . . . The writer is to describe, to represent just as the painter must do--but what? and how? It is the same question of words and technique in their arrangement--Stein has stressed, as Braque did paint, words. So the significance of her personal motto: A rose is a rose--which printed in a circle [as it was on Stein's stationary and linen] means two things: A rose is, to be sure, a rose. But on the other hand the words: A rose is--are words which stand for all words and are very definitely not roses" (EK, 22). Stein's abstract patterns of words emphasize this second function, a function which traditional logic and narration had come to neglect, and Williams was perpetually grateful that she had revealed that words, like Braque's paint, were material waiting to be formed.

Williams ultimately saw Stein's work, however, as an important failure. Her problem, as he saw it, was that she never moved beyond her concentration on the formal aspects of writing. Hers was an art almost wholly dedicated to the abstract. "I don't hear a language," she would write, "I hear tones of voices and rhythms, but with my eyes I see words and sentences" (AABT, 65-66). From her point of view, all art was abstract, even the relatively representational art of a painter like Raoul Dufy. In one of her last compositions, the portrait of "Raoul Dufy," finished a few months before her death in 1946, and originally intended as the text for Dufy's collection of race track watercolors, Epsom-Chantilly-Deauville vus par Raoul Dufy,²⁴ she talks of meeting Dufy in Aix-les-Bains during the second World War: ". . . on the terrace in the sunshine was Dufy, his hair white white and his face rosy and his color like his color is when he paints other things" (RAB, 64). This leads her later in the piece to a discussion of abstract painting:

Painters talk about abstract painting but as I was saying and funnily enough it was seeing Dufy at Aix-les-Bains made me realize it, painters do not paint the colors that their eyes see, they paint the colors of which they are composed. There is a great deal of nonsense talked about painting, musicians and architects and writers do not talk about abstraction, they know perfectly well that everything they do is an abstraction, but painters because they have to use their eyes to work with labor under the delusion that they use their eyes to see the things they paint and so they think they must get away from painting what they think they see by being abstract, but oh dear me, what they paint when they think they are most straightforwardly painting what they see has nothing whatsoever to do with what they see, think of Dufy, nobody calls him abstract but he does not paint what he sees, he paints what he is, and certainly it is not what anybody else sees. (RAB, 72)

If Stein underplays the representational aspects of Dufy's work--and it should be remembered that this text was approved by Dufy--it is because the abstract side of modern art was for her the exciting side. From her point

of view, it was in the investigation of the abstract that the modern artist had redefined art, and justifiably she saw herself as one of the leaders in this investigation, this advance.

Williams saw Stein's work as only half the battle, half the advance. If the phrase "a rose is a rose" is, for her, primarily an abstract design, the phrase equally points out, for Williams, that a rose is, to be sure, a rose. The word "rose" does represent the thing "rose." "Stein has gone systematically to work smashing every connotation that words ever had," Williams writes, "in order to get them back clean. . . . It can't be helped that the whole house has to come down. . . . In fact the whole house has to come down. . . . And it's got to come down because it has to be rebuilt. . . . [It] has to be done with straight, sharp words. Call them nails to hold together the joints of the new architecture" (SE, 163-164, my emphasis). Stein, in effect, gave Williams the nails to make the new architecture of the poem. The three chapters on Williams in this study concentrate on how Williams planned this architecture and what he finally built. It was to be an architecture which would be made up of language's abstract side, on the one hand, and its concrete side, on the other. Language has become a two-fold system here. If the word is purely denotative, and describes the object in the most straightforward manner possible, it also has become an object in its own right, simply material to be formed, regardless of its meaning. Superficially at least, many modern painters had eliminated "subject matter"--reference to the outer world--in favor of a pure investigation of form itself. But, as Williams wrote in his editorial introduction to the fifth number of Contact (1923), "'Subject matter,' so-called, as opposed to 'form,' an abstraction, is a distinction that does

not exist in a work of art save as a division between types of material." Because words, as opposed to paint, inevitably possess subject matter does not mean that they cannot simultaneously partake of the abstraction of pure form. In fact, as Williams points out, modern painting stresses "abstraction as subject matter."²⁵ Kandinsky himself agreed with this formulation. In an essay which appeared in the 1912 Blaue Reiter Almanac, "On the Question of Form," he asserts that "it makes no difference whether the artist uses real or abstract forms." For once the artist "is freed from delineating a thing," whatever he paints "functions as a thing in itself." He concludes that "pure abstraction makes use of things that lead a material existence just as pure realism does."²⁶

From this point of view the fact that words denote things is almost beside the point for Williams. As he says in his editorial, "the thing that has been said over and over again is that whatever the material . . . all in the work must relate to an intrinsic unity and not to anything outside itself."²⁷ This intrinsic unity--or, as he also calls it, "the pure form of composition," "an abstraction"--takes precedence over everything else. But if "all in the work" must relate to this purely abstract form, then the word, which denotes a thing, must paradoxically partake of the same abstraction. This abstraction does not underlie and support a poem's meaning. It functions as a thing in itself, unifying and synthesizing the elements (words) of which it is composed, and in that unification it gives a new material existence to these purely realistic (i.e., purely denotative) words.

What Williams has in mind here is very close to the notion of "architecture" outlined by the Cubist painter Juan Gris in his 1924 "On the

Possibilities of Painting." "All architecture," Gris writes, "is construction, but not every construction is architecture. Before a construction, whether intellectual, material, visual or acoustic, can be architecture it must fulfil certain conditions." For Gris, "all constructions of the natural world" are "fine examples" of architecture:

When oxygen and hydrogen meet they combine in certain proportions to produce a certain quantity of new molecules, the quantity depending on the amount of each element introduced into the mixture, neither more nor less. Water can be produced synthetically which is identical both in quality and quantity with natural water. This is an example of chemical architecture, or real architecture, because the result of this mixture has a totally different unity, consistency and chemical proportions to those of the elements from which it is made. It has a new individuality. But the mixture of water and wine, for example, only produces a construction. The result has no new chemical properties, no unity, no consistency and no individuality. In short, it is not a synthesis.²⁸

Let oxygen be abstraction and hydrogen be reality, and this defines the architecture both Gris and Williams sought, for a time at least, to achieve in their respective paintings and poems. Since the writer's material, no matter how abstractly he conceives it, inevitably points to reality, the architecture of which Gris speaks is of the utmost consequence to a writer such as Williams who was dedicated to the idea that art must possess abstract design. The idea that the abstract and the concrete, the subjective and the objective, could be synthesized to form a "new individuality" which transcends its constituent parts was attractive to Williams. But when Williams writes in his Autobiography that Juan Gris was "at one time my favorite painter" (A, 318, my emphasis), he is admitting that Gris' "architecture" no longer interests him as it once did. He had in fact accepted the notion that the marriage of abstraction and reality was a

construction of "water and wine." Instead of synthesizing abstraction and reality, the subjective and the objective, Williams strove to discover a way to measure their interrelations, a way to record how each affects the other. In fact, he finally succeeded in writing a poetry that both possessed the abstract design of a formal order and reflected the disorder of his world, a poetry in which the human mind and material reality were held in perpetual tension. His poetry did not synthesize the mind and the world, rather it was the record of a conversation between them, statement and counter-statement, question and response. As Williams saw it, man was divorced from his world, and the marriage he wished to realize in his poetry would not be made in heaven--no marriage ever was--but it would be a realistic one. It would be a dialogue, give and take, that would make it possible at least for one partner to live with the other again, to bring them together, even, in a dance.

Williams' recognition of the divorce of man from his world, abstraction from reality, reaches to the very heart of modernist aesthetics. The divorce dominates his poetry until late in his career--until Book Five of Paterson was written in the middle 'fifties--and until then whenever the marriage he dreams of is realized, it is undercut by the isolation of its own accomplishment. Very early on, Williams knows the paradoxical nature of a marriage to the land: the successes in making contact with the ground on which he walks, in his nature poems for instance, are simultaneously failures to communicate with his people, a people with no sense of the ground at all. A 1926 letter, to a young friend, John Ricrdan, indicates the aesthetic dimensions of the problem:

I can't take a situation for what it is, that's why I was "dead" in the studio. I must look and digest, swallow and break up a situation inside myself before it can get to me. It is due to my wanting to encircle too much. It is due to my lack of pattern. . . . As I exist, omniverous, everything I touch seems incomplete until I can swallow digest and make it a part of myself. I thank you for making this clear to me, you have been an invaluable friend.

But my failure to work inside a pattern--a positive sin--is the cause of my virtues. I cannot work inside a pattern because I can't find a pattern that will have me.²⁹

Williams' problem is two-fold: if he finds a pattern--as he does when he makes contact with the land--that pattern isolates him from his people and he is "dead" in his studio; if he accepts the "lack of pattern" which his confused people represent--as he does, "omniverous"--then he cannot discover a pattern great enough to "encircle" both. His people are, in short, as much a part of his world as the land itself, and if he marries one he is divorced from the other, a choice between the abstract pattern of his mind discovered in proximity to the land or the real chaos of his world discovered in proximity to his people.

In Paterson Williams would discover a pattern to "encircle" both the land and his people, but the split between them parallels a similar sense of divorce in the plastic arts which was not resolved until the rise of Abstract Expressionism, or Action Painting, in the United States after World War II. As early as the first Blaue Reiter Exhibition in 1911, Kandinsky recognized the split. At the Exhibition, Kandinsky chose to represent directions in modern art outside Germany by the works of only two artists: Robert Delaunay, whom he considered moving in a direction parallel to himself and whose work he called "total abstraction," and the Douanier, Henri Rousseau, whose neo-primitive work he called "total realism," which he defined in his 1912 essay, "On the Question of Form," as the "simple

('inartistic') representation of a simple solid object."³⁰ Kandinsky saw "total abstraction" and "total realism" as the two poles of modern art, and he believed that they were, as "ways" or styles, irreconcilable:

These two elements [abstraction and realism] have always existed in art. They have been classified as the "purely artistic" and the "objective." The first was expressed in the second while the second was serving the first. It was a fluid balance, which seemed to search for its ideal fruition in an absolute equilibrium.

It seems that this ideal is no longer a goal today. The horizontal bar that held the two pairs of the scale in balance seems to have vanished today; each pan intends to exist individually and independently. This breaking of the ideal scale also seems to people to be "anarchistic." Art has apparently brought to an end the pleasant supplementing of the objective by the abstract, and vice versa.

On the one hand, the diverting support of reality has been removed from the abstract, and viewers think they are floating. They say that art has lost its footing. On the other hand, the diverting idealization of the abstract (the "artistic" element) has been removed from the objective; and viewers feel nailed to the floor. They say that art has lost the ideal.³¹

Kandinsky turned out to be prophetic. His formulation goes so far toward defining the differences between the myriad "isms" and tendencies that developed in painting from 1910 to the second World War that Werner Haftmann, the German art historian, has used it as the organizing principle of his mammoth, two-volume study, Painting in the Twentieth Century. Haftmann points to "two symbolic acts of profound significance" which at once defined "the unconscious longings of the epoch" and the two opposite directions that modern art would follow between the wars, directions that Kandinsky predicted and Williams tried to reconcile:

The first act was performed by Duchamp, when he chose an object and placed it in a strange environment as an image of the Other, whose accidental but very material presence invested it with the very unrealistic dignity of a magic thing, a fetish. In this act, the modern experience of the object was defined as the experience of the magical Other. The second act was performed

by Malevich when, in order to define in the most rigorous manner the opposite of the world of natural appearance, he declared a black square on a white ground to be a painting. In this act, the modern experience of form was defined as the experience of a concrete reality, which belongs to the human mind alone, and in which the mind represents itself. The two acts . . . have nothing to do with "art": they were demonstrations, they marked off the frontiers of art at two opposite poles of human experience--the absolute thing and the absolute form, the reality of nature and the reality of man.³²

There are on the one hand the "schools" which concentrate on the outward thing--the Neue Sachlichkeit, Magical Realism, Neo-Classicism--all of which attempt to infuse the object with the sense of a "total realism" once it is transposed onto the canvas. On the other hand, the "abstract" schools begin with the inward thing; their canvases are objects in their own right, with no reference to the objective world outside themselves. Most simplistically, things can be recognized in the former, only forms or colors in the latter. In Dada and Surrealism, however, we can detect both tendencies at work. In Dada, for instance, we find the hard realism of Duchamp's "readymades" or Picabia's machinist drawings, and simultaneously untold numbers of productions like this experiment in pure sound by Hugo Ball:

gadji beri bimba
 glandridi lauli lonni cadori
 gadjama bim beri glassala
 glandridi glassala tuffm i zimbrabim 33
 blassa galassasa tuffm i zimbrabim

And though Surrealism is based on a doctrine of the image not unlike Pound's, it too could be either "realistic" or "abstract" depending on the image's source. Joan Miro's "images," for instance, are the product of psychic automatism and are categorically non-representational; Salvador Dali's dream images are almost photographic. If we can detect both styles of modern art in Dada and Surrealism, it is because neither is interested in creating a

single, formal style. Rather each described an aesthetic approach to the world which was applicable to any kind of artistic endeavor, any style.

And until World War II, only Cubism, the movement that began everything in the first place, attempted to integrate abstraction and realism in a single style, to establish the "absolute equilibrium" which Kandinsky claimed was "no longer a goal." Cubism shuttled between the two almost at will, transforming a bottle into an abstract cone or conversely a cone into a bottle. It qualified pure abstraction with realism, and simple realism with abstraction. In its collages it championed the object, while at the same time it embraced Cézanne's famous dictum that "nature must be treated in terms of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone." Kandinsky's formulation of the two irreconcilable modes of modern art is probably a subtle poke at Cubism's unwillingness to "purify" itself by choosing one path or the other. But in its very unwillingness, Cubism laid the foundations for both paths, and it is from Cubism that both paths developed.

For that reason I have spent more time with Cubism in this study than with any of the other movements in modern art which developed from it. The issues raised by abstraction and realism, the tensions between them, can be seen most clearly in the apparent necessity the Cubists felt to never choose one over the other. If Williams was finally unable to accept Gris' synthesis, he never rejected Gris' sense that abstraction and realism should coexist. The terms of Williams' marriage were simply different from Gris': Williams' terms are American, and Gris' are European. I have in fact dwelled on the plastic arts and Williams' relation to them at length in this study in order to place Williams' achievement in the context of a developing modernist aesthetic--from Cubism to Abstract Expressionism--which is in turn

the development of a shift in modernism's focal point from Europe to the United States. It is no accident, I think, that Williams' influence on contemporary American poetry is as great if not greater than Pound's or Eliot's, for the aesthetics of Pound and Eliot remain European. Williams' influence parallels that of Jackson Pollack, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko and Marcel Duchamp on contemporary American painting. Duchamp and de Kooning were Europeans, but for the last twenty years of their lives, when they accomplished their greatest works, they were American citizens, living in America. The question of the influence of Williams' generation on the next one is, however, the subject of another study. This one will outline earlier continuities, what I have called "the rise of American modernism," and the concurrent revelation of "a world unsuspected."

When Roy Harvey Pearce set out to write his ground-breaking Continuities of American Poetry, he determined that it would have to be what he called an "inside narrative," a narrative which takes "for granted the nature of a poet's special relation to his culture" and assumes "that our characteristically American commitments, aspirations, and theories are by definition also those of our poets, who stand for ourselves working at full creative pitch."³⁴ Pearce was among the first American scholars to take the poetry of William Carlos Williams seriously, and his commentary on Williams' poetry attests to the value of his approach. Like Pearce's literary history, the body of Williams' poetry is itself an "inside narrative." Although as often as not it damns the "commitments, aspirations and theories" of American culture, it does so in the spirit of restoring a "full creative pitch" to them. His is a profoundly public poetry, at once the narrative of a man and the narrative of America herself. And Pearce

is certainly right when he says that Williams took it "upon himself to be a prophet among twentieth-century American poets,"³⁵ for what he prophesied was the rediscovery of America through the discovery of himself.

For Williams, however, American poetry and American life were inevitably involved in what he called "the split forces of the two necessary cultural groups: (1) the local effort, well understood in defined detail and (2) the forces from the outside" (SE, 161), and to consider Williams' poetry as a purely "inside narrative" is to simplify both his effort and his accomplishment. "The forces from the outside" matter, and the nature of the "local effort" is best understood in relation to, and not isolated from, its counter-tendency. Pearce's study of continuity and development in American poetry required him, as he admits, to "rule out that more customary critical-historical perspective--from the outside in--which could be gained from a properly comparatist study."³⁶ This is a comparatist study, and it proposes to restore something of the balance, so far as Williams' poetry goes, that Pearce willingly gave up. I have come "from the outside in," and I have come assuming that "the outside" is a part of--not apart from--"the inside," just as for Williams reality, the outside of man, was in the end "all of a piece" with abstraction, the inside of man. I have attempted to record, as Williams attempted to record, the dialogue between the "split forces" in Williams' and America's experience. But I trust that this study remains an "inside narrative" in the spirit, if not the letter, of Pearce's own.

Chapter I

The Example of Gertrude Stein

A rose is a rose
and the poem equals it
if it be well made.

--William Carlos Williams
"The Pink Locust"

In The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, Gertrude Stein describes how in the winter of 1906 she came to write her first full length book: "She had this Cezanne and she looked at it and under its stimulus she wrote Three Lives" (AABT, 31). The painting was the large Portrait d'une Femme (1896) which she and her brother Leo had just purchased from the dealer Vollard. During that winter she worked almost continuously on Three Lives, the Cézanne portrait hanging above her desk. But Three Lives was not all that occupied her. Late in 1905 she had met Picasso and posed throughout the winter for the now famous Portrait of Gertrude Stein, Picasso requiring over eighty sittings of her. She had also met Matisse the previous fall after purchasing his controversial Femme au Chapeau at the Salon d'Automne, and a close friendship quickly developed. At about the same time she met Braque, Derain, Vlaminck and Guillaume Apollinaire. Her rapidly expanding collection of paintings soon included a Toulouse Lautrec, a Denis, two Gauguins, a Manet, a Renoir, a Vlaminck, and a great many Cézannes, Matisse and Picassos. These last were soon recognized as the center of a collection which "little by little people began to come to the rue de Fleurus to see" (AABT, 38).

That winter, Stein was participating in an intellectual upheaval. "It had been a fruitful winter," she would recall. "In the long struggle with the portrait of Gertrude Stein, Picasso passed from the Harlequin, the charming early Italian period to the intensive struggle which was to end in cubism. Gertrude Stein had written the story *Melanctha the negress*, the second story of *Three Lives* which was the first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Matisse had painted the *Bonheur de Vivre* and had created the new school of colour which was soon to leave its mark on everything" (AABT, 50). Like Stein, Picasso and Matisse were working that winter under the "stimulus" of Cézanne as well. This "fruitful winter" of 1906 could be said in fact to belong to Cézanne. By the time he died the following October, the direction of art had changed and he had changed it.

What Cézanne had done was redefine the traditional relationship between the artist and his subject matter. It was no longer the artist's business to copy anything, because to copy meant to deal only with surfaces, the appearance of things. Cézanne was interested in what lay beneath appearance, the unifying elements of nature itself. "All appearance is scattered," he wrote, "nature is always the same."¹ The artist's problem then is that he must "penetrate what is before him,"² and reveal on the canvas what his penetrating eye discovers there. In their 1912 Cubism, Gleizes and Metzinger describe this as the methodology of "profound realism" and cite Cézanne as the founder of this kind of realism and Cubism's most important precursor. For Gleizes and Metzinger, in all western art to Cézanne, and especially in Impressionism, "the retina predominates over the brain," and the works that result are no better than the expression of "one who

contemplates the Ocean for the first time and who, diverted by the play of waves, does not think of the depths."³ For them Cézanne's work hinges on the "operation of thought," and his work "proves beyond all doubt that painting is not--or is no longer--the art of imitating an object by means of lines and colors, but the art of giving to our instinct a plastic consciousness."⁴ The work of art, then, is fundamentally abstract. It is a composition, an imaginative ordering of chaotic and accidental experience. It is the composition which gives meaning to experience because the composition defines, orders, forms experience: "In painting there are two things," Cézanne wrote, "the eye and the brain . . . the eye must be strengthened through the visual exploration of nature, the brain through the logical development and ordering of the artistic experience--it creates the means of expression."⁵ The painting, according to Cézanne, is a "harmony parallel to nature":⁶ it is distinct from nature because it is a painting, but the order and harmony of its forms and colors, the logical ordering of visual experience by the brain, is a realization of the harmony beneath the superficial surfaces of nature and parallels the logic of nature.

Any painting beginning from this set of assumptions would be freed of course from the necessity of faithfully reproducing the superficial appearances of nature. Instead it would represent, to borrow Kandinsky's later formulation, an "inner necessity," and in Cézanne's case this "inner necessity" would be the unity or harmony upon which he believed the natural world was founded. The artist becomes lord over his subject matter, manipulating it in any way that helps him to realize on canvas whatever he has discovered beneath appearance. If we compare a Cézanne landscape with its model, for instance, we can see that he has radically changed the details

of the landscape in order to make a more unified painting. What was in actuality five trees will become three trees in the painting; where there was a blank and open sky, he will paint a broad curve of leaves. The disunity of appearance is modified further by his de-emphasis of "accidental" color: "The colors [of nature]," he writes, "are the expression on the surface of [nature's] depth, they rise up from the roots of the world."⁷ He almost ignores the grey color of a rock, for instance, but highlights the green of it, as if the shadow of a tree cast across the rock draws the rock into the tree's greenness. In this way, Cézanne changed the direction of art by insisting that the artist's idea of his subject matter was more important than the subject matter itself.

Matisse, Picasso and Stein all embraced these notions, and as different as their styles are--Stein's especially, since it is in a different medium altogether--they have similar ramifications in their work. After Signac attacked the Bonheur de vivre, Matisse defended it in terms obviously indebted to Cézanne: "I painted it in plain flat colors because I wanted to base the quality of the picture on a harmony of all plain colors. . . . Since I had a form that could be localized, a leg, for example, I should logically have used a flesh tone. But I saw myself obliged to use a cinnabar. . . . I cannot copy nature in a servile way; I must interpret nature and subordinate it to the spirit of the picture. The relationship of all the tones I have found must result in a living harmony of colors, analogous to the harmony of a musical composition."⁸ And Picasso, after keeping Stein for over eighty sittings, toward the end of the winter of 1906 painted out her face. Several months later he returned from a long vacation and painted it from memory. When Alice B. Toklas told him she liked the portrait, he replied,

"Yes, everybody says she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will" (AABT, 12). Like Matisse, Picasso had interpreted nature, interpreted Stein. The painting is not a copy of Stein so much as it is Picasso's idea of her. Her features are reduced to their basic angular forms, to what Picasso implies is the basic character of the face which in time will come to dominate its superficial characteristics. This painting begins the "intensive struggle which would end in cubism" because it is both an acceptance and a realization of Cézanne's dictum that "nature must be treated in terms of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone," the basic geometric forms from which Cézanne believed--with the Cubists after him--all the more complex forms in nature arise.⁹ As Matisse had turned to a study of the relationships of color tones in order to express what for him were the "roots of the world," Picasso turned, for the same reason, to the relationships of forms. For both "the spirit of the picture," composition as a formal ordering of the basic elements which their penetrating eyes have discovered, allows these "roots" to be seen. Composition, to paraphrase Stein, has become explanation, the realization of meaning.

Composition as Explanation, as Stein titled her first public lecture delivered at Oxford in the spring of 1926, is a defense of the style she initiated with the story "Melanctha" in Three Lives, the style she developed under the stimulus of Cézanne. There are three recurrent statements in the text which indicate the direction this stimulus would carry her: "The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends on how everybody is doing everything"; "Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition"; "Everything is the same except composition and as the composition is

different and always going to be different everything is not the same" (SW, 513, 516). In less opaque terms, Stein is saying here, with Cézanne, that "all appearance is scattered, but nature is always the same." What makes a composition then is the way the artist and his generation look at the world, how they organize the vast sameness of the thing seen. If she departs from Cézanne at all it is in her insistence that the composition is not so much "parallel" to nature, as it is "different." This is a fine distinction--both after all assert the integrity of the composition itself--but it is an important one. It explains the growing abstraction of Stein's prose in the years following the composition of Three Lives and its culmination in works like Tender Buttons, where the composition bears almost no relation to nature, the thing seen, at all. It is what she means in her 1923 portrait of Cézanne when she says: "In this way Cezanne nearly did nearly in this way. Cezanne nearly did nearly did and nearly did" (SW, 329). Cézanne "nearly did" assert the complete integrity of the composition and liberate it from its subject matter entirely. But what Cézanne "nearly did," Stein would not hesitate to do. Her "portrait" of Cézanne concludes:

". . . are you patient when you find bees. Bees in a garden make a specialty of honey and so does honey. Honey and prayer. Honey and there. There where the grass can grow four times yearly" (SW, 329). "In this way" the composition is freed of Cézanne. It is a "different" thing entirely. Nevertheless, we can also see her portrait as a "harmony parallel to" Cézanne, parallel at least to his insistence that composition is our only means of expression. The subject matter of her composition is not Cézanne but rather Cézanne's idea of composition, which for her is Cézanne, the mind and not the superficial exterior. Stein's notion of the difference of

composition enlarges Cézanne's notion of the composition as parallel to nature. The parallel is in the idea that makes up the two things--the subject matter and its composition--the difference is in the superficial appearance of the two things--Cézanne himself and Stein's portrait of him. By emphasizing this difference, Stein draws our attention of necessity to the parallelism beneath. "Everything is the same" and "the composition is different."

"Melanctha" is Stein's first step toward a realization of this idea, and here we can see the idea's technical ramifications in a much less difficult context. The story itself is straightforward enough. Melanctha Herbert, a young black girl in Bridgepoint, is given to "wandering" among the male workers of the town in pursuit of "wisdom"--Stein never names what kind of wisdom, but it is obviously sexual--which she "wanted very much to know and yet she feared the knowledge" (TL, 101). She meets Jane Harden, an "experienced" woman, who teaches her to "understand what everybody wanted, and what one did with power when one had it" (TL, 106). After "trying" a great many men, she finally meets a young black doctor, Jefferson Campbell. The story largely deals with their relationship, beginning on the day of their first, tentative attraction and ending several years later with their rejection of one another. Each of the story's seventeen detailed descriptions of their meetings follows this same pattern--attraction, "feeling very close," and then alienation. Between the meetings Stein describes either Jeff's or Melanctha's reaction to this pattern, their thinking on it, until we come to realize, just as they come to realize, that they are essentially two different kinds of people:

In tender-hearted natures [like the doctor, Jeff Campbell], those that mostly never feel strong passion, suffering comes to make them harder. . . . Passionate natures [like the "wandering" Melanctha] who have always made themselves, to suffer, that is all the kind of people who have emotions that come to them as sharp as a sensation, they always get more tender-hearted when they suffer, and it always does them good to suffer. Tender-hearted, compassionate and comfortable natures always get much harder when they suffer, for so they lose the fear and reverence and wonder they once had for everybody who has to suffer. (TL, 186-187)

The passionate nature of the one and the compassionate nature of the other creates an irreconcilable tension between them for which they both suffer. And they are not even united in their suffering: the passionate and hardened woman of the world becomes tender-hearted, the tender-hearted doctor becomes hardened. Unfulfilled, Melanctha returns to her "wandering." Jeff Campbell, hardened now, goes away to another town "to live regular." After two more similarly unfulfilling relationships, Melanctha dies and the story ends.

Stein's debt to Cézanne's idea of the composition is most obvious in her treatment of character here. She is not interested in her characters as individuals so much as "kinds" of people, representatives of two basic types. In her next major work, The Making of Americans, she calls this notion of basic character type, "the bottom nature" of people. In her later lecture, "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans," she explains "bottom nature" in the following way:

I then [after Three Lives] began again to think about the bottom nature in people, I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thoughts they had but the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different. (LA, 138)

The story "Melanctha," the composition, is generated out of the relationship

between two of these elemental "bottom natures." As again and again these bottom natures come together and then repel one another, like the "push and pull" of Matisse's color relations, the pattern of the composition is achieved, each individual meeting between Jeff and Melanctha a repetition of the story as a whole. And yet each meeting is different, composed of slightly different words and surrounded by slightly different circumstances. For Stein, character is analogous to Cézanne's color--"the expression on the surface of depth"--and her treatment of character is an effort to expose this depth: "bottom natures" are "the roots of the world." What we have here is theme and variation, a pattern of repetition which Stein calls in Composition as Explanation "a prolonged present . . . an inevitable beginning of beginning again and again and again" (SW, 518).

Stein considered the "prolonged present" of Three Lives the first step toward composition in a "continuous present" which she felt she accomplished in The Making of Americans. Both are conscious attempts to free herself of the traditional foundations of novelistic structure, narrative and plot, the shackles of "past present and future" (SW, 517). Narrative and plot impose a scheme upon the composition from the outside. But for Stein "a middle and a beginning and an end . . . of course . . . does make an identity but not the human mind" (GHA, 117). Composition in the "present" allows her to concentrate on the human mind, the "bottom nature" in people which is the "same thing over and over again . . . the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same" and only superficially "endlessly different." Just before her death in 1946 Stein described what was for her "the important thing" she had done in Three Lives: "It was not solely the realism of the characters but the realism of the composition which was the important thing,

the realism of the composition of my thoughts. . . . I got it largely from Cezanne" (WAM, 98). And Cézanne had said: "A picture should first of all represent nothing but color. Stories, psychology . . . all that is implicit in the picture."¹⁰ There is a story to "Melanctha," "the realism of the characters." There is even a story to The Making of Americans: The History of a Family's Progress, though it is almost lost beneath the weight of her more general investigation of "bottom nature." Not until she decided in 1911 to attempt "to express the rhythm of the visible world" (AABT, 112), the rhythm of both people and things, did she leave narrative and plot completely behind and turn exclusively to a pure investigation of the formal possibilities of composition. Nevertheless, the "beginning again and again and again" of Three Lives, the repetition and modulation of her sentences indicate the degree to which she was already interested in this "rhythm" and the possibility of paralleling it in the rhythms of her sentences. In The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas she says that she enjoyed posing for Picasso because "the long still hours . . . intensified the concentration with which she was creating her sentences," and then she points with pride and satisfaction to what Marcel Brion, a French critic, has to say about these sentences: "by exactitude, austerity, absence of variety in light and shade, by refusal of the use of the subconscious Gertrude Stein achieves a symmetry which has a close analogy to the symmetry of the musical fugue of Bach" (AABT, 47). Stein's interest in language has become in Three Lives an abstract and formal interest. It is not surprising then that this interest should bring her in time to reject language's traditional referential functions. She would come to believe that a word which refers to something outside itself draws attention away from the integrity of the

composition. For the same reason, Kandinsky, as we have seen, would decide at almost the same time that "the object harmed [his] paintings."

The history of Stein's writing then is the history of her effort to free herself first from traditional novelistic conventions--the necessity of narrative, plot, realistic setting, and character development--and second from the discursive character of language itself. For Stein, both language and its conventions are traditionally manifestations of a superficial realism. The cause and effect of narrative, the beginning, middle and end of plot, the verisimilitude of setting and character all serve to mask the artificial nature of literature. They make literature seem real, and force us to willingly suspend our disbelief. In the same way, language only seems real: wholly transparent, its sole function is to point beyond itself to the real world. Stein determined that her writing should be real in itself, and to accomplish this language had to become real in itself, non-discursive and wholly opaque. Literature would no longer require the suspension of disbelief because its realism would be of a different order. For although writing would still be "artificial," it would no longer point beyond itself. Instead it would point only inwards, to the mind, and to the creative act that made it. Like the "profound realism" of the Cubists Gleizes and Metzinger, the same profound realism they discovered in Cézanne, literature would become "the art of giving to our instinct a plastic consciousness." For Stein, the writer's language would become as plastic as the painter's paint, the medium and material, as she says, for the "composition of my thoughts."

Michael Hoffman calls this tendency in Stein "the development of abstractionism" in her writing,¹¹ and John Malcolm Brinnin has connected

the "abstractionism" of Stein's prose expressly to developments in the arts: "When the literary content of painting was omitted in favor of the freely conceived mathematical or intuitive exercise of purely plastic values, Gertrude Stein also attempted to drop subject matter in order to concentrate freely upon the 'plastic' potentialities of language itself."¹² Neither Hoffman or Brinnin carry Stein's connections to painting much beyond this. The fact is that time and time again Stein would adapt principles and even technical devices developed by the Cubists to her own medium. For instance, her interest in suppressing narrative structure in The Making of Americans, begun in 1907, finds a close parallel to the suppression of "literary" content in Picasso's Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, the painting which initiated Cubism, begun late in 1906 and finished in the spring of 1907. The composition studies for the painting reveal an initial conception of it as a large, symbol-charged work.¹³ In the first studies there are six figures: a sailor is seated among four nude women surrounded by food and flowers and, entering from the left, is a man holding a skull in his hands. In a later study the sailor has disappeared. Still later the man with the skull becomes a woman and at this point the skull also disappears. Simultaneously the features of the figures themselves grow less and less mimetic until, "All implications of a moralistic contrast between virtue (the man with the skull) and vice (the man surrounded by food and women) have been eliminated in favor of a purely formal figure composition, which as it develops becomes more and more dehumanized and abstract."¹⁴ There is every indication that Picasso suppressed his initial "literary"--that is, symbolic and referential--impulse in order to concentrate both his own energies and the energies of the potential audience on the painting as composition in its

own right.

The suppression of this impulse is apparent in another way. Although the painting's five nudes are recognizably human figures, their bodies generally portrayed by flesh tones, there is a kind of progress in the painting toward less and less mimetic representation. The three figures on the left are reminiscent of the generalization and reduction to essential forms which Picasso had already accomplished in the Portrait of Gertrude Stein. But the nudes on the right are grossly distorted: their contours are modelled by means of color rather than chiaroscuro; their limbs merge flatly with the color planes behind and in front of them; the breasts of the upper nude have become diamonds, lying side by side and inexplicably ajar; the face of the seated nude rests in her palm, and yet that face should be turned away from us to face the rest of the group--her face is a face gone awry, twisted upon a torso which reveals both back and breast. The representational possibilities of color are also being explored in the painting: blue in a general way represents drapery or clothing here, in the same way that it might serve to represent the sea or the sky in another painting, but it is also used to represent a nose. Picasso is beginning to strip away our traditional color associations. The green nose and the green and red breast of the upper right hand nude or the blue nose of the lower nude assert that color is an object or material in itself. The composition studies indicate that the two right hand nudes were painted last. The imaginative energy which these two figures reveal dislodges our attention from the referential and mimetic quality of the work. We are no longer interested in how "true" the painting is to nature. We have shifted the terms by which we evaluate it to the process of perception which comprises it and to the composition

which reveals that process.

The rationale for Picasso's shift away from narrative or symbolic representation in Les Demoiselles is the same as Stein's rationale for shifting away from narrative structure in The Making of Americans. This is clearest in a section of the novel that incorporates into the text a slightly revised version of a straightforward narrative history which she had written in 1904, Fernhurst: The History of Philip Redfern, A Student of the Nature of Women.¹⁵ When she completes this narrative interpolation, she commences upon a rather long apology which ends: "Categories that once to some had some real meaning can later to that same one be all empty" (MA, 440). The narrative approach of the earlier history has become "all empty" for her. "Now," she says, "to begin again with what I know of the being of Philip Redfern":

He was of the kind of men and women who, in the end, to everyone, have been as if they had been a failure. They are many of them, many of the kind of which Redfern was one, that have had very much reputation, have been well known for their living, for the being in them, in their living very many of this kind of them. (MA, 441)

And so on, for fifteen long pages. To write that Redfern was "standing looking out at a fine prospect of sunset and a long line of elms defining a road that led back through the town of Farnham to the wooded hills behind" (MA, 436), seemed to her "literary" in the worst way. As decoration it allowed the mind to ignore what was for Stein the raison d'être of writing in the first place--to extract the "real meaning" of things, the "being in them," their "bottom natures."

As we have already noted, Stein has generalized human character in The Making of Americans, just as Picasso has generalized the human anatomy

in Les Demoiselles. This process of generalization in her writing manifests itself in a style that seems to be a literary response to stylistic developments in Les Demoiselles and the rapid succession of Cubist developments that followed. As Stein worked on the novel during the years 1907 to 1911, it more and more reflected the continuing emphasis on composition in Cubism, so much so that Stein resorts in the novel to lengthy justification and explication of the style itself. Briefly, the style can be summarized in three interrelated ways: 1) the replacement of nouns by pronouns and present participles; 2) the repetitive pattern of "beginning again and again;" and 3) a gradual shift in emphasis from the "bottom nature" of people to the "bottom nature" of words themselves. To show this style at work in The Making of Americans would require lengthy quotation from across its one thousand pages. It would be better to turn our attention to a shorter piece, the famous portrait of Picasso (SW, 333-335), written in 1909 when The Making of Americans was approximately three-quarters complete. Every stylistic device that we witness in this short portrait can be discovered many times in The Making of Americans.

The first three sentences of the portrait introduce Picasso as "one who was charming," but this charm is quickly defined by two roughly synonymous phrases--"one who was working" and "one having something coming out of him"--both of which tend to define Picasso as a leader--"one whom some were following." His charm is only briefly mentioned by Stein, for it is of secondary importance to his work. His "charming" qualities are referred to only once more in the course of the piece, but the three phrases concerning his work and his role as a leader recur over and over again. Toward the middle of the portrait, for example, we find this:

This one was working and something was coming then, something was coming out of this one then. This one was one and always there was something coming out of this one and always there had been something coming out of this one. This one had never been one not having something coming out of this one. This one was one having something coming out of this one. This one had been one whom some were following. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working. (SW, 334)

Granting Stein the minor variations she performs on these phrases, in their essentials they recur as follows: "one who was working"--38 times; "one having something coming out of him"--28 times; "one whom some were following"--22 times. The portrait itself is only 900 words in length. These phrases then--and I am counting them in their most minimal forms, without the addition of adverbs, negatives, etc.--constitute a full half of the piece. Stein also uses several other phrases synonymous with these that occur only once or twice--"one who was doing," "one who was going on," "one who was bringing something out of him" are examples. Most of the other vocabulary in the piece revolves around defining the "something" which is "coming out" of Picasso--"a simple thing, a clear thing, a complicated thing, and interesting thing"--and asserting that this "something" has "meaning"--"a solid meaning, a struggling meaning, a clear meaning."

This suppression of semantic variation and the reliance on the participle are the direct result of Stein's "beginning again and again" and support it. To write "this one" (Picasso, and note he is never named, particularized, in the piece) is like writing "this tree" (a particular tree--oak, fir, elm?). Each word in its turn--"one," "tree"--awaits, almost demands, further definition because the form of the word itself holds beneath it a wide range of content. "This one" is not one who was lazy but "one who was working." Because the word "one" is a general category, we must explain, compose, write

if we are to define the word at all in its particularity. Confronted by the abstract nature of the word--and hence its potential meaninglessness--we are forced to establish connections between it and other words: this tree is an elm, and it is budding. The problem, of course, is that as we narrow in on meaning in our language, our vocabulary becomes more expansive; where there was once only one word needing definition, there are now many. But they are words in relation, and in relation they turn back to the first word and become parts of the whole. They serve to define one another; "elm," and "budding" are metaphors for each other, and metonyms for the whole, the "tree."

Stein is acutely conscious of this. The dominant verb of the Picasso portrait is the copula. When Stein writes, "This one was one who was working," she is first connecting two noun phrases by means of the copula: [This one] was [one who was working]. The second noun phrase is itself composed of two noun phrases: [one who] was [working]. That Stein does not think of this second phrase as a noun and past progressive verb becomes clear when we realize that in the course of the piece the phrases "This one was one who was working" and "This one was working" are interchangeable. "Working" is a nominal idea, synonymous with "this one" or "one who". This nominal quality of the "ing" words is further emphasized by the fact that, after the pronoun "one," the nouns that appear most often in the portrait are "something" and "thing." The sound association between these two words and the gerunds that dominate the piece is inescapable. That Stein consciously recognizes the association is clear when we encounter a phrase such as "this one would be doing and this one was doing that thing, this one was working," where "that thing" is clearly "working."

Stein's conception of the word in this portrait is, significantly, very similar to Fenollosa's "Chinese Written Character," which Pound found so attractive when he discovered it in 1913. As Hugh Kenner has pointed out in The Pound Era, Fenollosa posited that ideographs corresponded with actions rather than things, that the Chinese sign denoted process.¹⁶ And the ideograph simultaneously restores metaphor: the ideography for "sincere," for instance, is a compound of two ideographs representing "man" and "word." Sincerity then, is the active product of man and language in relation. But as Kenner puts it, Fenollosa, unlike Stein, "warred on the copula: 'There is in reality no such verb.'" Fenollosa's objections to the copula were based primarily on its service as a connective between two nouns, nouns conceived of as static things because the copula renders them static. It is this in turn which leads to a stultification of language. But, like Stein, the work of poets such as Pound, Williams and Stevens turns time and again to the copula. Daniel P. Tompkins has pointed out that there are 165 sentences in Stevens' Collected Poems that begin "It is."¹⁷ Similar numbers could probably be found in the Cantos and Williams' collected poems. The point is that once nouns are recognized as active elements--things which act and react to other elements around them--the verb "to be" becomes similarly active, in fact a necessary catalyst to the nouns' activity.

The almost total dominance of the verbal noun or noun phrase in the Picasso portrait allows Stein, then, to fuse an entity with action. In A Long Gay Book, begun at approximately the same time as the Picasso portrait though not completed until 1912, she writes:

Anything put down is something. . . . A thing being a thing
that is that thing, a thing being a thing, a thing having
been put down a thing being something and putting down a

thing is a thing that is happening and then the thing put down being then that thing, a thing being that thing, a thing is something, and a thing being something, a thing being that thing is then that thing and being that thing it is a thing and being a thing it is that thing and it is then that thing, it is then that thing. (GMP, 48-49)

A thing put down (a word, or a phrase, or an entire composition) is both a thing in itself and a thing "happening." The word "being" is the key, the double entendre of both movement and stasis. This is the style she came to call the "continuous present," or as she later called it in How Writing is Written (1935), the sense of "present immediacy" in a work (HWIW, 155). This is Stein's way of saying that the work of art should be all activity and process. She "got rid of more and more commas," because "when you were conceiving a sentence, the comma stopped you" (HWIW, 153). She was "getting rid of nouns" and replacing them by present participles because "in the Twentieth Century you feel like movement" (HWIW, 153). Above all, because the artist "is contemporary" he inevitably expresses "the time-sense of his contemporaries" (HWIW, 151), activity and process:

The United States, instead of having the feeling of beginning at one end and ending at another, had the conception of assembling the whole thing out of its parts, the whole thing which made the twentieth century productive. The Twentieth Century conceived the automobile as a whole, so to speak, and then created it, built it up out of its part. It was an entirely different point of view from the Nineteenth Century's. The Nineteenth Century would have seen the parts and worked towards the automobile through them. (HWIW, 152-153)

The artistic product of the twentieth century is a whole thing which moves. It is like the automobile which, although a thing in its own right, is also a thing which by fact of its movement from context to context--from the show room, to the city street, to the open highway--is only experienced in its "present immediacy." Its meaning is in the movement it both represents and

generates. And its parts like the parts of writing--punctuation, the word, the sentence and its grammar--serve only this conception of movement, the whole.

For Stein the automobile was a kind of folk art, the inevitable and natural expression of the century's "time-sense." But Stein drew the bulk of the stylistic innovations she designed to capture this "time-sense" from more serious art, notably the notion of simultaneity developed by the Cubists.¹⁸ Simultaneity manifests itself in a set of very complex technical devices with far-reaching aesthetic implications. Its origins are in the technique of passage developed by Cézanne as a way to rid himself of one-point perspective, the Albertian vanishing point technique developed in Renaissance painting. One-point perspective gives the painting the effect of a snap-shot, a single instant of perception. It pretends to be definitive, unassailable. But for Cézanne perception, the mind and the object of the mind's contemplation in relation, exists in a never-ending dynamic, and the painting should reflect this. By running together planes on the canvas that would otherwise be separated in space, integrating them by means of color modulation and continuity, passage serves to indicate three-dimensional relationships as it simultaneously integrates surface and depth on the two-dimensional canvas. It is, in short, a technique of intentional ambiguity or simultaneity: we can distinguish different spatial planes on the canvas and thus the suggestion of three-dimensionality is confirmed; yet where these planes run together this suggestion of a third dimension is denied--a painting is a thing made in two dimensions, and the third dimension is a reality beyond its scope. Passage reminds us that the world we see on the canvas is a fiction--not the thing itself, but someone's idea of it. What passage

accomplishes, first and foremost, is to draw our attention to the painting as a composition in its own right. In addition, and related to this, passage allows the canvas to exist perpetually in the present. Because of the simultaneity of the two and three dimensional readings, neither of which cancels out the other, we have two conflicting "presents" which exist in a never-ending dynamic. The painting exists in time because our perception of it exists in time. We are in situ in a Cézanne canvas. Where the snap-shot effect of the Albertian technique gives us the sense of the canvas as something made, an artifact or product, the ambiguity established through passage give the canvas the sense of being in the making, a creation or process.

In the years 1906 to 1907, when Picasso was most heavily influenced by Cézanne, he discovered this same process in primitive art, especially African and Oceanic sculpture. As Gertrude Stein put it in her 1936 book Picasso, this discovery "consoled Picasso's vision" (P, 19) in that it both "reinforced his vision and helped him to realize it" (P, 22). The discovery that passage was the primary technique of the art of "basic" cultures lent the technique authority. In a recent article Joshua C. Taylor has explained how primitive art differs from traditional Western art:

Most of Western art has been based on the interplay or opposition of two compositional principles: the proportional relationship or clearly defined forms of a relatively simple geometric sort, or a continuity of line or form in which one shape flows into the next with little concern for beginnings and endings. . . . This handy distinction in formal order is little help in looking [at works of primitive art]. . . . In the first place, they seem always to be made up of both distinct formal entities arranged in a nice symmetry, and of continuities. . . . As a result the eye confronts a continuously ambivalent situation, having to choose between simply looking at a form . . . and joining a rhythm that leads to something else. Which does one choose? Both, of course.¹⁹

Cézanne's late work and Cubism differ most from traditional Western art in this way, except that in Cézanne the continuity, the sense of no "beginnings and endings," is achieved with the help of color as well as line and form. The Cubists, like the primitive artists, would deemphasize color continuity in order to concentrate more fully on the continuity of line and form, the rhythm in the painting that makes the painting move.

Sentence to sentence Stein's portrait of Picasso reveals a similar technique at work. The piece is marked by an almost numbing limitation of vocabulary, but also and equally by a wide modulation in this vocabulary's usage. Each sentence is a distinct and self-contained unit. Stein avoids the use of causal links between them. Rather we begin again and again from the same "one" and arrive again and again at the same "thing," each time with a slight variation of rhythm and usage until words that would normally exist distinctly and separately blend into one another and become synonymous. Taking advantage of the appearance and sound of the "ing" phoneme, for instance, and using it as material, she painstakingly develops an underlying connection between all the "ing" vocabulary in the piece. She is so convincing in developing the interrelations among her words that when she calls Picasso's production "a simple thing . . . a complicated thing" neither adjective contradicts the other. The possibility of their simultaneity, in a sense, defines Stein's piece. Each sentence is simple; but, as each sentence is juxtaposed against another (and another), each sentence is complicated. The semantic content of the portrait can be paraphrased in a sentence; the complexity of its technical play is almost impossible to fully explain. Just as we do not admire Cézanne's work because it portrays an apple but rather because of the way that apple is portrayed, what is

important in Stein's portrait is not what she says but the way in which she says it, the composition itself.

Stein further creates an intentional ambiguity, roughly analogous to the simultaneous two- and three-dimensionality of Cézanne's canvases at least in its effect, in the simultaneous creation of static and active nouns: as "this one was one" gradually modulates into "this one was working." As we have noted this is semantic play on the notion of "being," and it lifts the concrete thing, Picasso, into activity. It makes him, as well as the words (material) of the portrait, exist in time.

Beginning then with passage, the integration of distinct forms in a continuous pattern or rhythm, simultaneity in both Stein's writing and Cubist art can be seen to have two fundamental meanings--one aesthetic and one technical--both of which rely on ambiguity. Aesthetically speaking, simultaneity allows the artist to portray an active and changing or dynamic universe. Technically, he does this by drawing our attention to the two-dimensionality of the canvas, the static medium itself (for Stein the static noun), and to the pattern with no beginning or end which takes place there (for Stein the active noun, the participle), the movement which it generates both between the forms and lines in the canvas itself and between the canvas and its subject matter. The painting becomes an object in the present, a continuous present, which moves and changes as we move through it and in it. This is what Picasso means when he says, "All that I have ever made was for the present,"²⁰ and what Gris means when he says, more precisely, "I like painters who paint in the present participle."²¹ The painting (or the portrait in language) is active and dynamic because it is ambiguous, because it cannot be pinned down. It is not a snapshot.

The Cubists, however, did not limit themselves to the technique of passage in their attempt to make the static object, the painting, active. Inspired by passage's essential ambiguity, they quickly developed several other techniques which, in effect, radicalized Cézanne's initial concept. For instance, in the lower right hand nude of Les Demoiselles we have already noticed that three views of the subject--from the back, from the side, and from the front--are integrated into one image, as if in time the artist has contemplated her from three successive points as he moved around her and made them one. Importantly we do not know which point of view came first and which last. There is a kind of never-ending circularity here, a sense as in Stein of "beginning again and again and again." Together with its reduction of the painting's subject matter to its basic forms, Cubism is most generally known for this moving around the object, the simultaneous representation of successive points of view. The term which is used to describe Cubism's first phase, from Les Demoiselles to about 1911, Analytic Cubism, is in fact a direct reference to this technique, derived from Henri Bergson's definition of "analysis" in his Introduction to Metaphysics:

Analysis . . . is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is, to elements common both to it and other objects . . . a representation taken from successive points of view from which we note as many resemblances as possible between the object which we are studying and others which we believe we know already. In its eternally unsatisfied desire to embrace the object around which it is compelled to turn, analysis multiplies without end the number of points of view in order to complete its always incomplete representation. . . . It goes on to infinity.²²

When Stein, in both "Melanctha" and The Making of Americans, reduces her characters to "bottom natures," that is, to elements common both to this

person and other similar persons, and then proceeds to "begin again and again," multiplying without end the number of points of view "endlessly the same and endlessly different," she is attempting the kind of analysis that Picasso is attempting in the lower right hand nude of Les Demoiselles. And her always "incomplete" description seems, especially in The Making of Americans, to go on to infinity, as if she ends it after nearly one thousand pages only arbitrarily. Referring to the sheer bulk of that work, she would say: "Science is continuously busy with the complete description of something, with ultimately the complete description of anything with ultimately the complete description of everything. . . . And so description is really unending" (SW, 255). But she continues by saying that in about 1911 she came to understand that "everything described would not do any more," and that her writing "changed from a description of any one and everything . . . to what if not was not not to be not known about any one about anything" (SW, 256-257).

This last cryptic statement is only understandable in the context of the development of Cubism from its Analytic Phase to its Synthetic Phase which began about 1911. This shift roughly can be described as the shift from an inductive to a deductive art, and corresponds to the painting's gradually ceasing to be the revelation of an absolute reality and its gradual recognition as an aesthetic object in itself. In 1908, for instance, Braque described the intention behind his first Cubist work, the Grand Nu: "I want to expose the Absolute, and not merely the factitious woman."²³ This is yet another formulation of Cézanne's desire to portray "the roots of the world" or Stein's interest in discovering "bottom nature." More quickly than Stein, Picasso and Braque recognized that this approach

"would not do." By 1912 Gleizes and Metzinger, who derived virtually all their ideas from the example of Picasso and Braque, would formulate why:

It . . . amazes us that well-meaning critics explain the remarkable difference between the forms attributed to nature and those of modern painting, by a desire to represent things not as they appear, but as they are. And how are they? According to them, the object possesses an absolute form, an essential form, and, in order to uncover it we should suppress chiaroscuro and traditional perspective. What naiveté! An object has not one absolute form, it has several; it has as many as there are planes in the domain of meaning.²⁴

The point is that the technique of passage and the notion of simultaneity to which it had given rise, both initially conceived as techniques to reveal the activity and dynamism of nature (the "higher" or "truer" reality behind superficial appearance), brought the Cubist artist to the realization that nature, like the techniques of passage and simultaneity themselves, is ambiguous, that if truth is to be found there, truth is constantly changing and simultaneously can be many things, all dependent upon one's point of view. Instead of an idealist art which hopes to portray the one, absolute Truth, Cubism is an art which more and more comes to emphasize ambiguity and multiplicity, the arbitrariness and factitiousness of meaning itself.

If we look at what Winthrop Judkins has defined as the fourteen "specific and irreducible details" of Cubist technique up to the Synthetic Phase, we can see how fully this notion of ambiguity and multiplicity occupied the Cubists. These technical devices are:

- 1) "planes which are at once transparent and opaque";
- 2) "tones of objects which 'bleed' out and become background tones so that the object is part of, and at the same time in front of, the background" [the primary way by which Cézanne accomplishes his passage];
- 3) "outlines which coincide with other outlines so that the continuity may be read around either or across both" [another Cézannian technique];

- 4) "surfaces which recede behind other surfaces and project over them simultaneously";
- 5) "shadows, mutually excluded by each others' light sources, standing side by side";
- 6) "parts of objects shifted away from the whole and then changed in tone so that the recognition of the original will be constantly elusive";
- 7) "shadows which become substance";
- 8) "flat planes which disappear behind themselves";
- 9) "shapes created by arbitrary changes of tone competing with the shapes of the recognizable objects within which they are developed";
- 10) "forms whose contours pass over other forms while their local tones disappear beneath them";
- 11) "interlocking dark and light forms either of which can be seen as the 'object' against the other as background";
- 12) "parts of an object displaced from the whole so that its recognition is made elusive, fugitive, intermittent";
- 13) "objects seen from two (or more) directions at once" [simultaneity in its most widely recognized manifestation];
- 14) "sections of objects shifted and adjusted so that they become either involved in other continuities or new forms in their own right."²⁵

Judkins then calls these devices the manifestation of four more general and interrelated characteristics, characteristics which they all have in common:

A Deliberate Oscillation of Appearance
 A Studied Multiplicity of Readings
 A Conscious Compounding of Identities
 An Iridescence of Form [by which he means Ambiguity of Form].²⁶

When Judkins developed this outline of Cubist technique in 1948, he meant it as a "reinterpretation," a corrective reading of the Cubist accomplishment. Until 1948, for instance, simultaneity had generally been regarded only in terms of device #13. Judkins shows that the notion extends to virtually every technique in the Cubist idiom. A second, maybe more important, correction was to the widely held notion that the Cubist fragmentation or deconstruction of the object was an end in itself. Judkins reveals that this deconstructive activity is a technique (#s 6, 12, 14), among many others, designed to establish the deliberate ambiguity of the painting, another means

to provoke unending plastic activity within the static frame of the canvas.

Cubism itself had invited this misinterpretation or over-emphasis of its deconstructive activity. Deconstruction is, after all, an integral and necessary step in analysis--the object is reduced to its most basic form, part by part. When forms are broken apart in this way, certain elements of the whole inevitably hold more interest--the slats of a violin, for instance, or the headline of a newspaper. Or, in what is perhaps a more readily understandable example, if a Cubist were to paint a frontal portrait--as each did time and again in the years 1910 and 1911--once one arm has been analyzed what is the point of analyzing the other; once one half a face has been portrayed why portray the other half, its mirror image? Doesn't this refusal to in effect "finish" the portrait in fact heighten its ambiguity and generate necessary mental activity on the part of the audience? I am suggesting here an important addition to Judkins' list of Cubist techniques: time and again they allow the part to represent the whole; their representation of the object is metonymic.

When in the years 1910 to 1912, the Cubists relied more and more heavily on this metonymic representation, always in conjunction with several or all of Judkins' other techniques, their painting became more and more elusive, more and more hermetic, more and more abstract, so that it seemed to be verging on what Gleizes and Metzinger called "a level of pure effusion."²⁷ Braque's 1911 Soda, for instance, is probably as close as Cubism ever came to "pure effusion." It is a painting full of things--all of them represented only in part--glasses, cups, pipes, letters, musical scores, musical instruments, the advertisement for soda which gives the

painting its title. This advertisement, immediately recognizable, draws us into the painting, forces us to examine its elements and discover what they are. What appears to be "an absence of things" becomes instead a kind of Pandora's box.

What is interesting about this late Analytic, or as it is sometimes called Hermetic, phase of Cubist painting is that as it moves toward abstraction, it senses the danger of abstraction. This is of course the rationale behind the famous trompe-l'oeil, the highly illusionistic nail painted in traditional perspective which casts a shadow onto the canvas and seemingly supports it.²⁸ The trompe-l'oeil points out an unresolved conflict between the demands of material reality, the artist's subject, and the demands of the artist's experience of that reality, his subjective and compositional idea(s). Abstraction is the result of fragmentation, metonymy, all the devices which create purposeful ambiguity--in short, the result of the Cubist's analysis of his subject--and yet that subject matter is in danger of being lost, becoming unrecognizable. The trompe-l'oeil nail, then, modulates between subjective feeling and objective reality. And this modulation draws attention to the medium, the composition, itself. Art critic Robert Rosenblum has said that the "inevitable conclusion" that must be drawn from trompe-l'oeil is that "a work of art presents a complex interchange between artifice and reality." The nail literally nails down the canvas as a two-dimensional surface. Line, color and form refer first to themselves, then to each other, and finally, as we see them in relation and detect representational effects, to things other than themselves, to the material world. "A picture depends," Rosenblum continues, "upon external reality, but the Cubist means of recording this reality--unlike

the means devised by the Renaissance--are not absolute but relative. One pictorial language is no more 'real' than another, for the nail, conceived as external reality, is just as false as any of the less illusionistic passages in the canvas--or conversely, conceived as art, just as true."²⁹ The painting is the product of a dialogue between the artist and his subject matter--or better, it is the dialogue itself, a representation of the space between them and the measure of their contact.

But what is for Rosenblum an "inevitable"--and I think right--conclusion was either lost on or ignored by not only the art historians until the time of Judkins but also most of the movements of modern art which Cubism inspired. In the first place, there is abstract art itself which, as we have seen, very quickly decided that it had no use for material reality whatsoever. For these artists--and I am thinking particularly of Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian--this late phase of Analytic Cubism initiated a liberating direction for the modern consciousness to follow. If art could only come into being through a deconstruction of material reality, why bother with material reality at all? Why not purely construct in the first place, from the outset? Secondly, there is the example of Dada, which seized on the Cubist notion of deconstruction--seeing it more as simple destruction--and proceeded to produce what they proudly called "gibberish," denying and damning in the process every system of dealing with material reality and existence man had ever conceived, including Cubism. Finally, there is Dada's successor, Surrealism, which, while a more formal program than Dada, also condemns systems, believes that logic and intellectuality have no place in art, and turns instead to an art of pure intuition, the necessarily unsystematic investigation of the subconscious.

And it is to abstract art, Dada and Surrealism, that Stein's style after The Making of Americans, the description of "what if not was not not to be not known about any one and anything," bears most resemblance. She would always deny this, believing instead that she was following the example of Cubism and constructing, as she puts it in The Autobiography, a fusion of "the external and the internal" (AABT, 112). She felt that the style of "Melanctha," the Picasso portrait, and The Making of Americans fell too heavily on the side of "the external." Provoked by the "pure effusion" of Hermetic Cubism, she sought to discover a style which would reveal the "internal," the workings of her own mind, more fully. For this reason, in the works that follow The Making of Americans, beginning with A Long Gay Book which she completed in 1912, the objective world is nearly lost. Instead of staying close to the object--monotonously close at times--what she writes seems to bear almost no relation to the object at all. Her subject matter seems to be, more than anything else, her own mind, and in this she seems very close indeed to the total abstraction of Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian. On the other hand, her work appears to be a purposeful attack on "sense" itself, and in this she is very close to Dada. Finally, her unsystematic free-association--punning, word-play, and rhyming--allies her with the art of pure intuition which is Surrealism. This affinity with modern art movements other than Cubism has led William Wasserstrom to call her a "Sursymamericubealist": she was, he says, "cubist by vocation but surrealist by default."³⁰ But because she felt that the object, "the external," was never lost in her work, she defended herself vigorously from charges such as Wasserstrom's. In fact Richard Bridgman, Stein's most authoritative critic, sees her later

proclivity to analyze and justify her style as a direct reaction to Dada and Surrealism, an effort to set herself apart from them: "The Dadaists and Surrealists were more than matching her enigmatic prose. . . . With these new and prodigiously bright competitors, Gertrude Stein felt obliged to clarify her aesthetic ideas."³¹ In these clarifications, or "explanations" as she preferred to call them, she always insists that she has never ceased to portray "things as they are." If she had added "things as they are to Gertrude Stein," she would have been closer to the truth: for in her effort to include "the internal" in her writing, the sheer presence of Gertrude Stein is finally more important than the presence of Gertrude Stein in the world.

When this new internalized style, a style which never realizes itself and never lives up to the aesthetic rationale which provoked it, first appears three-quarters of the way through A Long Gay Book, Stein proclaims that she is "not satisfied" with what she has written to this point: "She said she did not care to repeat what she had said." She exclaims that "singing is everything," and rather than repetition, beginning again and again, singing "is the way" (GMP, 87). Thus a book that begins, "There are some when they feel it inside them that it has been with them that there was once so very little of them" (GMP, 13), another Making of Americans, ends like this:

A lake particular salad.
 Wet cress has points in a plant when new sand is a
 particular.
 Frank, frank quay.
 Set of keys was, was.
 Lead kind in soap, lead kind in soap sew up. Lead kind
 in so up. Lead kind in so up. Lead kind in so up.
 Leaves a mass, so mean. No shows. Leaves a mass cool
 will. Leaves a mass puddle.
 Etching. Etching a chief, none plush. (GMP, 116)

She is making here, I think, a complex set of verbal connections between a landscape--possibly an etching with a lake, sand, quay, bathers (from soap), foliage and a puddle--and a watercress salad and possibly a bowl of soup (from "sewing up" the words "so up"). But whatever this excerpt is about--and look what things have dwindled down to--Stein's first full-fledged effort to fuse the external (objects) and the internal (the imagination that confronts them) occurs in Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms, written in late 1912, probably after A Long Gay Book was completed.

Like the Cubists, she recognized that this fusion depended on the relationship of the imagination to the object, or to put it another way, the passage between objective and subjective space. Now, the word was the medium by which this passage would be conveyed. If a thing--"objects, food, rooms"--was to be conveyed in writing, then the thing had to be deduced from the medium, from the language-object. Later she would recall that at this time "I found myself plunged into a vortex of words, burning words, cleansing words, feeling words, and the words were all ours and it was enough that we held them in our hands to play with them; what you can play with is yours, and this was the beginning of knowing."³² And so

Tender Buttons opens with this object:

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.

(SW, 461)

A carafe is a kind of glass, a cousin to other kinds of glass. It is "blind" (it cannot see and yet it is seen--it is a "spectacle"). It is ordinary ("nothing strange") and yet "not ordinary" because it is a particular carafe.

But this carafe--and now the verbal play comes in--is also a blind window (from the French glace, as in glace de portière), and though it is opaque ("A single hurt color") it is a window that reveals a world of associations. It points beyond itself to what it does not resemble: "the difference is spreading." And, as the association spreads, later in Tender Buttons we find: "Climate, climate is not southern, a little glass, a bright winter" (SW, 505), where glass is now glace--ice--and there is sense in this nonsense. Stein sees through the word "carafe" and finds imaginative potential in it. Although the carafe is a blind glass, "No eye-glasses are rotten, no window is useless . . . there is a speech ready, there always is and there is no dimness, not a bit of it" (SW, 501). A carafe, we recall, is a spectacle, an eye-glass; speech is a way of seeing.

Stein's play with words then is play that depends for one thing on the pun, a deliberate ambiguity which propels mental and verbal activity in the same way that the Cubists' multiplicity and ambiguity propel mental and plastic activity. In fact, Stein manipulates her verbal associations in such a way that her words almost become plastic themselves. The title of the work itself is probably meant to suggest "tendres boutons," tender or delicate buds, and hence Stein's continual reference to flowers and seasons throughout the work. And the emphasis on vision throughout suggests that another pun, "eye/I," may be the work's organizing principle, a complex interchange between what the "eye" sees and what the "I" makes of that seeing.³³ In "A BOX," which is among the most theoretical of her "objects," her method in manipulating words is made clear:

A BOX

Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research and out of

selection comes painful cattle. So then the order is that a white way of being round is something suggesting a pin and is it disappointing, it is not, it is so rudimentary to be analysed and see a fine substance strangely, it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point again. (SW, 463)

Redness comes out of kindness through the word kindredness, a purely plastic deconstruction of language, and out of rudeness (we rapidly ask the same "question") comes redness through the word ruddiness. The eye researches its material, the words, searching out this kind of likeness (kindness), and finally selects a likeness that is a difficult one, "painful"--cattle, kine, kind. In this way, "a white way of being round," the eye/I again at work, suggests "a pin," a device to fasten all these things together. The analysis is "rudimentary" (and this word, of course, connects back to the kindness/redness, rudeness/ruddiness associations), because it is an analysis of the rudiments of language, and reveals this "fine substance" (language itself) strangely. This is not a disappointing process, but rather a process which points. And the process does not point to semantic likeness (a green does not point to a red--a color to a color), but to things beyond semantic equivalence. Any word, then, is "A BOX" out of which an astonishing variety of things can spring, just as the word "box" is derived from the Latin pyxis, which in botany becomes pyxidium, a round seed that sprouts when its top opens like the lid of an eye. Finally, the word eye is derived from the Latin oculus, which in Latin means both eye and bud, and in modern French means a round or oval window, and we are back to the "spectacle," "eye-glass" of "A CARAFE," all Tender Buttons.

But all this seems rather ingenious, on my part as well as Stein's. If I could pretend to be able to analyze the rest of Tender Buttons in like manner it might seem less so, but I cannot. Stein's work, in fact, invites

this kind of ingeniousness. She gives you enough, now and again, to draw you into her labyrinth. She is addictive in the way crossword puzzles are addictive--from a few verbal clues we try to piece together the whole--but I do not believe one can ever finish her puzzle, let alone become expert at it. Let me give an example, not something which totally baffles me

(Tender Buttons is full of them), the 1913 portrait of "Guillaume Apollinaire":

Give known or pin ware.
 Fancy teeth, gas strips.
 Elbow elect, sour stout pore, pore caesar, pour state at.
 Leave eye lessons I. Leave I. Lesson. I. Leave I lessons, I.
 (PP, 26)

That is the whole of it. At first I was inclined to agree with Michael J. Hoffman that this is "language devoid of meaning," total abstraction, that it is "completely non-representational."³⁴ But I think not. In the first place, if this were true it would deny everything Stein says about her own work, let alone the idea of portraiture itself. Rather, I think now that she is attempting something here along the lines of Hermetic Cubism's 1910 and 1911 portraits. This occurred to me when I recognized the sound associations between the title "Guillaume Apollinaire" and the first line, "Give known or pin ware": a deliberate oscillation of appearance. "Fancy teeth," I then realized, might well be a recasting of the French word "fantaisiste"--with André Salmon and Francis Carco, Apollinaire was recognized by 1913 as one of "les poètes fantaisistes." "Gas strips" might refer simply to "gaz," one of Apollinaire's favorite images and one which opens his 1913 poem "Lundi Rue Christine," a collage of snatches of conversation overheard in a cafe which is senseless in a way that Stein would surely have admired. The third line more or less baffles me, but "caesar" can be explained by a description of Apollinaire in

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas: "He had a head like one of the late roman emperors" (AABT, 55). And the fourth line suggests a complicated process of metamorphosis involving, as catalytic agents, the eye and the I--leave→laissons→les sons→lessons--which underlines the portrait's purposeful ambiguity. "I feel with my eyes," she writes in the Autobiography, "it doesn't make any difference what language I hear" (AABT, 65). So the eye lessons or teaches the I. But then again "lessons" may well be "les sons"--sounds. "I don't hear a language," she continues in the Autobiography, "I hear tones of voice and rhythms." So that this last line becomes a kind of guide to how to read the poem--disregard what words mean, look and listen instead to what they have in common. And then finally, "Leave I," which immediately calls to mind the euphemism that she repeats again and again in her later explications, "I am not I any longer when I see," the sense that here the "I," but not sight and sound, has been left behind.

The problem here is that although the "meaning" of "Guillaume Apollinaire" is beginning to take shape, it is finally elusive, and not elusive in the sense that a Cubist painting is elusive. With some work, the elements of a Cubist painting can all be understood, deciphered; the elements that compose "Guillaume Apollinaire," or the majority of Stein's Tender Buttons, cannot. And yet, as the immense body of her own later explication indicates, Stein insists that she can, even should, be understood. Now, it is quite likely that what Stein means by "understanding" is not what we normally mean by that word. What she does mean is probably implicit in the phrase "singing is everything" with which she introduces this difficult style in A Long Gay Book, and by "singing" she means "abstraction" and all that it implies, especially the integrity of the composition as a thing in itself, and the

ability of an abstract work to communicate despite the fact that the elements of which it is composed, like musical notes, have no reference to the material world. In her 1913 portrait of Braque, for instance, Stein has this to say about Soda (and she must have Soda in mind since it is Braque's only circular painting): "There is an undetermined super division. . . . The tune which is on any wind the same, the tune is the organization. It has a place, it is a circle and this which is not guarded is not soft, it is softening. . . . There is no doubt that the lines that are turning are the lines that are turning" (GP, 144, 148). What she is interested in here is not the things in Soda, but their organization, their "tune." And in these few lines she reveals how well she understands how this "tune" is in fact organized: by "undetermined" she implies ambiguity, by "super division" fragmentation and plastic metonymy, by "softening" passage and the time-sense and the presentness of Cubist painting, and by "lines that are turning are lines that are turning" the painting's integrity as composition. The inevitable conclusion is that for Stein the things, the subject matter, of the painting are beside the point. Its meaning is its tune, its plastic organization. She is interested in the abstract side of the work, and is forgetting, significantly, that Braque himself was so disturbed by it that he felt compelled--not in Soda, but in other paintings of the same era--to introduce the trompe-l'oeil nail and draw our attention back to material reality.

In this disregard for the representational she aligns herself not with Cubism but with abstract art, Dada and Surrealism. And to this day, whenever she is identified with Cubism, she is identified only with its abstract side. In a recent article on Stein and Picasso, L. T. Fitz draws our

attention to their shared concern for the composition as a thing in itself, the fact that from this point of view subject matter is, at best, of secondary importance, and finally, because the subject matter is beside the point, the fact that both create works that lack a "focal point," a center.³⁵ This is true enough for Stein, but it is only half true for Picasso. The Cubist painting is a composition in its own right, but as such it is also an object taking its place among a world of objects and creates, then, a complex interchange between the mind which confronts it and material reality. Subject matter is beside the point, but only to a point; the painting must possess subject matter or the interchange between the mind and material reality cannot take place. Finally, Cubist painting always has a focal point, a center; it is only that this focal point is simultaneously denied by making it ambiguous so that the interchange between the mind and material reality is equalized and balanced; the painting allows neither to dominate the other.

Although Stein knew these things, she tends to forget them. The third section of Tender Buttons begins, "Act so that there is no use in a centre" (SW, 508). If the center is not active then "use" or "custom is in the centre" and custom means "an imitation, more imitation, imitations succeed imitations" (SW, 483). Material reality, and our customary and habitual acceptance of it, will become lord over us, and the integrity of the human mind, which it is the function of the composition to reveal, will be denied. So far, so good: she wants to equalize and balance the thing and our conception of it. But when we encounter an "object" from Tender Buttons such as this--and this is the normal fare--the balance has shifted:

A CUTLET

A blind agitation is manly and uttermost.
(SW, 470)

The object is there, in the title, A CUTLET. But its description, its representation, we can only assume to be the product of "blind" mental whimsy, "agitation." And it is impossible to say what "manly" and "uttermost" have to do with a cutlet. The interchange between the mind and the object is simply destroyed by the hermeticism, the total lack of a focal point. The cutlet and its representation cannot provoke or reveal an interchange because they have nothing in common, despite Stein's implicit assertion that they do. What has happened here is that the mind has become lord over fact in such a totalitarian way that fact finally counts for nothing.

Gertrude Stein is not a Dadaist, but at this point she begins very much to look like one. Simply stated, if fact counts for nothing, the composition itself, being a fact, also counts for nothing. Compare Stein's hermetic prose to this composition, written in 1915 by Marcel Duchamp in New York:

The

If you come into * linen, your time is thirsty because
* ink saw some wood intelligent enough to get giddiness
from from a sister. However, even it should be smilable
to shut * hair whose * water writes always in * plural,
they have avoided * frequency, meaning mother in law;
powder will take a chance; and * road could try. But
after somebody brought any multiplication as soon as *
stamp was out, a great many cords refused to go through.
Around * wire's people, who will be able to sweeten *
rug, that is to say, why must every patents look for a
wife? Pushing four dangers near * listening place, *
vacation had not dug absolutely nor this likeness has
eaten.

remplacer chaque * par le mot: the³⁶

Duchamp goes on in a note to explain what he is doing here: "The meaning in these sentences is a thing I had to avoid. . . . I would very often see a meaning and immediately I saw a meaning I would cross out the verb and change it . . . until the text would finally read without any echo of the physical world."³⁷ What Duchamp is doing here purposefully--"I was interested in ideas," he says elsewhere, "I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind"--Stein is doing accidentally. She implies that her composition has meaning by giving it a meaningful title; Duchamp denies meaning altogether, turning his attention to the word "the," and then transforming even this meager word to a "*". The effect of both, however, is the same: art which is not art, not merely anti-art. "Dada," Duchamp continues, "was an extreme protest against the physical side of painting [its materiality]. It was a metaphysical attitude . . . a sort of nihilism."³⁹ In its refusal to either mean anything or take itself seriously, Dada establishes what Werner Haftmann calls "the autonomy of the self,"⁴⁰ the mind as total lord over fact. The painter Hans Richter, in his own history of the movement, Dada: Art and Anti-Art, explains: "Every spontaneous impulse, every message from within, was . . . greeted as an expression of pure reality."⁴¹ Tristan Tzara's infamous formula for making a Dada poem reflects exactly this kind of spontaneity:

To make a dadist poem.
 Take a newspaper.
 Take a pair of scissors.
 Choose an article as long as you are planning to make
 your poem.
 Cut out the article.
 Then cut out each of the words that make up this article
 and put them in a bag.
 Shake it gently.
 Then take out the scraps one after the other and arrange
 them in the order in which they left the bag.
 Copy conscientiously.
 The poem will be like you. ⁴²

Although the newspaper, material reality, has an important role to play in making this kind of poem, its triviality--and the poem's--is assured. And Tzara's "newspaper clipping" poems read just like Gertrude Stein's hermetic prose. They are both to cite Tzara's definition of Dada, "the new transmutation that signifies nothing."⁴³

Of course it was no accident that Stein was and is associated with Dada. With the exception of the two small editions of Three Lives and Tender Buttons, her work remained unpublished until the Dada, and later the Surrealist, spirit took control of the little magazines both in France and abroad.⁴⁴ The only real difference between the Dadaists and Stein is their relative seriousness of purpose, and to most observers Francis Picabia's 1920 ironic statement at a public meeting organized by French Dada for the Salon des Indépendents was equally applicable to both: "You do not understand, of course, what we are doing! Well, my dear friends, we understand it still less. How wonderful, isn't it, that you are right. . . . You don't understand? Neither do I; how sad!"⁴⁵ In many ways her writing and her seriousness of purpose are even closer to the Surrealists. In their remaking of the Dadist revolution into a formal program dedicated to the exploration of the unconscious, the Surrealists match Stein's sense of the importance of their work. And the style of Stein's prose is at times very close to Surrealist psychic automatism, which was begun by André Breton in 1919 in collaboration with Phillipe Soupault, and which resulted in their "novel" Les Champs magnetiques in 1920. For Breton, psychic automatism was generated in automatic writing, a writing marked by its "extreme degree of immediate absurdity."⁴⁶ In fact, when B. F. Skinner discovered Stein's early, published study of automatic writing, "Normal Motor Automatism,"

written as an undergraduate under the direction of William James, he published an article, "Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?" in the Atlantic Monthly which "explained" her work, especially Tender Buttons, as automatic writing and consequently "explained" why she is impossible to understand.⁴⁷ Stein always wrote too carefully to be considered an "automatic writer," and she found Skinner's approach "very amusing" because her experiments had proven fairly conclusively that "you could not do anything with automatic writing" (HWIW, 156). Nevertheless, Skinner's impulse is sound if finally mistaken. It is as if, in a very carefully reasoned and logical way, she developed a style by 1913 which is the mirror image of the anti-rational and anti-logical styles of Dadaist and Surrealist writing. In this, finally, she is closer to Marcel Duchamp than any other modern artist, either writer or painter.

In recent years, Duchamp has come to be recognized as the guiding genius behind the development of modern art. As Picasso's influence has waned, Duchamp's has steadily increased until, as one art critic recently has pointed out, "his presence affects multiple facets of the art of the 1960s and 1970s."⁴⁸ Duchamp is nothing if he is not the embodiment of paradox and ambiguity, but it is possible to say now that behind his anti-rational and anti-logical exterior--the exterior that would by fiat declare a urinal purchased in a plumbing store, art--lay a very logical and rational mind. There was a reason behind his every act. His "readymades"--the urinal, the bottle rack--are, according to Robert Motherwell, "a subtle solution to an essential dada dilemma, how to express oneself without art when all means of expression are potentially artistic."⁴⁹ The famous Mona Lisa with a moustache--entitled L.H.O.O.Q., which, when pronounced

in French fashion, makes an obscene pun, "Elle a chaud au cul"--is, according to Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, "no innocent game . . . this usurping of the masterpiece's privileges by the pun is aimed at destroying its prestige more effectively than any thesis could do."⁵⁰ One of Duchamp's never-realized projects along these same lines was the "Reciprocal Readymade = Use a Rembrandt as an ironing-board."⁵¹ But the reason for activity such as this is not merely the release of anti-artistic impulses. Rather he saw it as a way to "get away from clichés--to get free . . . a purgative,"⁵² the first necessary step toward the realization of a more encompassing and profound kind of art.

What exactly this more encompassing and profound art is is very difficult to articulate. Duchamp never defines it, except perhaps in his last work, the so-called Large Box, Etant Donnés, where, as Octavio Paz has put it, "we pass from voyeurism to clairvoyance," from "an appearance to be deciphered" to "a presence offered for our contemplation."⁵³ Suffice it to say that Duchamp did not achieve this transmutation--and it is a very difficult one indeed--until the 1950's. Until this time he gives us only "the appearance to be deciphered," and as in Stein it is always an appearance of total and purposeful ambiguity, so total that the connection between the subject matter and its representation is as baffling, hermetic and enigmatic as Stein's Tender Buttons. And like Stein, in the 'twenties, 'thirties and 'forties Duchamp spent more time explicating his already completed work than producing anything new.

The advantage we have in analyzing Duchamp's work that we do not have in Stein's, however, is that the body of Duchamp's explication is more particular in detail than Stein's. We learn for instance, in the

Green Box (1934), that the machine-like elements which compose the famous Large Glass, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (1918), are in fact the elements of a private mythology, symbols of everything from the female womb to the bachelors' semen. The Large Glass is finally decipherable. But without the aid of the notes in the Green Box, the connection between the upper section of the Large Glass and its subject matter, "the bride," and the lower section and its subject matter "the bachelors," is as enigmatic as the connection between "a blind agitation" and its subject matter, "a cutlet." And in both cases the composition itself mirrors this enigma. The bride is, or has been, stripped bare by her bachelors, according to the title, but the composition itself presents two distinct areas, one the bride's and the other the bachelors', in which both are isolated. They cannot act upon one another. Similarly in "a blind agitation is manly and uttermost," the copula insists on an interchange between the sentence's first and second halves, an interchange which meaning, especially in the context of "a cutlet," denies.

Furthermore, and in this he is very much like Stein, the ambiguity of Duchamp's art time and again rests on the verbal pun. Although by 1912 Duchamp was a relatively frequent visitor to the Rue de Fleury, I can find no evidence that either Stein or Duchamp were particularly aware, at least impressed by, each other's work. There is certainly little to indicate that either one directly influenced the other. Their interest in the pun seems rather to have been independently inspired and nurtured in their study of Cubism, a manifestation of their desire, as Duchamp puts it, "to break up forms--to 'decompose' them much along the lines the cubists had done."⁵⁴ Duchamp testifies that Raymond Roussel's Impressions d'Afrique

a play composed of puns and dependent upon, significantly, a large and meaningless machine, inspired his Bride.⁵⁵ He saw the pun as a bridge, or the hinge mechanism of a door ("perhaps make a hinge picture" is one of the notes in the Green Box),⁵⁶ which allows one to pass between two seemingly unrelated worlds, and hold them together in a single image. He even extended this notion to himself, converting his name, Marcel Duchamp, to Marchand du Sel (either "salt-seller" or, in more colloquial French usage, "wit-seller"), an obvious reference to the commercial aspects of the painter's occupation. Likewise he adopted the pen name Rose Selavy (éros, c'est la vie) and posed in transvestite garb and make-up for a portrait, this act drawing attention to the artist's usurpation of the female prerogative, to the notion of art as sexless reproduction.

But more to the point is the pun which informs the title of The Bride-- and now we must turn to the original French--La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même. As David Antin has noted in an article on "Duchamp and Language," the French language has a great many subtle rules on the placement of the adverb, but to place it at the end, in this way, is unheard of, literally unspeakable. Antin continues:

then why did duchamp put it at the end you hold your head you walk around several times and you say "no what an awful joke" you take même and change it to m'aime . . . "the bride stripped bare by her bachelors loves me" now thats a terrible joke but on the other hand its very much like duchamp . . . its terribly convincing mainly because of the adverb it even sounds silly in english translation no reasonable frenchman would put it there if the title was a complete sentence which alas it may not have been because it could also have been an abruptly interrupted beginning to a subordinate clause that had been cavalierly deleted for example "the bride stripped bare by her bachelors even" (if they could not

consummate the union) . . . i think that duchamps manipulation of these two systems of interpretations (readings) is such that you will be driven between the two alternatives without being allowed to rest . . . if the title of the big glass is taken as a notation for the voice . . . i think whether you hear "loves me" (m'aime) or "even" (même) depends upon whether your voice supplies a period after m'aime. or an ellipsis after même. . . . you pay your money and take your choice but the title of the big glass is a perpetual pendulum that keeps swinging back and forth between alternative readings⁵⁷

The activity that this pun generates then is the same activity that Cézanne and later the Cubists initiated in painting by means of passage, a continual swing between multiple meanings. Stein discovered that the surest way for a writer to match this kind of ambiguity was via the pun, and Duchamp incorporated this verbal tool in the plastic arts by incorporating it in painting's only truly verbal component, the title. For the same basic reasons he would call a readymade--a shovel, for instance--"In advance of a broken arm," in order to distance the object from the title and thereby mystify both the image and the word. This is the same effect Stein achieves in "A CUTLET."

But finally we have to admit that Duchamp's private mythology (a system, from a man who publicly at least condemned all systems) makes him accessible in a way that Stein is not. I think we are misled if we pretend that some private mythology lies at the heart of Tender Buttons waiting to be discovered. If it were there, Stein, in her constant struggle to be published, be read, be understood, and be appreciated, would sometime or other have told us about it. But Stein's only mythology is the mythology of "play"--a concept which she developed soon after the completion of Tender Buttons and which occupied her (with the exception of her autobiographies) almost exclusively until her death:

And then to make a play with just the human mind.
Let us try. (GHA, 100)

As Richard Bridgman has pointed out, her plays bear little resemblance to "plays" at all. In fact they seem exactly like the still lifes of Tender Buttons.⁵⁸ What "play" means to her probably revolves around the various meanings inherent in the word: "play" as game--word-play, punning and so forth--and "play" as dialogue, that is, as the articulation of relationships between objects themselves, various states of mind, the relationships between the object and the state of mind, and the manifold complication in this kind of "play" as we shift between objects, states of mind, endlessly. The notion of "play" finally is another "explication," a self-defense for the hermeticism which it produces. It is no longer the integrity of the composition that interests Stein. Somewhere along the line she has assumed that as a given, and in so doing assured herself that "the play of the human mind" which the composition portrays will itself necessarily possess integrity. Stein's mythology, if she can be said to have one, is a mythology of the integrity of the human mind. She believed that inevitably she would be understood and appreciated because she believed in herself. But she was mistaken. Duchamp and the Dadaists knew better than to give credence to the integrity of the human mind, or to anything else for that matter. This good-natured disbelief is, I think, the Dadaists' greatest contribution to the modern mind: to doubt not only the world, but themselves.

Unfortunately for Stein, most people--and we can count William Carlos Williams among them--assumed Stein approached her work with the same kind of doubt and good humor that we might expect of a Dadaist. How else do we explain Williams' telling Stein in 1926, when asked what he would do if he possessed as many unpublished manuscripts as she, "I should probably select

what I thought were the best and throw the rest into the fire." Replied Stein: "No doubt. But then writing is not, of course, your metier" (A, 254). A faux pas on Williams' part to be sure, but in the light of what he knew about modern art and literature--and he knew a great deal--it is not an unreasonable one. At any rate, Stein's icy response did not dent Williams' respect for her achievement. He saw her as the first American writer to wholly liberate the language from cliché, the place from which, he felt, modern writing must begin. He saw her not as a Cubist, not as an abstractionist, not as a Dadaist or a Surrealist. He saw her as all these things. Above all, he saw her as a modern, even the Modern, among the writers at least, who led the way.

Chapter II

Williams and the Idea of Abstraction

How to begin to find a shape--to begin to begin again,
turning the inside out: to find one phrase that will lie
married beside another for delight . ?
--seems beyond attainment .

--William Carlos Williams
Paterson III

Many of William Carlos Williams' contemporaries, especially the New Critics, refused to consider the work of Gertrude Stein or the Dadaists as anything much more than nonsense. They regarded this "nonsense," when they bothered to admit to its presence at all, as the symptom of a chaotic age which it was their place to restore to order. Yvor Winters' 1937 Primitivism and Decadence: A Study of American Experimental Poetry, for instance, makes no mention of either Stein or Dada, despite the fact that Winters' discussion is in part concerned with the debts of experimental poetry to French Symbolism, and that six years earlier Edmund Wilson, in Axel's Castle, had established both Stein and Dada as the culmination of the Symbolist desire to rescue language from cliché. The only nod in their direction that Winters makes is to establish a distinction between "experimental poetry" and "pseudo-experimental poetry." Whereas the former "endeavors to widen . . . experience, or to alter it, or to get away from it, by establishing abnormal conventions," the latter "confuses tradition with convention, and . . . desiring to experiment, sees no way to escape from or alter tradition save by the abandonment of convention [altogether]: it

means the abandonment of form and of poetry." Winters mentions E. E. Cummings as an example of a "pseudo-experimental" poet, and never discusses the issue again.¹

In the same year that Winters thus chose to ignore radical experiments in literature, Williams would champion them. From Williams' point of view, the work of artists like the Dadists and Stein revealed, perhaps more clearly than any other kind of art, what he called "the basis of faith in art." In a context that is strikingly antagonistic to New Critical attitudes, he writes:

. . . the minute you let yourself be carried away by purely . . . "literary" reasoning without consulting the thing from which it grew, you've cut the life-giving artery and nothing ensues but rot.

What we seem to be getting to is that all the arts have to come back to something.

And that that thing is human need. When our manner of action becomes imbecilic we breed Dada, Gertrude Stein, surrealism. These things seem unrelated to any sort of sense UNTIL we look for the NEED of human beings. Examining that we find these apparently irrelevant movements of art represent mind saving, even at moments of genius, soul saving, continents of security for the pestered and bedeviled spirit of man, bedeviled by the deadly, lying repetitiousness of doctrinaire formula worship which is the standard work of the day.

("The Basis of Faith in Art," SE, 178-179)

For Williams, Gertrude Stein, Dada, surrealism and, though he does not mention it here, Cubism all answer a profound human need. They save the human mind, the imagination, from stagnation, and their ability to free man's imagination in this way is the basis of our faith in them. Purely "literary" reasoning, the kind of reasoning that Winters and the other New Critics championed, ignores the human need that provokes this kind of art, necessarily then regards it as irrelevant nonsense, and thereby cuts art off from man.

Williams believed that art is directly related to society, "that the

purpose of art IS to be useful," (SE, 179), and that the "uselessness" of art like that produced by Stein and the Dadaists "might constitute its principle use," for "in a scientific era like the one now passing" art which is "wholly nonutilitarian" paints "a wonderful picture of us all" (SE, 179). He is attempting to define what is the basis of faith in modern art, even modern art at its most extreme, and in this way he is beginning to define what he conceived the modern to be. He ignores the differences in Stein, Dada and Surrealism because, as he wrote in the Introduction to Kora in Hell, "Given many things of nearly totally divergent natures but possessing one-thousandth part of a quality in common, provided that be new, distinguished, these things belong in an imaginative category and not in a gross natural array" (I, 14). He is trying to discover "the one-thousandth part" which defines the modern, and he was not alone in his belief that one imaginative category might contain them all. As early as 1914 Apollinaire wrote:

One must . . . not take literally the names of the various schools: cubists, orphists, futurists, simultaneists, etc. For some time, they have meant absolutely nothing.

Today, there are only modern painters who, having liberated their art, are now forging a new art in order to achieve works that are materially as new as the aesthetic to which they were conceived.²

The painter Hilaire Hiler, in the lead article to the October, 1932 number of Contact, Williams' little magazine, echoed the same sentiments:

Post-impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Rayonism, Vorticism, Futurism, dadaism . . . all had one thing in common, and this meeting ground furnishes perhaps the best definition of the spirit of modernism. . . . The painter had become preoccupied, consciously or unconsciously with painting for its own sake, with problems of color form and composition of and for themselves: he was only secondarily if at all interested in the representation of nature.³

Furthermore, contemporary art criticism is beginning to approach the history of modern art in terms that also disregard individual tendencies in favor of trying to define the major outlines of the modern in art. As

William C. Seitz writes, for instance, in his ground-breaking study of

The Art of Assemblage:

For a study of the attitudes by which modern art has been activated, the terms "cubism," "futurism," "dada" should denote an interrelated sequence of currents . . . [which] substituted a nonrational metaphysic of oppositions for a rationalized hierarchy of values. As a consequence it accorded to unsureness, accident, confusion, disunity, and discontinuity a share of the attention formerly reserved for what had been commonly regarded as their moral opposites.⁴

Apollinaire and Hiler both emphasize the painting as a thing in itself, an object, in their description of modernism, while Seitz emphasizes the metaphysic that underlies this modernism. Mina Loy's 1924 definition of modernism, which appeared in Ford Madox Ford's transatlantic review, clarifies what Seitz's metaphysics has to do with the conception of the painting as a thing in itself. Loy's definition, incidentally, concludes an essay on Stein's Geography and Plays:

Modernism is a prophet crying in the wilderness of stabilized culture that humanity is wasting its aesthetic time. . . . The flux of life is pouring its aesthetic aspect into your eyes, your ears--and you ignore it because you are looking for your canons of beauty in some sort of frame or glass case of tradition. . . . Would not life be lovelier if you were constantly overjoyed by the sublimely pure concavity of your wash bowls? The tubular dynamics of your cigarette?⁵

Loy's "flux of life" is the "unsureness, accident, confusion, disunity, and discontinuity" of which Seitz speaks. The manifestations of this metaphysical "flux" are an interest in the geometric and mathematical essence of things like wash bowls and cigarettes, a concern with problems of "color form and composition of and for themselves," and simultaneously the breaking up of old forms and techniques in order to forge "a new art" out of new materials. This aesthetic is the basis of Williams' faith in art. Unflinchingly new, it is the link between modern man and the modern world.

It points to the common complexity which lumps us together as moderns, a complexity which is, paradoxically, the singleness of our existence.

But the world which we share is so complex, fragmented, ambiguous and chaotic that it appears to be centerless, if it can be said to have a center at all. It is the desire for a center, the desire for absolute meaning, which provoked in 1913, even as it provokes today, the inevitable public reaction to avant-garde art, its dismissal of this art as meaningless and nonsensical. Francis Carco, the French poet, once said of his friend Max Jacob that he was, above all, a student of the mechanics of the word: "Max was the type of man who successively presented the word in every meaning that it would possibly have; from every angle, every side and in that way, without one's realizing it, he belongs to Cubism."⁶ The same could be said of Gertrude Stein. To show that meaning is multiplicitous, cannot be nailed down except like the Cubist trompe-l'oeil, that is except by a trick, is not the same thing as saying that there is no meaning at all. It is to say there is no absolute meaning, no permanence. If there is absolute meaning, it is the mutability, multiplicity, fragmentation and ambiguity of meaning itself: centerlessness. Reacting to this sense of disordered and chaotic centerlessness, Williams wrote in the Prologue to Kora in Hell:

[Our] loose linking of one thing with another has effects of a destructive power little to be guessed at: all manner of things are thrown out of key so that it approaches the impossible to arrive at an understanding of anything. All is confusion, yet it comes from a hidden desire for the dance, a lust of the imagination, a will to accord two instruments in a duet. (I, 18-19)

The trick is to find a way, consistent with the vision of a multiplicitous world, the simultaneity of everything, to go beyond "the incoherence of the day" and on the page, in the poem, "keep ordered the disorder of the

pageless actual" (I, 274-275). As Juan Gris put it in his essay "On the Possibilities of Painting": "It is a question of fitting this rather shapeless world into . . . formal necessities."⁷ In short, one must go beyond the shapeless world of a Gertrude Stein, and yet not deny her world either. The work of art must synthesize the confusion of its elements.

But paradoxically the notion of the possibility of synthesis seems to be a willful denial of multiplicity and ambiguity. The very need for synthesis admits a fragmented and disorderly world as a condition of reality, but if synthesis is accomplished, and order restored by the ordering capabilities of the mind, doesn't this then deny our original sense of fragmentation and disorder? Doesn't art then become "a beautiful illusion," the very thing that Williams would say in the opening pages of Spring and All art must escape (I, 89)? Finally, if all is confusion, how--technically--can the poem or the painting be anything but confusion, or better, how can it represent this confusion even as it orders it? How can it be anything else but Gertrude Stein at her most hermetic?

These questions occupied Williams almost from the beginning of his career, certainly from the moment he began to be aware of tendencies and directions in modern art, a moment that roughly coincides with the 1913 Armory Show, the publication of The Tempers and the writing of "The Wanderer" (CEP, 3-12), the poem in which Williams asks "How shall I be a mirror to this modernity?" and answers his own question by leaping into the unknown territory of modernity represented by "the filthy Passaic." These are questions with which Williams constantly struggles in his work, questions about which "there is no confusion--only difficulties" (I, 140). And the difficulties are everywhere apparent.

There is, in the first place, a necessity for the kind of work Stein does. Williams shares with her the sense that language has lost its power to express the world with clarity and that this power must be restored. Like Stein's attack on the conventions of linear narrative, Williams' effort at renewal first manifests itself in an attack on certain poetic conventions. In the Collected Earlier Poems, Williams places a poem called "Portrait of a Lady" at the end of The Tempers section of the volume. The poem, however, was written in 1918, five years after the publication of The Tempers. Its placement at the conclusion of this early group suggests a criticism on Williams' part of the group as a whole. The poem stands in direct contrast to lines such as these, which represent the standard fare of The Tempers:

Your hair is my Carthage
 And my arms the bow,
 And our words arrows
 To shoot the stars
 Who from that misty sea
 Swarm to destroy us ["Postlude," CEP, 16]

Sure happily
 I still bring flowers, flowers
 Knowing how all
 Are crumpled in your praise
 And may not live
 To speak a lesser thing. ["Ad Infinitum," CEP, 28]

Although "Portrait of a Lady" assumes the same Petrarchan stance as these lines, that stance is attacked. Williams turns the Petrarchan conceit to his own purposes, straining the conceit until it in fact breaks:

Your thighs are appletrees
 whose blossoms touch the sky.
 Which sky? The sky
 where Watteau hung a lady's
 slipper. Your knees
 are a southern breeze--or
 a gust of snow. Agh! what

sort of man was Fragonard?
 --as if that answered
 anything. Ah yes--below
 the knees, since the tune
 drops that way, it is
 one of those white summer days,
 the tall grass of your ankles
 flickers upon the shore--
 Which shore?--
 the sand clings to my lips--
 Which shore?
 Agh, petals maybe. How
 should I know?
 Which shore? Which shore?
 I said petals from an appletree. (CEP, 40)

The traditional affectio of Petrarchan convention--the praise of the lady from her eyes down to her feet, "since the tune / drops that way"--begins not with her eyes but, much more erotically, with her thighs, thighs which are "appletrees / whose blossoms touch the sky." Immediately this conceit is questioned by a second voice, a voice we can take as either the voice of the Lady herself, the voice of the Lady as Muse, or, by extension, Williams' own self-critical voice. "Which sky?" this voice asks. The poet replies that it is the sky of art, the sky of the imagination, the sky we discover in a painting by Watteau or in, for instance, Fragonard's The Swing (1776). Fragonard's painting, like Williams' poem, desanctifies the Petrarchan view of the Lady by emphasizing her as an erotic object of desire. The Baron de St. Julien, who commissioned the famous painting, ordered that Fragonard "should paint Madame (pointing to his mistress) in a swing which is being set in motion by a Bishop. You must place me where I can have a good view of the legs of this pretty little thing."⁸ But "Agh!" the poet says, as if talking about Fragonard "answered anything," complaining that this questioning voice is destroying his objectifying conceits, both Petrarchan and erotic, which in fact it is. When he repeats the "Agh"

further on, his confidence in the conceit has been almost totally undermined: "Which shore? / Agh, petals maybe. How / should I know?" And the temptation here is to read "as if that answered / anything" back into the poem, an echo which points to the overall confusion of the conceit itself: ankles flickering on a shore that is first sand, then "petals maybe," and this in turn echoes the poet's confusion over knees, perhaps "a southern breeze" or perhaps "a gust of snow"--"How should I know?" The poet is lost and his conceit's effectiveness is lost with him.

But the poem itself is not lost, and what redeems it is the presence of the second, questioning voice. This voice brings the Lady out of "the sky," off her Petrarchan pedestal or Fragonardian swing, and plants her squarely on the same ground as the poet. This voice insists that the Lady is not an object for the poet's contemplation, but an objective presence with which the poet must converse. The voice finally assures us that the lady cannot be captured by conventional conceits which compare her "self" to appletrees, southern breezes or gusts of snow; she insists rather on the integrity and complexity of "herself." In effect, "Portrait of a Lady" reveals Williams' belief in the integrity of his material; there is a tension between what he would later call "conversation as design" and conventional design. The poem suggests that the mindless acceptance of any convention, such as the Petrarchan worship of the lady, imposes a stock view of reality on the poet which limits the imagination's ability to confront reality in any original way. The poem posits that in conversation with reality things as they are will be revealed, but that any conventional portrayal of reality at best can only reveal things as we would have them--centered, secure and traditional.

Since "Portrait of a Lady" insists on the individual integrity of all things, it underscores the multiplicity and fragmentation of the world and posits that the only way we can know the world is in a conversation or dialogue with it. From this point of view, convention and definition are not knowledge, but the inverse of knowledge. They limit the imagination rather than free it. Williams' 1920 "Portrait of the Author" (CEP, 228-229) confronts this problem directly. The poem opens with a confrontation which explicitly recalls the earlier "Portrait of a Lady":

The birches are mad with green points
 the wood's edge is burning with their green,
 burning, seething--No, no, no.
 The birches are opening their leaves one
 by one. Their delicate leaves unfold cold
 and separate, one by one. Slender tassels
 hang swaying from the delicate branch tips--
 Oh, I cannot say it. There is no word.
 Black is split at once into flowers. In
 every bog and ditch, flares of
 small fire, white flowers!--Agh,
 the birches are mad, mad with their green.
 The world is gone, torn into shreds
 with this blessing. What have I left undone
 that I should have undertaken?

There are three separate efforts in this opening stanza to define Spring, and all of them fail: "No, no, no"; "No, I cannot say it"; "Agh." The effort at definition, rather than expressing the poet's knowledge of the world has distanced him from it, and definition is revealed to be a wholly subjective activity which loses touch with reality, the confusion and multiplicity of Spring: "The world is gone, torn to shreds / with this blessing." The greatest "blessing" the poet can bestow on his world is his poem, and because the poem is so distanced from that world, it has instead torn the world to shreds. The implicit answer to the stanza's concluding question--"What have I left undone / that I should have undertaken"--is that

the poet must converse with his world, not violate its integrity by subjectively attempting to define it.

The next stanza makes this implicit answer explicit:

Answer me. I will clutch you. I
will hug you, grip you. I will poke my face
into your face and force you to see me.
Take me in your arms, tell me the commonest
thing that is in your mind to say,
say anything. I will understand you--!

The world however will not speak, and its silence drives Williams "mad with terror":

I am shaken, broken against a might
that splits comfort, blows apart
my careful partitions, crushes my house
and leaves me--with shrinking heart
and startled, empty eyes--peering out
into a cold world.

The world is cold because Williams cannot communicate with it, because his careful, comfortable and conventional response to it cannot accommodate what he calls its "madness" and its "fury." Spring is an activity, "the birch leaves . . . opening one by one," which definition cannot capture because definition, codification, stops activity. Although Williams begins the poem as an attempt to portray the visual world, he ends with a despairing and egocentric dialogue with himself: a portrait of the author. The poet's only recourse is to "drink and lie forgetting the world," but the implication is that if the poet's imagination were as active as the world then the poet might hope to communicate with that world.

What Williams needs to do is take the landscape of, for instance, "Flight to the City" (CEP, 244)--

The Easter stars are shining
above lights that are flashing--

and "burst it asunder," rename things in order to revitalize them, just as Spring remakes and revitalizes the world. Williams claims that there is nobody to revitalize these stars, that there is

Nobody
to say it--
Nobody to say: pinholes
 . . .
stars of tinsel
from the great end of a cornucopia
of glass,

but Williams of course is saying it. The discovery of dialogue which began in "Portrait of a Lady" must be continued. He must submit the substance of the world to an active imagination, to allow, as in "the Rose" (CEP, 249-250), the conversation between the world and the mind to take place. For if "the rose is obsolete" as a word, it is because it is all "laboredness." It has "carried" too long the "weight of love," its conventional function as the emblem for love, and it has been "worked to defeat" by this burden. But considered as "metal" or "porcelain," the rose "renews / itself," and

somewhere the sense
makes copper roses
steel roses

Williams' imagination has created new roses out of new material, roses which deny conventional and traditional associations. His metallic roses create a "geometry of roses" not a geometry of love. Williams' move from a conventional poetry which ends by denying the integrity of the thing in the world (be it a lady or birches) to an imaginative poetry which joins the integrity of the thing in the world to the activity of the mind (tinsel stars or metallic roses) was not an easy move. He had to come to terms not only with the recalcitrant world revealed in the portrait poems, but also with an unruly imagination which might lose contact with the world and

become wholly subjective. We see his struggle to understand the imagination most clearly in the prose--Kora in Hell: Improvisations, The Great American Novel, and A Novelette in particular--and this struggle reveals a great deal about what happens in his poetry.

With the exception of the novel A Voyage to Paganry (1928), all of Williams' prose writing until the late 'twenties can be seen as a kind of descent, a de-creation of the world. Even the prose in Spring and All can be regarded in this way if we consider it as a self-critical analysis, a deconstruction, of his own writing and the conventions he would often adopt in his writing. Williams regards these descents, as the title of Kora in Hell implies, as a necessary first step before rebirth, recreation, the poem in the end, can take place. In this light, the despair that we have seen at the end of "Portrait of the Author" can be seen as the necessary realization of his own imagination's failure, to meet the world on the world's terms. At the end of "Portrait of the Author" he submits to the world's "madness" and confusion, and as Spring awakens out of the "black," so he trusts will the poet's language.

It is significant that Williams always connects this movement downward with Dada.⁹ Of A Novelette he would say: "The pieces in this book show the influence of Dadaism. I didn't originate Dadaism but I had it in my soul to write it" (IWWP, 48). And his explanation of his reasons for writing Kora in Hell reads like a Dadaist manifesto:

Damn it, the freshness, the newness of a springtime which I had sensed among the others, a reawakening of letters, all that delight which in making a world to match the supremacies of the past could mean was being blotted out by the war. The stupidity, the calculated viciousness of a money-grubbing society such as I knew and violently wrote against; everything I wanted to see live and thrive was being deliberately murdered

in the name of church and state.

It was Persephone gone into Hades, into hell. Kora was the springtime of the year; my year, my self was being slaughtered. What was the use of denying it? (A, 158)

He suddenly explodes in The Great American Novel (1924): "To hell with art. To hell with literature" (I, 170). And in The Descent of Winter, written in the fall of 1927, he calls his poetry the "river of my heart polluted / and defamed," and compares it to another actual river:

beginning to be cleaned now
from factory pollution

Though at night a watchman
must still prowl lest some paid hand
open the waste sluices--

That river will be clean
before ever you [the poetry] will be (I, 255)

The prose paragraph that precedes this poem reads in its entirety: "The perfect man of action is the suicide." Finally, in an unsigned discussion of Dada in the December 1920 Contact, he writes: "Well, America is a bastard country where decomposition is the prevalent spectacle. . . . We should be able to profit by this french orchid."¹⁰

Williams believed that the "newness of a springtime," and a "reawakening of letters" were only momentarily "slaughtered," and that the Dadaist example of decomposition might be a way to salvage them. "Dada," he writes in The Great American Novel, "is more than rien, rien, rien. It is the release of SOMETHING" (I, 174). But Dada was so thoroughly convincing in its promulgation of rien, rien, rien that until the last decade it has generally been regarded as little more. In George Lemaître's ground-breaking 1947 study From Cubism to Surrealism in French Literature, for instance, Dada is labelled a movement of "absolute nihilism," an aberration that

"interrupted the regular evolution of modernistic literature."¹¹ Lemaître's reaction to Dadaist painting is altogether typical: "Their attempt was not to find a new modality of personal expression, but simply to ruin the art of painting itself by making their pictures a dumping ground for samples of refuse."¹²

But this view is too simplistic. Dada did try to ruin the art of painting, the art of poetry too, but for a reason. Just as Williams felt betrayed by Eliot's The Waste Land, seeing it as a return to the academy, the Dadaists struck out at any "art" that seemed to them traditional. Wrote Tristan Tzara, the leader of French Dada: "Before Dada all modern writers held fast to a discipline, to a rule to a unity. After Dada, active indifference, spontaneity and relativity entered into life." And when Tzara defines Dadaist poetry several lines later in this text, the positive goal of indifference and spontaneity is revealed: "Poetry is a means of communicating a certain amount of humanity, of vital elements that the poet has within himself."¹³ It is this sense that Dadaist art is working with vital elements, the sense that no matter how antagonistic it is to "art" it communicates that antagonism actively, that Williams, as early as 1920, had enough insight to extract: "it is the release of SOMETHING."

And that something is finally the imagination. In what is perhaps his most Dadaist moment, in the opening pages of Spring and All, Williams makes this clear:

I speak for the integrity of the soul and the greatness of life's inanity; the formality of its boredom; the orthodoxy of its stupidity. Kill! Kill! let there be fresh meat. . . .

The imagination, intoxicated by prohibitions, rises to drunken heights to destroy the world. Let it rage, let it kill. The imagination is supreme. . . . To it now we come to dedicate

our secret project: the annihilation of every human creature on the face of the earth. . . . Then at last will the world be made anew. [The first ellipsis is Williams'.]
(I, 90-91)

In this destruction the imagination will be released from the hands of those whom Williams calls "The Traditionalists of Plagiarism," those like Eliot who would return poetry to the academy:

The great English divine, Sam Butler, is shouting from a platform, warning us as we pass: There are two who can invent some extraordinary thing to one who can properly employ that which has been made us of before.

Enheartened by this thought THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM try to get hold of the mob. They seize those nearest them and shout into their ears: Tradition! The solidarity of life!

The fight is on. . . . (I, 97-98)

All this echoes the sentiment behind Tzara's later explanation of Dada's use of a phrase from Descartes--"I don't even want to know that there were men before me"--as a motto for their publications: "This meant that we wished to regard the world with new eyes, to reconsider the very fundamentals and test the truth of the notions handed down to us by our elders."¹⁴

Finally, this looking at the world with new eyes, the desire to invent some extraordinary thing, is possible only after the world has been de-constructed, disassembled. Here is Manuel Grossman on the importance of Dada:

Having pushed the idea of destruction as far as it would go, the Dadas thus discovered--or, perhaps, allowed us to discover--that true nihilism can never really exist in the arts. . . . What prevented the Dadas' revolt from nihilism in the fullest sense of the word was the fact that . . . they refused to give up their creative activity. They were prepared to abandon all the values embraced by their society, especially its artistic ones, but whether willingly or not, they remained artists and writers through it all, and the subversive poetry they wrote and the provocative demonstrations and other scandalous proceedings in which they engaged proved it.¹⁵

moon--Unknown grasses asleep in the level mists, pieces of the fog. Last night it was an ocean. Tonight trees. Already it is yesterday. Turned into the wrong street seeking to pass the power house from which the hum, hMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM--sprang. Electricity has been discovered for ever. I'm new, says the great dynamo. I am progress. I make a word. Listen!
 UMMMMMMMMMMMM--

UMMMMMMMMMMMM--Turned into the wrong street at three A.M. lost in the fog, listening, searching--Waaaa! said the baby. I'm new. A boy! A what? Boy. Shit, said the father of two other sons. Listen here. This is no place to talk that way. What a word to use. I'm new, said the sudden word. (I, 162)

"UMMMMMMMMMMMM" and "shit" have both been poeticized here, which for Williams is the same thing as saying energized or revitalized. These are the most basic of words--elemental to say the least--but, to borrow Sanouillet's formulation, they reveal the electrical "positive" and "negative" poles of human activity to be an inseparable electric current: they describe that movement where the negation of language and life becomes an affirmation of language and life. Williams has revitalized "The Rose" in the same way. Already destroyed, reduced to cliché by the burden tradition has asked it to carry, the poem begins by announcing this sad state of affairs, the loss. Then slowly Williams restores the rose, makes it "fresh" again. It becomes purposefully ambiguous--"metal or porcelain," "copper" or "steel" or "majolica," or simultaneously all of these. And even more purposefully Williams denies the rose any context, let alone any tradition:

The edge
 cuts without cutting
 meets--nothing
 . . .
 fragile
 plucked, moist, half-raised
 cold, precise, touching

What

The place between the petal's
 edge and the

End of stanza: the rose, both the image and the word, touches only the blank and unfilled space of the poem. In this way, "without contact," it "penetrates space," renewed and "unbruised" by misuse. What tradition has taken away from us, Williams restores; and what Williams takes away--the tradition--is no longer of any use, except that its "negative" charge has generated the poem.

In "Romance Moderne" (CEP, 181-184), Williams confronts the word "love," but does not succeed in rescuing it. The poem is a kind of interior monologue, interrupted by snatches of conversation between the poet and a woman who sits beside him in the back seat of a car. They are being driven by another couple through a landscape:

Tracks of rain and light linger in
the spongy greens of a nature whose
flickering mountain--bulging nearer,
ebbing back into the sun
hollowing itself away to hold a lake,--
or brown stream rising and falling
at the roadside . . .

This sentence, which begins the poem, is never completed. The world it describes is supplanted by "the other world," the world of the car, "the windshield a blunt barrier" between the two. And out of this second world, the "moderne" we presume, comes this string of "dodging remarks": "Talk to me. Sh! they would hear us"; "I am never afraid when he is driving"; "God how I love you!"; "Love you? It's / a fire in the blood, willy-nilly!"; "Will you love me always?";

I married you because I liked your nose
I wanted you! I wanted you
in spite of all they'd say--

To combat this numbing dialogue the poet imagines becoming one with "the dirt of these parts" by engaging in an act of total destruction and forcing

the car off the road:

Lean forward. Punch the steersman
behind the ear. Twirl the wheel!
Over the edge! Screams! Crash!

Death! Black. The end. The very end--

This imaginative embrace of "the very end," what Williams calls in the poem "all stuff of the blind emotions," a sentiment very close to "the end" which concludes the "Portrait of the Author," nevertheless metamorphoses the poet and allows him to see "for the first time" the natural spectacle through which the automobile passes. And the fire he feels in his blood before the natural spectacle he realizes to be a kind of definition for love, much closer to the root of the matter than the vapidness of language which surrounds him. For unlike the word "love," the natural spectacle is unencumbered by usage and misuse:

Rain and light, mountain and rain
rain and river,

And the white clean moon already up.
White. Clean. All the colors.
A good head, backed by the eye--awake!
backed by the emotion--blind--
River and mountain, light and rain--or
rain, rock, light, trees--divided;
rain-light, counter rocks-trees or
trees counter rain-light-rocks or--

Myriads of counter processions
crossing and recrossing. . . .

Williams is talking about love here, that is, what he believes the nature of love to be. Things in nature stand separate, "divided" like two people, and yet they blur into one another like two people in love. These things in nature are also like the things in a Cubist painting, and the words which describe them are themselves things which Williams treats in a manner very

similar to Cubist passage: "rain" and "light" become "rain-light"; "rain-light," juxtaposed to and thus divided from "rocks," becomes in the context of "trees," "rain-light-rocks." And like the objects in a Cubist painting, the words remain static (pointing to themselves) and simultaneously achieve motion as they combine with one another. There is the same sense of fragmentation and multiplicity (the ambiguity achieved by the simultaneity of "rain, rock, light" and "rain-light-rocks"), and the same paradoxical sense of unity (over everything sits the moon: "White. Clean"). But finally and importantly, the "myriads of counter processions," fragmentation and multiplicity, dominate. The passage or conversation Williams describes between things in nature is juxtaposed to the empty and mindless talk that takes place in the car. The poet's closing wish

--I wish that you were lying there dead
and I sitting here beside you--

reveals the distance between the imaginative synthesis and its actual realization. The lovers remain divided. The unity Williams finds in "the grey moon--over and over," that simplicity, is only realizable in death, the complete return to "the clay of these parts." In death, at least, the conversation between rain, light, rocks, and trees will become possible for man as well, as man inevitably is subsumed into and becomes one with nature itself.

Given that in death man is unified with his world, it is not surprising that Williams turns, more often than to any other image in these early poems, to the decomposed and barren winter landscape, the landscape of death, as a source for his poetry. Winter is a thing not only untouched by the imaginative life, but untouched by life altogether. It is

in fact his art's greatest test, for the poetry Williams would make of this lifeless landscape, the recreation of the world he seeks, must be compared to nature's own recreative surge, the blossoming of Spring. His task is to raise the poem from the "cold world" he describes in his own "Portrait of the Author." The title poem of Spring and All--"By the road to the contagious hospital"--describes the process more fully (CEP, 241-242):

All along the road the reddish
 purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
 stuff of bushes and small trees
 with dead, brown leaves under them
 leafless vines--

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
 dazed spring approaches--
 They enter the new world naked,
 cold, uncertain of all
 save that they enter. All about them
 the cold, familiar wind--

The poem is not only about the emergence of Spring from the barrenness of Winter, but also about the emergence of language from the barrenness of empty talk. This is an art freed from the tyranny of The Traditionalists of Plagiarism, "the imagination, freed from the handcuffs of 'art'" (I, 97). A careful and subtle semantic transformation occurs at the very heart of this poem: a shift from "dead, brown leaves" to "leafless vines" to "lifeless in appearance." Although the place this series ends, "lifeless," seems synonymous with where it begins, "dead," the force of "lifeless" carries far less weight of finality, as Williams carefully points out by the words which modify it, "in appearance, sluggish / dazed." In this leafless/lifeless world we are prepared for a rebirth, a reawakening. Thus "they enter"--both the words themselves and the things they represent--"uncertain" because they are surrounded by "the cold, familiar wind"--both the wind of winter

and the numbing "wind" of traditional usage. What is certain is "the profound change" which "has come upon them." In the reawakening

One by one objects are defined--
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf.

This is the same clarity Williams recognizes in the pale moon of "Romance Moderne." And it is the same clarity which Williams could not communicate in the "birches opening . . . one by one" in his "Portrait of the Author." Instead of trying to define the world, Williams is allowing the world to define itself, and as a result the world seems more accessible. In this "waste of broad, muddy fields," what was heretofore "lifeless" and "leafless" defines itself, "quickens" and comes into being in the "outline of leaf," that is, in the realization of its form. "Strange recompense," Williams writes in the prose text which follows this poem, "in the depths of our despair at the unfathomable mist into which all mankind is plunging, a curious force awakens. It is HOPE long asleep, aroused once more" (I, 97). It is, more precisely, the hope that language might clarify itself in form, that it is only "lifeless" and not "dead."

But this imperative for new form, modelled after the new form of Spring, is far easier to recognize than to accomplish in the poem, as four related poems from Sour Grapes (1921) attest. In "The Dark Day" (CEP, 201), a "three-day-long" winter rain seems like an "interminable talking, talking / of no consequence--patter, patter, patter." It is a dark day because there seems to be "no escape!" from this meaningless talk of a meaningless world. The poem is not a conversation because there is no communication. There is no alternative finally but "Complete Destruction," another brief poem in the volume which describes a consciously apocalyptic moment when the

cat is buried, her box set afire, and "those fleas that escaped / earth and fire / died by the cold" (CEP, 207). The only movement here is descent and despair: "Backward, backward, backward" is the final, heavy line of "The Dark Day." But in "January" Williams resists a complete giving over of the self to these destructive impulses. He refuses to be drawn to the "derisive music" of the same winter winds which carry the "interminable" rain of "The Dark Day":

Again I reply to the triple winds
 running chromatic fifths of derision
 outside my window:

Play louder.

You will not succeed. I am
 bound more to my sentences
 the more you batter at me
 to follow you.

And the wind
 as before, fingers perfectly
 its derisive music. (CEP, 197)

Williams realizes here that even if the atonal wind "fingers perfectly" the music of the season, that even if its music is in complete accord with the barren world of January, he would make something more of things. The derisive music, especially in its perfection, mocks his effort, but Williams adamantly stands his ground. What he is refusing is the complete dislocation of sense we have witnessed in Stein, or even more to the point, the harsh discord created by the chromatic fifth, one of modern music's primary technical devices. He wants to avoid the total abstraction of Schönberg or Varèse, the last of whom, incidentally, he knew. The complete disorder of the world, finally, does not imply that art must imitate this disorder. If anything, it implies the reverse, that art must order the chaos which surrounds it. And so in "The Disputants," a "colloquy" of "loud talk / grown frail as vaudeville," which reminds us both of the wind's loud music and its

"interminable patter," stands juxtaposed to an arrangement of flowers in a bowl:

in violent disarray
of yellow sprays, green spikes
of leaves, red pointed petals
and curled heads of blue
and white among the litter
of forks and crumbs and plates
the flowers remain composed. (CEP, 218)

The composition of the flowers is one of "violent disarray," yet it is a composition, an ordering, which stands above and mocks both the remains of a meal and the inconsequential talk that the meal has precipitated. It is what Williams would seek to achieve in the poem, a simultaneity of disorder and order, a violent disarray that is likewise a composition, a conversation among different things.

This quest for a new form occupied Williams until late in his career, but at the heart of it is a redefinition of metaphor. The direction Williams is moving is clearest in four flower poems that come from Sour Grapes as well: "Daisy," "Primrose," "Queen Anne's Lace," and "Great Mullen." When Williams was asked to contribute to Whit Burnett's anthology This Is My Best, these are the four poems he chose (IWWP, 35). He probably did so because he felt that they matched in some way the composition of the bowl of flowers described in "The Disputants." More significantly, but not unrelated to their composition of disarray, they also--for the first time in any consistent way in Williams' work--sustain their metaphors. And they are not metaphors easy to sustain. The daisy is the "dayseye," a man, a woman, a "limpid seashell" (CEP, 208). The primrose is "a disinclination to be . . . a rose":

It is summer!
 It is the wind on a willow,
 the lap of waves, the shadow
 under a bush, a bird, a bluebird,
 three herons, a dead hawk
 rotting on a pole--

It is a piece of blue paper
 in the grass or a threecluster of
 green walnuts swaying, children
 playing croquet or one boy
 fishing, a man
 swinging his pink fists
 as he walks (CEP 209)

It is, in short, everything in summer that it is not. "Each flower" in a field of Queen Anne's Lace is "a hand's span" of a woman's "whiteness," and each of the woman's parts is a single "blossom under his touch / to which the fibers of her being / stem one by one." Her body is composed of each "single stem" which joins in "a cluster, flower by flower," finally to compose "the whole field" (CEP, 210). Great Mullen is a lighthouse, "a mast with a lantern," cowdung, "birdlime on a fencerail," the man who has cuckolded the poet, and the poet himself (CEP, 211). What Williams has done here is turn the function of metaphor around on itself: where metaphor is generally considered to be a means of evoking and defining the image--pinning down the flower in this case--the image now becomes the nexus, the generator, of a whole range of metaphors. The poem no longer frames the image, instead the image frames the poem. And the word "like" is consequently suppressed, replaced by the copula as in Stein's portrait of Picasso, for the word "like" is in reality a verb--the verb to be, a catalyst for the activity of nominal things acting on and reacting to one another. "Crude symbolism," Williams would write in Spring and All, "is typified by use of the word 'like' or that 'evocation' of the 'image' which served us for a

time" (I, 100-101). Instead of "like," we have the verb "to be," and instead of the "evocation of the Image" we have the "image" evoking what it will. And it will evoke, to borrow a phrase from "Romance Moderne," "myriads of counter processions / crossing and recrossing," this disarray of things focused in and by the composition, the image that stands above, frames and unifies all.

Williams' redefinition of metaphor is typified by the primrose's disinclination to be a rose, which is, in turn, the inclination to be first this, then that, then another thing. The primrose becomes a kind of paradigm for everything the summer holds, and all these things become a part of it. Each thing stands in metaphoric relation to the primrose.

To paraphrase:

the primrose is a ladysthumb
 the primrose is forget-me-nots in the ditch
 the primrose is moss under the flange of the carrail
 the primrose is the wavy lines in split rock
 the primrose is a great oaktree.

While Williams makes clear the metaphoric relation of each thing to the primrose, each metaphor is also displaced by the one which follows it.

The poem actually reads:

It is ladysthumb, forget-me-nots
 in the ditch, moss under
 the flange of the carrail, the
 wavy line in split rock, a
 great oaktree--

Considered as a series, the only way that all these things can stand equally in relation to the primrose is as metonyms for the primrose. As metonyms for the central image, they do not displace each other, but rather name the central image's parts. The primrose generates images which displace one another as metaphors, but which disseminate from and enlarge the idea of

the primrose as metonyms. What Williams accomplishes in this poem is the creation of a means whereby metaphor and metonymy are simultaneous, a technique that acknowledges fragmentation and composition, multiplicity and unity, difference and analogy.

Furthermore, "The Primrose" defines poetry as the function of a dialectic between the imagination and reality. The poem overcomes the despair of "Portrait of the Author" and "Romance Moderne" by refusing to limit, in defining the world, the possibilities of imaginative response to the world. It accepts natural process and proliferation as parallel to the imagination's own process and proliferation. In this sense the primrose can be seen as a metaphor for the imagination itself--a single place in which the multiplicitous world is unified. The image of the primrose (as metaphor for the imagination) goes beyond "the incoherence of the day" and suggests the possibility of keeping "ordered the disorder of the pageless actual." The difficulty presented by this poem, however, is that if art "is a question of fitting this rather shapeless world into . . . formal necessities," as Juan Gris had said, the form of the image Williams presents us with suggests proliferation more than it does formal order. The poem lacks that "clarity" and "outline" of form which Williams insists on in the opening poem of Spring and All.

In Kora in Hell: Improvisations, which was written at approximately the same time as "The Primrose," Williams recognizes that the imagination serves the poet in two ways. The Improvisations themselves concentrate on the ability of the imagination to go "from one thing to another" (I, 14), its ability to accommodate itself to the multitude of things which surround it. But even as he wrote the Improvisations he knew that he must also

design this random leaping about: "design is a function of the IMAGINATION," he would write in Spring and All (I, 98), and we measure a poem's worth, he writes in the Prologue to Kora in Hell, "by no quality it borrows from a logical recital of events nor from the events themselves but solely from that attenuated power which draws perhaps many broken things into a dance giving them thus a full being" (I, 16-17). This idea of a design which stands above material reality and forms it, a design which represents the imagination, is the same idea of formal design which abstract artists such as Malevich regarded, to borrow Werner Haftmann's phrase, as "the modern experience of form . . . the experience of a concrete reality, which belongs to the human mind alone, and in which the mind represents itself." And like the abstract artists, Williams regards this purely formal representation of the mind as approaching the "conditions of music." Williams would articulate this effort to realize abstract form in the poem most satisfactorily in his 1944 "Writer's Prologue to a Play in Verse"

(CLP, 12):

In your minds you jump from doors
to sad departings, pigeons, dreams
of terror, to cathedrals.

.
You see it
in your mind and the mind at once
jostles it, turns it about, examines
and arranges it to suit its fancy.
Or rather changes it after a pattern
which is the mind itself, turning
and twisting the theme until it gets
a meaning or finds no meaning and
is dropped. By such composition,
without code, the scenes we see move
and, as it may happen, make
a music, a poetry
which the poor poet copies if
and only if he is able. [my emphasis]

This is the articulation of an effort to capture "a music, a poetry," "a pattern which is the mind itself" given concrete form, that is clearly begun at the time of Kora in Hell and "The Primrose."

This pattern is present in "The Primrose," and it is a mistake to suggest that the poem lacks any "formal necessity" whatsoever. The complexity of Williams' metaphor is sustained primarily by a formal pattern of repetition established in the repetition of the simple phrase "It is" again and again throughout the poem, and all of Williams' longer poems from 1918 on depend upon similar patterns of repetition to unify the diverse elements of which they are composed. Implicitly unifying the natural world in "Romance Moderne" is "the grey moon--over and over." This moon is the "clean and hardedged form which represents a world where all things are unified, the world of "the other," and the "other music." The very complex "Della Primavera Trasportata Al Morale" (CEP, 57-64) uses several repetitive devices. Near its end, for instance, there is a series of various signs, signs in which Williams affirms his "belief":

I believe

Moving to three doors
above--May 1st.

I believe

ICE--and warehouse site

No parking between tree and corner

. . . .

I believe

Spumoni	\$1.00
French Vanilla	.70
Chocolate	.70
Strawberry	.70
Maple Walnut	.70
Coffee	.70

Tutti Frutti	.70
Pistachio	.70
Cherry Special	.70
Orange Ice	.70
Biscuit Tortoni	
25 per portion	

POISON!



I believe

WOMAN'S WARD



PRIVATE



The poem ends with the recognition that it is "the shapes of things" which move him, their design, and not primarily the message these shapes impart. The recurrent "I believe" connects Williams' catalogue of actual signs as the "It is" does the heterogeneous inventory of "The Primrose." In addition, this poem possesses the formal necessity which "The Primrose" lacks: its signs are abstract shapes, implicitly rectangular. Williams also extends his inventory here to include the natural world, the "geometric-faceted" abstract design of things, "the ovoid sun, the pointed trees." When he writes "Winter : Spring," for instance, he establishes these two words and the natural world they refer to as signs by repeating the typographical pattern of other more obvious signs which occur in the poem--"STOP : GO." Abstract pattern is united with the natural world by the poet's imagination.

Patterns of repetition--syntactic and typographical--give Williams the means to assert the relationships he recognizes among the diverse things of

his world and to draw these things into a unified design. In A Novelette, written during the great flu epidemic of the mid-'twenties though not published until 1932, he would call this revelation of the formal relationships among things "conversation as design" (I, 286), the relationships themselves being the "conversation" among things which formal repetitions reveal as "design." "Conversation as design" is the revelation of "the singleness I see in everything" (I, 283), what he calls "the simplicity of disorder" (I, 275). It is the revelation of an abstract design which unifies the disorder and multiplicity of the world. In a long conversation with his wife, Williams explicitly ties this idea to the painting and drawing of Juan Gris:

Always the one thing in Juan Gris. Conversation as design. . . . That would be writing.

What's that?

In which conversation was actual to the extent that it would be pure design. . . . It is the one thing I admire in his drawings--since there is nothing else. . . . Conversation of which there is none in novels and the news.

Oh yes, there is.

Oh, no, there is not. It is something else. To be conversation, it must have no other purpose than the roundness and the color and the repetition of grapes in a bunch, such grapes as those of Juan Gris which are related more to a ship at sea than to the human tongue. As they are.

The singleness of Juan Gris. . . . pure design--like the paintings of Juan Gris. (I, 286-288)¹⁷

The grapes Williams discusses here are probably the same grapes which occur in Gris' 1921 synthetic work The Open Window which Williams describes more fully in Spring and All:

Here is a shutter, a bunch of grapes, a sheet of music, a picture of sea and mountains (particularly fine) which the onlooker is not for a moment permitted to witness as an "illusion." One thing laps over on the other, the cloud laps over on the shutter, the bunch of grapes is part of the guitar, the mountain and sea are obviously not "the mountain

and sea," but a picture of the mountain and the sea. All drawn with admirable simplicity and excellent design--all a unity-- (I, 110-111)¹⁸

What is interesting about this painting is that by not permitting us to look at the things in this painting as "illusion," Gris draws our attention to the imagination which has designed them. In the careful design of the canvas, most especially in the subtle repetition of forms, colors and patterns, the mind at work is revealed.

Gris' pattern of repetition in The Open Window would be adapted by Williams to his own poetic efforts. Williams wanted to reveal the same unity and design in the "conversation" among things, their rapport as Gris called it. Gris organized the things in the canvas by means of an overlying abstract design, and this design was a response to the fragmentation and multiplicity which had marked the Analytic Cubism of Picasso and Braque. As early as 1915, Gris had written his friend D.-H. Kahnweiler that "my pictures begin to have a unity which they have lacked till now. They are no longer inventories of objects which used to depress me so much."¹⁹ In 1919 he would write to Kahnweiler again that in realizing an overall design in his paintings his work had become more "poetic," and by "poetic" he means that his abstract use of design has begun to reveal a "pure imaginary reality," the reality of the mind.²⁰ In 1921, the same year that he painted The Open Window, he would conclude in the now famous statement for L'Esprit Nouveau which gave Synthetic Cubism its name, that "this painting is to the other [i.e., Analytic Cubism] what poetry is to prose."²¹

For Gris, this shift of Cubism from an analytic to a synthetic art was intimately tied to a redefinition of analysis itself. Gris' analysis of the world became consciously selective. Instead of the painter's choice of

subject matter being an arbitrary procedure--a miscellaneous inventory--his choice of subject matter from the world was consciously tied to the ultimate goal of revealing overall design and unity in that world. Near the end of the 1924 "Possibilities of Painting" he would write:

The role of aesthetic analysis is to break down the material world, in order to select from it elements of the same category.

Technique should serve to elaborate all these formal elements into a coherent unity. Its role is synthetic.
[my emphasis]²²

Thus when Gris breaks down the things of his world into their parts--the fragmentation and metonymy of Cubist painting--he is doing so in order to reveal the formal similarities these diverse things share. In his 1913 Violin et Damier, Gris literally rhymes different elements in the painting. Christopher Grey has described the painting's rhyme scheme: it consists "of the almost literal repetition of the same linear theme element in a number of different contexts--elements derived from the outline of the violin are repeated in the drapery on both the right and the left of the table, while another rhyme, derived from the neck of the violin is repeated in the pattern on the wall paper in the background and in the outline of the dark shadow just below the center on the left margin."²³ Grey also notes that Gris extends the notion of rhyming by establishing metaphoric relationships among the objects, although "the difference between rhymes and metaphors is not always clear." The difference lies in the fact that "a metaphor points out a comparison, rather than a simple rhythmical repetition, as can be seen for example in Gris' Guitare, Verre et Bouteille (1914), where there is an obvious comparison of the round aperture of the guitar to the lip of the glass."²⁴ Perhaps the distinction between rhyme and metaphor in

Gris' painting can be seen most clearly if we turn to The Open Window. There is a distinct rhyme between the aperture of the guitar and the black oval which sits in the bottle's shadow. Another rhyme occurs between the three smaller ovals at the top of the bottle, in its shadow, and to the left in the dark form which appears to be a pipe. The large and small ovals, together with the circular forms of the grapes, stand in metaphoric relation: they suggest one another without duplicating one another. A metaphor exists also between the shape of the guitar and the cloud formation. A metaphoric mirror image can be seen in the wave of the line which connects the bottom of the guitar, the bottle and the music, and in its inverse in the wave of the hills out the window. The staff lines of the music rhyme with the strings of the guitar, and both find metaphors in the lines that cross and pattern the sea and in the shape of the shutter slats.

The "rhyme" of Gris' painting, like the shapes of the signs in Williams' "Della Primavera," is the technical device which establishes patterns of repetition within the painting. And Gris' "metaphor," like Williams' use of metaphor in "The Primrose," defines the relations that exist between the diverse objects of the world. Suzanne Juhasz has pointed out in her study of Metaphor and the Poetry of Williams, Pound, and Stevens that Williams' "use of metaphor is fundamental to the structure of [his] poetry" because it both suggests "the essentially divorced condition of modern life" and brings the things in this divorced and multiplicitous world "together as closely as possible for the purpose of revelation" of formal "unity."²⁵ Gris' painterly metaphor suggests the same revelation of a formal unity which transcends the divorced condition of the world.

Furthermore, it is clear that Gris' work is the product of the same dialectic between mind and matter that we find in Williams. Gris defines the modern experience of form as the expression of a concrete reality, which belongs to the human mind alone, in which the mind represents itself, and which is finally the "coherent unity" or abstract design of the canvas. The objective world remains for Gris a vast disarray of things which he must analyze in order to detect the "elements of the same category" which will allow him to realize this purely formal unity.

Shortly after Williams read Gris' "Possibilities of Painting" in the transatlantic review, he acknowledged the debt he owed Cubist painting in general in the poem "This Florida: 1924" (CEP, 329-331). Since Gris was at this time Williams' favorite painter, we can safely assume that when he acknowledges his debt to Cubism, he is acknowledging Gris in particular. The poem is about Williams' effort to escape the barrenness of winter which had occupied him so thoroughly in the Sour Grapes years. He has joined the "frantic pilgrimage" to the South, "Florida the Flowery," in order to "escape"

this winter
this winter that I feel.

His expectation, and ours, is that he will discover an abstract design for the poem in this flowering environment. But if he has escaped winter, he has not escaped the winter that he feels which is a winter of the soul sustained by his inability to discover any adequate pattern. He tries three separate designs, and they all fail. First he considers the possibility of a traditional pattern:

turbid, orange of the bottom
 rocks in Maine rivers
 orange of mushrooms

of Cepes the Marshal loved
 to cook in copper
 pans, orange of the sun--

Here we have an "unarrangement" of many things unified by the overriding image of the hibiscus blossom. It is also unified by the repetition of the three-line stanza and the repetition of the word "orange" in a manner that is meant to call to mind the repetition of forms and colors in Cubist work. But again this is another ordering "rime" which Williams finds to be inadequate.

Thus at poem's end, Williams turns away from this effort to unify the many in the one by simply turning to a consideration of one thing, his urine samples:

I shall do my pees, instead--
 boiling them in test tubes
 holding them to the light

dropping in the acid--
 Peggy has a little albumen
 in hers--

Several important things are accomplished by these last two stanzas. The synthesizing powers of the imagination seem to be replaced by scientific and analytic reasoning. At the same time we have turned from a consideration of exotic, beautiful and inherently artistic material to a consideration of mundane, base and inartistic material. Once again, we return to the world as it is, not as we would have it. Related to this, Williams' diction has changed from an elevated and complex syntax and vocabulary to the simple and direct address of colloquial speech and usage. What is interesting is Williams' apparent preference, in this poem, for this last approach, despite

what we know to be his lifelong interest in the imaginative possibilities he discovered in the formal experimentation of painting such as *Gris*'.

This return to an analysis of the object recurs throughout Williams' poetry, and one way to account for it is to recognize that it is a necessary part of the dialectic which generates his poetry. As part of the dialectic, we can read these last two stanzas as a kind of "beginning again," a movement back to an analysis of the inartistic ground from which Williams' poetry springs, the landscape of winter where art has not as yet been born, a world of urine as opposed to hibiscus. In this sense, the stanzas promise "a new poem." There is more to it, however, and more to it because these stanzas have a sense of finality and accomplishment about them that contradicts any idea that the poem must, or even should, go on. And Williams' punctuation--the dash which concludes the poem--indicates his awareness of this contradiction: the dash projects us forward, and yet it is the poem's end. Furthermore, there is an implicit connection between the urine samples and the abstract pattern achieved in his examination and presentation of the orange "shades and textures" of Florida, a catalogue which ends "orange of the sun." This pattern of color permeates his return to the object, his "pees" held up to "the light." What Williams is positing here is that the idea of abstraction is inherent in even the most direct treatment of the thing.

In his last paintings--the 1926 Dish of Pears is an example--Gris too turned to a more direct treatment of the thing, preferring to reveal the abstract design of a single object to an abstract design which would unify many different objects. What both Williams and Gris had come to understand by the mid-'twenties is that the dialectic between mind and matter which

generated their work could be manifested best as a dialectic between total abstraction (the province of the mind) and total realism (the province of the material world). For both the dialectic had to be worked out in terms of the single object before it could be applied to the general confusion of many objects. Furthermore, and in contrast to larger trends in modern art which tended to treat total abstraction and total realism as irreconcilable styles, they both insisted that there was an intimate correspondence between the two. Simply stated, by 1925 both had realized that if the artist analyzed the objective world he would discover there an abstract pattern; conversely, if an artist were to make an abstract design, he was ultimately making an object. Total abstraction and total realism seemed to collapse into one another.

This interdependence of abstraction and realism, which both Gris and Williams viewed as a necessary kind of simultaneity, is implicit even in Haftmann's example of the two irreconcilable "frontiers of art" represented by Malevich's black square and Duchamp's urinal. Malevich's black square, which Haftmann calls the demonstration of "absolute form," is the experience of a "concrete reality" in which "the mind represents itself." Duchamp's urinal, a demonstration of "the absolute thing," possesses a "very unrealistic dignity" which brings its objective presence back to the realm of the imagination, as Duchamp's title for the urinal, "Fountain," demonstrates. Even the most "total" or "pure" expressions of both abstraction and realism manifest the presence of one another; the evocation of one seems inevitably to be the provocation of the other.

In "The Question of Form," which is the original source for Haftmann's distinction between total abstraction and total realism, Kandinsky in fact

demonstrates why this interdependence is inevitable:

Great realism is an effort to banish external artistic elements from painting and to embody the content of the work in a simple ("inartistic") representation of the simple solid object. . . . With the "artistic" reduced to a minimum, the soul of the object can be heard at its strongest through its shell because tasteful beauty can no longer be a distraction.

This is possible only because we can increasingly hear the whole world, not in a beautiful interpretation, but as it is.

The "artistic" reduced to a minimum must be considered as the most intensely effective abstraction. . . . The quantitative reduction of the abstract [the artistic pattern] therefore equals the qualitative intensification of the abstract.

The great antithesis to this realism is the great abstraction, which apparently intends to annihilate the objective (reality) and to embody the content of the work in "incorporeal" forms. Thus interpreted and fixed in the painting, the abstract life of representational forms is reduced to a minimum and best reveals the inner sound of the painting. Likewise, as in realism the inner sound is intensified by blotting out the abstract, so in abstraction this sound is intensified by blotting out reality. . . .

The "representational" reduced to a minimum must in abstraction be regarded as the most intensely effective reality.

In conclusion: in total realism the real appears strikingly great and the abstract strikingly small; in total abstraction this relation seems to be reversed, so that in the end these two poles are equalized. . . .

Realism = Abstraction

Abstraction = Realism

The greatest external difference becomes the greatest internal equality.²⁶

The premise behind Kandinsky's equalization of total abstraction and total realism is that there is some internal soul or sound that "we can increasingly hear in the whole world," and that unifies both the reality of nature and the reality of the mind. The patterns of repetition which unify both Williams' poetry and Gris' painting are technical devices which support this aesthetic: these patterns reveal an "internal equality" which transcends "external difference." Furthermore, if these patterns are the product of the human mind and represent the human mind alone, the simple fact that these patterns are found in the world--or, rather, the fact that the reality

of these patterns can be verified in the world--attests to an "internal equality" between mind and matter as well.

It was not Gris alone, however, who provided Williams with the means to reveal this "internal equality" in his poetry. There were two other important sources: Alfred Stieglitz and the painters of his circle, and Gertrude Stein. If Williams was not directly acquainted with Kandinsky's formulation of the equivalence of abstraction and realism, his friend Stieglitz was, and agreed with it. Stieglitz wrote to Heinrich Kühn, a few months after the 1912 publication of the Blaue Reiter Almanac, in terms which echo Kandinsky: "I find that contemporary art consists of the abstract (without subject) like Picasso, etc., and the photographic." Furthermore, he wrote, both styles are manifestations of the necessity to work with "the true medium (Abstraction)."²⁷ Since Stieglitz was a photographer, he was naturally interested in the abstract possibilities of "total realism," and most of the young American painters whom he championed--most of whom were also Williams' friends--were noted primarily for their faithful and precise, at times almost photographic, representation of objective reality. But all of them believed that their concern with objective representation was equally a concern with the idea of abstraction.

When Williams writes specifically about the painters of the Stieglitz circle, as he does in the Introduction to the catalogue of Charles Sheeler's retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Paintings--Drawings--Photographs 1939, he emphasizes that it is "in the shape of the thing . . . the abstract if you will but left by the artist integral with its native detail" that the artist's power lies (SE, 233). Significantly, the "abstract" must make contact with detail because design is only revealed "in

things, not beyond them." In this way Sheeler performs "the miracle of resuscitation" and revives the "always dead" present scene. In his celebration of the "cool and thorough organizations today about us, familiar in industry," in his formal abstraction of the industrial landscape, Sheeler restores to us the power "to see," and thus, Williams claims, restores "our courage and our love" (SE, 233-234). As Williams would write in a 1944 poem, when the mind allows itself to consider "The World Narrowed to a Point" (CLP, 20), "the eye awakes" to a particular detail, and we "focus the wit / on a world of form."

In "This Florida" Williams had posited that the idea of abstraction was inherent in the most direct treatment of the thing, but the abstraction of the orange "shades and textures" of Florida and the realism of his "pees" held up to the light seem to be irreconcilable. However, in "The Crimson Cyclamen" (CEP, 297-404), his memorial poem to Charles Demuth written shortly after Demuth's death in 1935, Williams emphasizes the abstract qualities of a realistic Demuth flower painting:

Upon each leaf it is
 a pattern more
 of logic than a purpose
 links each part to the rest,
 an abstraction
 playfully following
 centripetal
 devices, as of pure thought--

Such are the leaves
 freakish, of the air
 as thought is.

The poem is full of purposeful ambiguities and puns. The petals are "all a color" (rose, crimson, blue, yellow), but equally all a color ("yet the effect . . . is crimson"). The petals "flare . . . eccentrically" and

"formless," and yet they are designed into one "centripetal." Finally, the force of the "petal tips / merging into one flower" is "color only and a form." But also

It is passion
earlier and later than thought
that rises above thought
at instant peril--peril
itself a flower
that lifts and draws it on [my emphasis]

The peril and the passion, like the "courage and love" which Williams says Sheeler's work restores for us, are the product of the realization of the thing seen. They are the product of the act which literally "draws it on" the canvas, the activity in which

color has been construed
from emptiness
to waken there

and through which "the form came gradually" to be realized in the thing, and on the canvas.

The basis for the integration of abstraction and realism in the paintings of the Stieglitz circle was, in fact, Stieglitz's photography itself. Members of the Stieglitz circle generally agreed that photography was the plastic medium best suited for the "verification of a fact," that is, the discovery of the "reality of form" inherent in the object. In the January 1913 Camera Work, Marius De Zayas, the Mexican cartoonist and critic, wrote:

In order fully and correctly to appreciate the reality of Form, it is necessary to get into a state of perfect consciousness. The reality of Form can only be transcribed through a mechanical process, in which the craftsmanship of man does not enter as a principle factor. There is no other process to accomplish this other than photography. The photographer--the true photographer--is he who has become able, through a state of

perfect consciousness, to possess such a clear view of things as to enable him to understand and feel the beauty of the reality of Form.²⁸

Stieglitz had discovered this in 1907 when, on a transatlantic voyage, he by chance looked down from above on the second class passenger deck of the ocean liner. The photograph he took is among his most famous, The Steerage:

The scene fascinated me: A round straw hat; the funnel leaning left, the stairway leaning right; the white drawbridge, its railings made of chain; white suspenders crossed on the back of a man below; circular iron machinery; a mast that cut into the sky, completing a triangle. I stood spellbound for a while. I saw shapes related to one another--a picture of shapes, and underlying it, a new vision that held me: simple people; the feeling of ship, ocean, sky. . . . The photograph would go far beyond any of my previous prints. It would be a picture based on related shapes and deepest human feeling.²⁹

Stieglitz's realization of formal organization in the chaos of the second class deck ties factual representation to abstract design.

In the final number of Camera Work (1917), Paul Strand, a young photographer whom Stieglitz had recently taken into the circle, published a series of photographs, a number of which, Strand himself explained, presented "objects . . . used as abstract forms, to create an emotion unrelated to the objectivity as such." These photographs, Wall Street and Abstraction-Porch Shadows among them, carried on what Stieglitz had begun in The Steerage. "It is in the organization of this objectivity," Strand continued, "that the photographer's point of view toward life enters in, and where formal conception born of the emotions, the intellect, or of both, is as inevitably necessary for him, before an exposure is made, as for the painter, before he puts his brush to canvas."³⁰ Here again, in photography, formal design is seen as the representation of the mind, and objective detail as the representation of the material world, and the photograph

integrates the two. Photography, of all the mediums the most suited to direct treatment of the thing, reveals that the abstraction which represents the mind alone can be verified in the world. Furthermore, material reality in its most inartistic manifestations--in the industrial scene which so intrigued Sheeler, in the mundane objectivity of a porch railing, in the materialism and barrenness of Wall Street, or the chaotic deck of The Steerage--is, if the mind makes contact with it, potentially artistic.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Stieglitz's own investigation of the abstract design inherent in natural form, his investigation of cloud formations in two major series of photographs executed from the early 'twenties into the 'thirties, Songs of the Sky and Equivalents. "The use of clouds," Stieglitz would say, "has made people less aware of clouds as clouds. . . . People seem freer to think about the relationships in the pictures than about the subject matter for its own sake."³¹ Earlier, he had described Strand's abstract photographs as the "brutally direct . . . expression of today,"³² and he extended this sentiment--the expression of the facts as they are, not as we would have them--to the Equivalents: "My photographs are a picture of the chaos in the world, and of my relationship to that chaos. My prints show the world's constant upsetting of man's equilibrium, and his eternal battle to reestablish it." The equilibrium is reestablished through Stieglitz's recognition that the abstract forms he has discovered in the clouds are "equivalent" to the workings of his own mind, in much the same way that a completely abstract painting is the "objectivity of a subjectivity": "I want solely to make an image of what I have seen, not of what it means to me. It is only after I have created an equivalent of what has moved me that I can begin to think about its

significance. Shapes, as such, do not interest me unless they happen to be an outer equivalent of something already taking form within me."³³

It was, it is important to recall, Stieglitz who first introduced Gertrude Stein's work to the American public. For him, the importance of her work rested in the fact that she treated words as things, things which could reveal abstract patterns and by extension the mind. This, too, is what Williams always praised her for: "Gertrude Stein found the key [to modern writing] with her conception of the objective use of words" (A, 241). It is not easy to see the relation between Stein's writing and the art of photography, but they are integrally related as Paul K. Alkon has shown in a brilliant article on "Visual Rhetoric in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas," in which he analyzes the connection between Stein's text and the placement of its illustrations, all of them, inevitably, photographs. He notes that after an allusion to Picasso's Portrait of Stein on page 7 of the original edition, there is, facing page 8, not the reproduction of the portrait we might expect, but a photograph of Stein. The inevitable comparison we make between the Stein of the Portrait and the Stein of the photograph "symbolizes the relationship between art and reality. The painting, any painting, is of course art, while the photograph, any photograph, seems to show things as they are." Alkon sees this as a "misleading" distinction. It is, furthermore, "encouraged by captions that attribute paintings to their artists but withhold photographers' names. A significant exception is the frontispiece, which is elevated to its proper status as a work of art by its caption: 'Alice B. Toklas at the door, photograph by Man Ray.' This attribution suggests the possibility of viewing subsequent photographs as if they, too, are works of art. The

reader has a choice. If that possibility is explored, the original naive distinction between art and photographic reality collapses." As we proceed through the Autobiography, the illustrations display

a gradual but not complete displacement of photographs of reality by photographs of paintings and, at the end, the photograph of a manuscript page [page 1 of the Autobiography itself]. Photographs of reality give way to photographs of works of art. But as this happens the distinction between art and reality collapses, because whatever can be photographed must be real. The illustrations provide visual proof that works of art are not only realities but perhaps . . . final realities.³⁴

And with the final displacement of photographs of painting by a photograph of words on a page, words which return us to the opening words of the Autobiography, language is established as equally the material of the real, equally a final reality.

As we have seen, Stein was constantly preoccupied with the notion that she was making things, and that these things were representations of the imagination. Her portrait of Cézanne does not portray Cézanne the man, but it does attempt to portray his imagination by interlacing patterns of words which literally describe different things, but which, in a purely aural and formal way, are unified by a pattern of sound. This was her way of describing with words the formal connection between different things which Cézanne revealed in his paintings by means of formal passage. For her it was important to disassociate words from their connotative and denotative functions and to treat them objectively (or plastically), because only in this way could she reveal the abstract patterns which represent the imagination without the intrusion of "representation." As her portrait of Raoul Dufy shows, Stein was also quite aware that "representational" art

possesses an inherent abstraction. She describes Dufy, "his hair white and his face rosy and his color like his color is when he paints other things," and then goes on to say that "nobody calls him abstract, but he does not point what he see, he paints what he is."

What Williams valued in Stein's work was her recognition of the importance of abstraction to writing. From her point of view, it was only in the creation of an abstract design or pattern that the imagination could reveal itself, and Williams agreed. The problem with her writing, Williams felt, was that in its identification of the imagination with total abstraction, the imagination lost contact with the world. He recognized this as early as his own Kora in Hell: Improvisations, the subtitle of which he probably derived from Kandinsky's series of abstract paintings of the same title (Kandinsky had said that an "improvisation" is the "largely unconscious, spontaneous expression of inner character, non-material in nature").³⁵ Williams comments on one of his own more opaque Improvisations: "It is obvious that if in flying an airplane one reached such an altitude that all sense of direction and every intelligible perception of the world were lost there would be nothing left to do but to come down to that point at which eyes regained their power" (I, 79). Tender Buttons operates at that altitude where the world is lost. So, Williams felt, does Kora in Hell. As in Stein's more abstract work "the virtue of the improvisations is their placement in a world of new values," he wrote in Spring and All, "their fault is their dislocation of sense, often complete" (I, 116-117). And in The Great American Novel, even as he is occupied almost exclusively with creating "new values" for his language, he comments in a moment of despair

that his work is

Joyce with a difference. The difference being greater opacity, less erudition, reduced power of perception . . . a ridiculous extreme. No excuse for that sort of thing. Amounts to a total occlusion of intelligence. Substitution of something else? What? Well, nonsense. Since you drive me to it. (I, 167)

Williams obviously feels the need to "come down to that point" where his language once again can make sense. He is seeking the middle ground that "The Crimson Cyclamen" represents, that place from which "pure thought" and material reality can both be appreciated, where leaves are both things in the world and patterns "of the air / as thought it."

As late as a 1945 review of Karl Shapiro's poetry he notes that although it is "all right to . . . use words as pigments," Shapiro is right to "put a quietus on the 'abstractionists' so far as writing (with words) is concerned" with the following lines:

No conception
Too far removed from literal position
Can keep its body. (SE, 260)

Juan Gris, Williams knew, constantly tried to tie his abstract "conception" to a concrete "body." In a 1921 letter to Amédée Ozenfant, the French critic and painter whose Purist school of painting championed Gris' return to and incorporation of the object in his synthetic work, Gris wrote:

Two outstanding works of art, whose importance is beyond question, have come down to us--the Venus of Milo, which represents Greece, and the Mona Lisa, which represents the Renaissance. They strike us with greater force than other works of art of the same periods because they have more individuality. The Venus of Milo has no arms--an individual characteristic. Now what is more potent than this act of natural selection as an argument against a form of art which confines itself to idealism and abstraction and refuses to become worldly and temporal.³⁶

And in "The Possibilities of Painting" he further explained the necessity

for giving abstract thought concrete body by noting that it was the only way to guarantee a proper response to one's work of art:

Why need one give the [abstract] forms the significance of reality, since a harmony already exists between them and they have an architectural unity? To which I would reply: The power of suggestion in every painting is considerable. Every spectator tends to ascribe his own subject to it. One must foresee, anticipate and ratify this suggestion, which will inevitably occur, by transforming into a subject this abstraction, this architecture which is solely the result of pictorial technique. Therefore the painter must be his own spectator and must modify the appearance of the relationships between the abstract forms.³⁷

Thus, in the 1926 Dish of Pears, which appeared untitled in transition, 1 (May 1927), Gris particularizes the abstract design of his canvas by means of three dark lines which delineate the base of the dish itself and outline the fruit in the bowl. The abstract forms of the canvas could be nearly meaningless--a pattern of overlapping planes and no more--save for these lines. If we take Gris at his word--

I work with the elements of the intellect, with the imagination. I try to make concrete that which is abstract. I proceed from the general to the particular, by which I mean I start with an abstraction in order to arrive at a true fact. Mine is an art of synthesis, of deduction. . . .

I want to arrive at a new specification; starting from a general type I want to make something particular and individual.³⁸

--these lines were added last. They bring the painting's abstract design to a representational and particular subject matter.

Williams' 1945 poem, "The Dish of Fruit" (CLP, 91) is very likely a response to Gris' painting. The poem reads, in its entirety:

The table describes
nothing: four legs, by which
it becomes a table. Four lines
by which it becomes a quatrain

the poem that lifts the dish
of fruit, if we say it is like
a table--how will it describe
the contents of the poem?

Both the table and the poem, similar designs composed of four legs/lines and each lifting a dish of fruit, one literally and the other titularly, as forms describe nothing: forms are, in themselves, "sense"-less. Design has nothing whatever to do with subject matter, with the dish of fruit. But the quatrain, a purely formal and abstract design, is "like / a table," and in this way Williams brings the abstract design which is the poem to a representational and particular subject matter. Like the table, the quatrains support the poem's subject matter, the dish of fruit. As the poem's metaphor suggests, the poem is about two things: the literal dish of fruit on the table, and writing about the literal dish of fruit on the table, the imagination which must confront that dish of fruit. The poem is to the table as the writing or the imagination is to the world, as abstraction is to realism. The point Williams is making is that abstract form does not in fact describe or define the world because it works independently of the world. But what abstract form does accomplish is a composition of the world. It elevates the world to a point where we can appreciate it aesthetically, as both table and poem elevate the dish of fruit. Conversely, in bringing an abstract form to a subject matter--the quatrain to the table--the imagination makes contact with the world and is rescued from that "altitude" where the world is left behind. The poem is a conversation between mind and matter, and its "fruit" lies in the fact that the conversation can take place at all.

The fact that "The Dish of Fruit" ends with a question--however

rhetorical--shows that Williams is still struggling to discover an idea of abstraction which can converse with the material of concrete reality. Yet it is clear that he has moved a long way from the conventionality of "Portrait of a Lady," the definition of "Portrait of the Author," the pure subjectivity of Kora in Hell, the inventory of "The Primrose," and the patterns of repetition in "Della Primavera," and "This Florida." For Williams, the conversation between the concrete and the abstract represents "the cure" which is discovered when we come "to the secret of that form / interknit with the unfathomable ground / where we walk daily" ("The Cure," CLP, 23), a sentiment which echoes Juan Gris' belief that "painting . . . is like a fabric, all of a piece and uniform, with one set of threads as the representational . . . and the cross-threads as the . . . abstract."³⁹ It is from the realization of this conversation that the tapestry which is Paterson would finally be woven, with the important qualification that Paterson is the record of the conversation between the American place and the American mind, a conversation in the American idiom.

Chapter III

The Americanization of a Poetic

Now about American painters. Today
yesterday or any day. How do they do it.

They do it like this.

When they paint it does not make any
difference what gets upon the canvas, they are
they and they feel that they are going to be they.
Oh yes. They. They are they. That is what they
look like and that is what they feel.

--Gertrude Stein
Four in America

What we have come to call modern art--Cubism and its aftermath--began in Europe; Paris was its home. But there was something about America, something about the place itself, which caused modern art to shift its locus, its focal point, gradually and almost imperceptibly, from Paris to New York. Beginning with the Armory Show and culminating in the sweeping successes of Abstract Expressionism at the conclusion of World War II, America and the American point of view slowly came to dominate the art world. The list of European artists who permanently emigrated to America attests to this-- Marcel Duchamp, Willem de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, Mark Rothko, Josef Albers, Ashille Gorky, Naum Gabo, Lyonel Feininger, Piet Mondrian, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Hans Richter, Yves Tanguy. By 1950, anyone hoping to ingratiate himself into the avant-garde could no longer seek out Picasso in the cafés of Paris, but drank instead with Pollock at the Cedar Bar, Manhattan.

William Carlos Williams, who stayed at home despite Pound's protestations,

was gratified by this turn of events, so much so that in 1958, in Paterson V, he would proclaim:

Pollock's blobs of paint squeezed out
with design!
pure from the tube. Nothing else
is real . . . (P, 213)

Pollock proved a point for Williams. Born in Cody, Wyoming, he grew up in Arizona and California, never studied in Europe, was trained by the American naturalist Thomas Benton and derived, from the rhythms in Benton's realist work, a rhythmic abstraction without any visible European roots. Pollock represented the triumph of American art, the triumph of the American mind over its European domination. But most of all Pollock testified to the value in staying home. There was something to be discovered in America.

Both Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp insisted that this was the case almost immediately after they arrived in New York, in 1913 and 1915 respectively. Picabia told the New York Times: "France is almost outplayed. It is in America that the theories of the New Art will hold most tenaciously."¹ In even stronger terms, Duchamp told Current Opinion: "Here--from the very instant one lands one realized that the art of Europe is finished--dead--and that America is the country of the art of the future, instead of trying to base everything she does on European traditions."² No one, at first, could decide what it was, particularly, that America was trying to find, what it was America had to offer. Williams' short story, "The Venus," witnesses the difficulty he himself had in trying to articulate what it meant to be an American. The story was intended originally to come at the mid-point of A Voyage to Pagany, but when Williams' publisher declared the book too long, Williams cut "The Venus," because it was "the best chapter in the

book" (IWWP, 45), and published it later in the 1932 A Novelette and Other Prose. The story itself describes a picnic near Frascati, Italy, and the conversation which takes place at that picnic between Dev Evans--"The protagonist was, of course, myself," Williams said (IWWP, 45)--and a German woman named Fräulein von J. It begins with the Fräulein asking "What then is it like, America?" (I, 324), and despite Dev's evasions, this question dominates the story:

What is America? It is perhaps you?

No, Dev shook his head.

Is it something to study? What will it do? Shall we go there to learn? she asked in rapid succession.

Dev shook his head.

But you will return to it?

Yes.

Habit?

No, it is something.

When I saw you, I saw something unusual, I am never mistaken. I saw something different from what I see every day. . . . Is it America? I asked, but you tell me nothing. It is because you will not do so.

America, he began again haltingly, is hard to know.

Yes, she answered, because she had made him serious so that he must speak his mind or say nothing.

I think it is useful to us, he continued, because it is near savagery. In Europe, you are so far from it that maybe you will have to die first before you will live again.-- But Dev was not such a fool.--Europe, I do not know, he corrected himself, I am seeing a few special moments only.

But he had a quick pupil.--That is enough replied Fräulein von J. I see now what I saw at the beginning. You are savage, not quite civilized--you have America and we have not. You have that, yes, it is something.

You are holding on to something, she said.

It is very difficult, Dev went on--something very likely to be lost, this is what--So he took out the flint arrowhead he had in his pocket and showed it to her. (I, 330-331)

"This is what" America is; something--some thing, an arrowhead--savage perhaps, but close to the land's origins, and free, as Duchamp had insisted it must

be, of "European traditions."

In "The Venus" Williams seems to articulate the real rationale behind his effort to marry abstraction and realism. Total abstraction, the imagination flying at that altitude where the world is lost, loses not only the world, but America as well. Total abstraction is equivalent to a loss of national identity. It denies the possibility of discovering America. A pure investigation of the inventory of American objects, on the other hand, denies the unifying power of the imagination. Williams, Stieglitz, and the painters of the Stieglitz circle were forced to marry the object and the imagination in a new way. It was only in the object that America could be identified; it was only in the abstraction that the American imagination could be voiced. In this dilemma we find the explanation for the American artists' interest in French Cubism. Cubism, as art historian Charles Rosenberg has recently pointed out, "may be viewed as a revelation of the consistency of the formal nature of the visible world. The new symbolism [i.e. communicating the relationships among objects by purely formal means], the extraction of the geometric essence of shape and, in the analytic phase, the uniformity of texture and value, are all devices for impressing the viewer with the formal brotherhood of all natural objects."³ Whenever the Cubists abandoned the object, as in the work of Delaunay for instance, their painting was "no longer of the movement, in spite of their statements to the contrary, but . . . the investigation of a new problem, the possibilities of completely abstract or non-objective painting."⁴ Williams writes in "The American Background," an essay which opened the 1934 America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait:

The thing that Americans never seem to see is that French painting, as an example of what is meant, is related to its own definite tradition, in its own environment and general history (which, it is true, we partly share), and which, when they have done with some one moment of it and have moved on to something else, they fatly sell where they can--to us, in short. And that American painting, to be of value, must have comparable relationships in its own tradition, thus only to attain classic proportions.

Realizing the fullness and color in French painting--certainly one of the delights of the modern world--he [Stieglitz] went to work, a real act of praise, by striving to push forward something what would be or that was comparable in America.

The effect of his life and work has been to bend together and fuse, against whatever resistance, the split forces of the two necessary cultural groups: (1) the local effort, well understood in defined detail and (2) the forces from the outside. (SE, 157, 160, 161)

The artists of the American, or "local," effort could afford to admire, even adopt, the compositional principles upon which Cubist art is founded because these principles still allowed them to choose their own subject matter. Like the Cubists, the American artist wanted to reveal "the formal brotherhood of natural objects," but his inventory of objects possessed a particular identity of its own. Since things in America differed from things in Europe, the realization of the identity of American things was equally the realization of a mind distinct from its European counterparts. The American experience of form--that is, the experience which revealed the American mind--was simply a new experience. There could be no precedent for it in Europe. The search for the identity of America itself was irrevocably tied, then, to the search for the identity of the American self. Whitman's catalogue of American things in his "Song of Myself" was of course the example which sanctioned this investigation by inventory into American identity. But it was Picabia and Duchamp, perhaps because they were seeing

America for the first time, who began to define the nature of modern American identity.

When Picabia arrived in New York in 1913 as semi-official spokesman for the European contingent at the Armory Show, he was so impressed by the tumultuous movement of the city, and his inability to represent that movement mimetically, that at first, he gave up his previous Cubist approach to painting and with it representational treatment of the object altogether. He did so in order to represent the state of mind which New York had inspired in him, so that his painting became the totally abstract "objectivity of a subjectivity." But this reaction was short-lived. When he returned for a second visit, in 1915, New York inspired a carefully detailed and highly mimetic series of machine drawings. A large group of these drawings appeared in the Picabia number of 291 in June 1915. He continued to publish them first in 291, and then, after 291 died in 1916, in his own 391. This second journal was meant to carry on the traditions of 291. Picabia published the first issue of 391 in Barcelona, the last three in New York. Picabia believed that these machine drawings were closer to capturing the American experience than his earlier totally abstract work. He told the New York Tribune in 1915: "This visit to America . . . has brought about a complete revolution in my methods of work. . . . Prior to leaving Europe I was engrossed in presenting psychological studies through the mediumship of forms which I created. Almost immediately upon coming to America it dawned on me that the genius of the modern world is in machinery and that through machinery art ought to find a most vivid expression."⁵ Picabia's cohort, Marcel Duchamp, who had initiated the early composition The Bride Stripped

Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass) while still in Europe, including the very mechanical and realistic Chocolate Grinder, arrived in New York in 1915, and New York seemed to confirm this direction in his art. Many years later, in an interview with Pierre Cabanne, he explained:

DUCHAMP: When I arrived in New York, I realized that I wasn't a stranger at all.

CABANNE: You were a man predestined for America.

DUCHAMP: So to speak, yes.

CABANNE: And you stayed there.

DUCHAMP: It was like a second wind.⁶

In the American environment, an environment dominated by the machine, Duchamp finished the mechanical Large Glass and ventured even further into the world of the machine, soon constructing a real machine with the help of Man Ray called Precision Optics (1920), a copy of which was incorporated into The Large Glass as the "Oculist Witnesses."⁷

The interest of Picabia and Duchamp in the machine, and their shared belief that the machine was an object which defined the experience of America very precisely, served as the impetus for a more general investigation of the American scene. This expansion of the investigation was implicit in their machine works, especially in the overt equation their works established between the American machine and American sexuality. This connection is clearest in two of Picabia's drawings, Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité, which appeared in the Picabia number of 291 and Américaine, which appeared in 1918 in 391. The first is a careful reproduction of a "Forever" sparkplug; the second a lightbulb representing, as the drawing's caption states, the "divorce and flirtation" of the American female. Very clearly, the machine is ambiguous, both the paradigm for progress and the paradigm of encroaching sterility. Marc Le Bot

has argued that this ambiguity is founded on an intentional paradox: on the one hand, Picabia's machine represents a sustained effort to define the body of a "new symbolism," intended to rescue our most misused "ideas"--love, beauty, even eroticism--from convention and lift these ideas into modernity; on the other hand, they represent an attack--humorous and ironic on occasion, but as often pessimistic, even nihilistic--on modern culture itself, and American culture in particular.⁸ But, more than this, Picabia's machines are a penetrating examination of the possibilities, in America, for creativity itself.

Picabia's first machine drawing, Fille née sans mère (1915), introduces the machine's relation to creativity--both artistic and sexual. The machine is a female produced by man, his daughter born without a mother. The drawing, purchased almost immediately by Stieglitz, was reproduced in 291 in June 1915, and was exhibited at the Modern Gallery in New York in January 1916.⁹ In an untitled essay in the September-October number of 291, Paul Haviland attempted to explain the importance of Fille née sans mère to American art:

We are living in the age of the machine.

Man made the machine in his own image. She has limbs which act; lungs which breathe; a heart which beats; a nervous system through which runs electricity. The phonograph is the image of his voice; the camera the image of his eye. The machine is his "daughter without a mother." That is why he loves her. He has made the machine superior to himself, he endows the superior beings which he conceives in his poetry and his plastique with the qualities of machines. After making the machine in his own image he has made his human ideal machinomorphie.¹⁰

Haviland's "ideal" conception of the machine's potential was reiterated in 1916 by Peter Minuit in a tribute to Stieglitz's contribution to American art and culture which appeared in The Seven Arts. Accepting Haviland's

idea that the camera is the image of man's eye, Minuit begins his essay by referring to Picabia's machine portrait of Stieglitz, Ici c'est ici

Stieglitz:

There is a design of Picabia's--one of those in which he has attempted to express himself in symbols abstracted from mechanical devices--in which a Kodak lens springs out from the body of the camera toward the Gothic characters that form the word "Ideal." At the side of the drawing stands the legend "Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz--foi et amour." A plastic epigram, if you will. But one that might well serve as the motto of a personality unique in America. Faith and love, love for art, faith in its divine power to reveal life, to spur action, to excite the creative impulse, those are the dominant characteristics of Alfred Stieglitz.¹¹

Both Minuit and Haviland have missed something of the subtlety of Picabia's machine drawings, and the Stieglitz drawing in particular. Neither sees any irony in the fact that the word "Ideal" is printed in Gothic script, an anachronism. And it is equally evident that this camera--the mechanical daughter which is the image of man's eye--is broken. "There is," Dickran Tashjian notes, "a total discontinuity between the lens and the flue box. The twisted bellows falls slightly to one side, parodying a limp phallus."¹² The creativity of the American artist, despite his "ideals" or perhaps because of them, is an impotent creativity. If Picabia's machine drawings capture the American spirit--the creative impulse, activity and energy of which Minuit speaks, they also undermine that positivism by attacking the naiveté and sentimentality to which both Haviland and Minuit--and by extension Stieglitz--unconsciously attest.

The America Picabia discovered in the machine was highly ambiguous: energetic and creative on the one hand, floundering and impotent on the other, it was a massive self-contradiction which rested finally on a

tension between its "ideals"--Stieglitz's faith and love--and its "facts." In Prostitution universelle, two female machines, which are implicitly the creations of man, are in fact engaged in the act of love. But, as art critic William A. Camfield notes, love in a machine culture is "an impersonal, mechanical function, stripped of all that is intimate and sacred. The machines are connected solely by two wires and they seem almost unaware of and unconcerned with each other's presence."¹³ The bleakness of this drawing is of course heightened by the fact that this love-making is homosexual and denies procreation. Even bleaker is the drawing Voilà Elle which appeared in the November 1915 291 accompanied by a poem by Marius de Zayas entitled "Femme!" The drawing itself is an autoerotic and potentially self-destructive machine, a target connected by a series of pulleys and wires to a pistol. But it is de Zayas' poem which reveals the ultimate tension between the male creator and his filie née sans mère. According to de Zayas the female has "pas d'intellectualisme": she represents an "atrophie cérébrale" and a "matérialité pure." If she is the creation of the male imagination, she nevertheless possesses "pas de forme"--that is, nothing of the abstract form which is the revelation of the imagination--and in this sense she is "pas le miroir de son male," but his opposite.¹⁴ Like the machine, this female is mindless. Like the lightbulb portrait of an Américaine, she represents "divorce." The machine in this context represents not only the "divorce" of man from woman, but also of man from his world, and of the imagination from reality. Pasted onto the de Zayas poem is a handwritten excerpt from what we must suppose to be a love letter: "Mais je vous aime," it reads, "et vous devez bien m'aimer un peu." This plea for love, for understanding, witnesses love's impossibility. It is as if

these mindless machines, with their autoeroticism and inversion of sexuality, have become, quite demonically, self-sufficient and automatic Amazons.

Picabia's discovery of America in the image of the machine had a profound effect on Williams. Williams' close ties to the Stieglitz circle in the late 'teens, which were shared of course by Picabia, almost guarantee that Williams knew his work very early on. Picabia was also close friends with Duchamp during these years, and Duchamp's works--the readymades as well as The Large Glass--are haunted by the same ambiguities which Picabia revealed. Williams knew Duchamp, and his work, well. When The Little Review reproduced most of Picabia's machine drawings in a special Picabia number in 1922, Williams wrote the editors: "The Picabia number of The Little Review is a distinct success: it gives me the sense of being arrived, as of any efficient engine in motion, the sense of being on the tracks, or resting on its wings firmly in the air, if you will. Surely everything else in America, every new magazine being published seems, beside the present Little Review to be the model of an engine made of wood to represent the power it does not possess."¹⁵ There is, furthermore, direct evidence that Williams understood the sense of divorce and alienation which Prostitution universelle, Voilà Elle and de Zayas' "Femme!" outline. The optimism of Haviland and Minuit seems to be present in Williams' "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives" (CEP, 194-195), which he read at the 1917 Independents Exhibition in New York, the same show to which Duchamp submitted his readymade urinal. But even in this poem, where the "dance" of the locomotives "is sure"--"In time: twofour / In time: twoeight!"--and the trains themselves, "poised horizontal / on

glittering parallels" are "packed with a warm glow--inviting entry," the ordered and mechanized world of trains and train schedules stands in apparent contradiction to the chaotic and discordant crowd which it serves. The machine itself is energetically static:

wheels repeating
the same gesture remain relatively
stationary: rails forever parallel
return on themselves infinitely.

The clock in the station, another well-ordered machine, not only repeats the static activity of the train's "wheels," but both imitates and drives on the crowd:

Covertly the hands of a great clock
go round and round!
discordant hands straining out from
a center: inevitable postures infinitely
repeated

The inspiration to create the machine may be admirable, but the machine seduces man. The time of the wheels' dance, the time of the clock on the wall, is a version of time "repeating / the same gesture" endlessly, monotonously. In his acceptance of this activity, this static energy, man accepts the machine's sterility. He is, in fact, helplessly in love with it.

In the same year that Williams read this poem, he wrote a long letter to The Egoist in London entitled "The Great Sex Spiral: A Criticism of Miss [Dora] Marsden's 'Lingual Psychology.'"¹⁶ Williams' argument with Marsden's attempt to revitalize psychology--and by extension philosophy--is that she fails to understand what Williams believed to be the basic "opposition" which must lie at the heart of psychological or philosophical endeavor, an opposition between male and female psychology. Williams

believes that Marsden's first step in "the re-establishment of life in a sterile 'philosophy,' sterile because entirely male," should be the "bending [of] all her energies to the setting up of a vigorous female side--thus establishing a male and female psychology in vigorous opposition." Instead "she has tried to 'solve' philosophy: that is, she has tried to deny reality to male psychology because it is not female psychology. . . . Could she succeed, only one thing would result: death," that is, the same sterility which she is fighting. From Williams' point of view--and here we are very close to the tension between the male/creator and the female/machine which Picabia and deZayas had recently articulated in 291--male psychology is "characterized by an inability to concede reality to fact . . . the universal lack of attachment between the male and the objective world," and conversely female psychology is "characterized by a trend not away from, but toward the earth, toward concreteness":

Thus man's only positive connexion with the earth is in the fleeting sex function. When not in pursuit of the female man has absolutely no necessity to exist. But this chase can never lead to satisfaction in the catch, never to objective satisfaction, since as soon as the catch is made the objective is removed and nothing remains but to make another catch of the same kind. . . . Thus the male pursuit leads only to further pursuit, that is, not toward the earth, but away from it--not to concreteness, but to further hunting, to star-gazing, to idleness.

[The female] pursuit of the male results not in further chase, at least not in the immediate necessity for further chase, but to definite physical results that connect her indisputably and firmly with the earth at her feet by an unalterable chain, every link of which is concrete. Woman is physically essential to the maintenance of a physical life. . . . To the female mind male psychology (philosophy), which is agnostic, due to his experience, has no reality in her experience. To the female mind such a psychology (philosophy) will always remain a meaningless symbol--a negative attracting her attack.

The opposition between male and female which Williams sets out here is equally an opposition between mind and matter, between the abstracting imagination and concrete fact. De Zayas had written that the female possesses "pas d'intellectualisme," "pas de forme," and is "pas le miroir de son male." She is instead "matérialité pure." By implication man is her opposite: "cérébrale" and "intellectuel"; he possesses "forme" and is "spiritualité pure." Similarly, Picabia's only abstract drawing of this period, Fantaisie, which appeared in the 291 of December-January, 1915-16, and which is subtitled "L'homme créa Dieu à son image," elevates the artistic creativity of the male by equating it to the creation of God himself. The male's abstracting imagination--his "star-gazing" psychology, as Williams puts it--sets him firmly apart from the concrete machines with which Picabia represents the female. Williams' "Great Sex Spiral" rests firmly in this tradition.

But equally important is Williams' refusal to "solve" the opposition between the male and the female--abstraction and realism. Because Williams believes that "positive connexion" between the two "exists only while sex lasts to enkindle life" he would never dream of obliterating the opposition necessary for that act, for without it there is only death and sterility. Life must be enkindled. Implicit in Picabia's machine drawings is the idea that the sterility of the modern world is due to the asexuality of the modern world's creativity. The male makes the machine in his own image, sans mère, and in this way he denies sexuality altogether. In Williams' terms, this results in a sterile world, "sterile because entirely male." Furthermore, the implicit criticism of works such as Picabia's sparkplug Jeune fille américaine is that Americans treat females

in precisely the same way as they treat their machines--both female and machine are equally created from the male's image and therefore are equally sterile. In the same way, Williams believes that Dora Marsden wants to create the world in the female's image, which would result in the sterile self-sufficiency of Picabia's Voilà Elle or Prostitution universelle. Either way, half the world is lost.

Along with this investigation of the machine in America, many artists turned their attention to enlarging the inventory of particularly American objects beyond the machine itself. In December 1916, Robert Coady, a New York art dealer, introduced his new little magazine The Soil, with just such an inventory. "American Art," he claimed, "has grown out of the soil," and we can find examples of it "in every conceivable field":

The Panama Canal, the Sky-scraper and Colonial Architecture. The East River, the Battery and the "Fish Theater." The Tug Boat and the Steam-shovel. The Steam Lighter. The Steel Plants, the Washing Plants and the Electrical Shops. The Bridges, the Docks, the Cutouts, the Viaducts, the "Mutt M. Shay" and the "3000." The Polarine and the Portland Cement Works. Wright's and Curtiss's Aeroplanes and the Aeronauts. The Sail Boats, the Ore Cars. Indian Beadwork, Sculptures, Decorations, Music and Dances. Jack Johnson, Charlie Chaplin, and "Spike" in "The Girl in the Game." Annette Kellerman, "Neptune's Daughter." Bert Williams, Rag-time, the Buck and Wing and the Clog. Syncopation and the Cake-walk. The Crazy Quilt and the Rag-mat. The Minstrels. The Cigar-store Indians. The Hatters, the Shoemakers, the Haberdashers and the Clothiers. The Window Dressers.¹⁷

Williams found Coady's inventory fine, as far as it went. In a lengthy review of contemporary American poetic endeavor, "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry" (1917), he wrote that The Soil "is all very democratic, all very decorative, this apotheosis of trust magnates and trip hammers and Jack Johnsons. I like it. I think it makes a fine lively magazine. . . . [But] after all I am speaking of poetry, not mechanics, and I do not like

the poetry that is published in The Soil. It is not given a proper frame. It is trivial."¹⁸

Surprisingly, he felt the same way about Duchamp's little magazine The Blind Man. The magazine was founded in order to celebrate the Independents Exhibition, "the birth of the Independence of American Art." Invoking Whitman as the guiding spirit behind the Independents Exhibition-- "May the spirit of Walt Whitman guide the Indeps. Long live his memory, and long live the Indeps!"--the magazine's declared purpose was to help America "think for itself, and no longer accept, mechanically, the art reputations made abroad." And it explicitly connected its own work to that of The Soil: "Every American who wish[es] to be aware of America should read 'The Soil.'"¹⁹ Williams, one would think, would be very sympathetic, since his own greatest success to date had been when he read "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives" at the Independents. He conceded that "Such things as The Blind Man are very useful, very 'purgative,' very nice decoration, even very true." He admitted that Duchamp's Chocolate Grinder, which was reproduced for the cover of the second number, was "good stuff," but added sardonically, "for a print." He concluded that all in all, "ici il n'y a pas grand chose."²⁰

Williams' realization of the shortcomings of The Soil and The Blind Man cannot be taken too seriously however, for he admittedly shared those shortcomings. "Others," he wrote, "the magazine with which I am associated, is of course excellent. Here we have an attempt to present a blank page to Tom, Dick and Harry with the invitation to write a masterpiece upon it. If Others came out once or twice every three years and consisted of four pages it would be the ideal magazine for poets."²¹

His point is that masterpieces are few and that "trivia" is the little magazine's standard fare. In Others "il n'y a pas grand chose" as well.

Duchamp's readymades were of course created in the spirit of these inventories of objects which Williams found so "trivial." The urinal which was submitted under the pseudonym of Richard Mutt to the Independents Exhibition was by far the best know of his readymades in 1917. Most of the second number of The Blind Man was devoted to defending the urinal as art after it had been hidden (in the interest of public decency) behind a partition at the Independents Exhibition. In "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," Williams attacked it: "[The Blind Man] likes to reach out of the cabinet and to grab whatever it touches and to imagine it has hit upon a new thing."²² But many years later, in his Autobiography, he would defend both the urinal and Duchamp: "The story then current of this extraordinary and popular young man was that he walked daily into whatever store struck his fancy and purchased whatever pleased him--something new--something American. Whatever it might be, that was his 'construction' for the day. The silly committee threw out the urinal, asses that they were" (A, 134). The urinal, Williams was willing to admit, was "very useful, very 'purgative' . . . even very true." The trouble, simply stated, was that it was so true, so American. Duchamp pointed to the trouble very perceptively in his own defense of the urinal in The Blind Man:

What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain.--

1. Some contend it was immoral, vulgar.

Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.

Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under

the new title and point of view-- created a new thought for that object.

As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.²³

Williams undoubtedly recognized the implicit call-to-action in the last line of Duchamp's defense: for if the urinal was indeed American art, it was, with her bridges and machines, the only art America had to offer. The dearth of good poetry in magazines like The Soil and Others testified to this.

What was needed in American art, Williams believed, was something more than Walt Whitman had given it already. The Blind Man saw Whitman as its guiding spirit and Duchamp's readymades participated in Whitman's discovery of America. The Soil's inventory of American things was little more than an updated version of Whitman's own inventories. Williams was willing to admit that Whitman "is our rock," but he added that American poetry "cannot advance until we have grasped Whitman and then built upon him." Whitman's great service was that "he destroyed the forms antiquity decreed to him to take and use." His legacy however is the necessity for American poets "to make . . . a new verse form":

American verse of today must have a certain quality of freedom, must be "free verse" in a sense. It must be new verse, in a new conscious form. But even more than that it must be free in that it is free to include all temperaments, all phases of our environment, physical as well as spiritual, mental and moral. It must be truly democratic, truly free for all--and yet it must be governed. This is no small demand to make of a new verse form. Its elements must not be too firmly cemented together as they are in the aristocratic forms of past civilizations. They must be perfectly concrete or they will escape through the fingers--but they must not be rigidly united. . . . The elements of the new form must be simple and single so that they are capable of every form of moulding.²⁴

If this new art form were discovered, American poetry could achieve the

stature of "art" which American industry seemed to have attained already. The photographer Paul Strand seconded Williams' notion that America demanded the discovery of a new form in his essay on photography which appeared in the June 1917 Camera Work. For Strand, as for Stieglitz, the development of photography pointed out that "America has really been expressed in terms of America without the outside influence of Paris art schools or their dilute offspring here. . . . Everything they [American photographers] wanted to say, had to be worked out by their own experiments: it was born of the actual living. In the same way the creators of our skyscrapers had to face the similar circumstance of no precedent, and it was through the very necessity of evolving a new form, both in architecture and photography that the resulting expression was vitalized."²⁵ Williams' rhetoric on the same subject four years later in Contact makes the "necessity of evolving a new form" clear:

It has been by paying naked attention first to the thing itself that American plumbing, American shoes, American bridges, indexing systems, locomotives, printing presses, city buildings, farm implements, and a thousand other things have become notable in the world. Yet we are timid in believing that in the arts discovery and invention will take the same course. And there is no reason why they should unless our writers have the inventive intelligence of our engineers and cobblers.²⁶

For Williams "inventive intelligence"--the mind--is synonymous with the creation of form. Plumbers pay attention to plumbing, engineers to bridges and locomotives, and poets must pay attention to the poem. But the founding of his "new verse form" was a larger demand than Williams probably imagined in 1917. The task would require nearly thirty years; not until Paterson would he discover the new form he had described in "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry."

The roots of the americanization of Williams' poetic--which is finally the discovery of an American poetic form--can be seen to originate in 1917, both in "The Great Sex Spiral" and in "America, Whitman and the Art of Poetry." What these two essays share is a developed sensitivity to and appreciation of opposition and contradiction. In "The Great Sex Spiral" the terms of this opposition are the tensions between the female and the male, realism and abstraction. In "America, Whitman, and the Art of American Poetry" this opposition is between multiplicity ("all temperaments, all phases of our environment, physical as well as spiritual, mental and moral") and unity ("it must be governed"), which is, again, another way of stating the fundamental opposition between realism and abstraction. Williams never sought to "solve" this opposition or to eliminate it; he merely wished to draw the opposites "into a dance," as he put it in the Improvisations (I, 17). But because he was male--the abstract, "star-gazing" mind--he expended most of his energy in trying to discover the stuff of which the other half, the opposition, was made. If the poem was to be "two dancers . . . pirouetting together (I, 47), he had to learn to anticipate the other dancer's moves. This meant that, like Coady in The Soil, he had to turn to an investigation of America herself. But he turned to her with a difference. "I don't give a damn about airplanes and airplane poetry," he wrote in the final issue of Others in 1919, "but I do give a damn about the distraught brain that must find its release in building gas motors and in balancing them on cloth wings in its agony."²⁷ What he had to discover was why Americans could create machines, but could not create poems; what it was that made them build planes in order to escape from the land itself; where it was America's dance was failing.

As Williams put it in the poem "Tract" (CEP, 129-131), his discovery of America demanded that he "scour" away all traditional (and largely European) ornament from American life in order to reveal "the ground sense" of his people. For whatever reasons, this "ground sense" had been lost. Williams' little magazine Contact, which he co-edited with Robert McAlmon, was dedicated to the proposition of re-establishing "contact" with this "ground sense." In the introductory "Comment" to Contact's inaugural issue in 1921, Williams wrote, "Americans are far behind France in an indigenous art." Americans, he complained, are "too prone to admire and to copy the very thing which should not be copied, the thing which is French or Irish alone, the thing which is the result of special local conditions of thought and circumstance" (SE, 29). In order to point out what he meant, in the second number of Contact he took a work of French art, a Matisse nude, and Americanized it:

On the french grass, in that room on Fifth Ave., lay that woman who had never seen my own poor land. The dust and noise of Paris had fallen from her with the dress and underwear and shoes and stockings which she had just put aside to lie bathing in the sun.

It had been a lovely day in the air. --What pleasant women are these girls of ours! When they have worn clothes and take them off it is with an effect of having performed a small duty. They return to the sun with a gesture of accomplishment. --Here she lay in this spot today not like Diana or Aphrodite but with better proof than they of regard for the place she was in. She rested and he painted her.

It was the first of summer. Bare as was his mind of interest in anything save the fullness of his knowledge, into which her simple body entered as into the eye of the sun itself, so he painted her. So she came to America.

No man in my country has seen a woman naked and painted her as if he knew anything except that she was naked. No woman in my country is naked except at night.

In the french sun, on the french grass in a room on Fifth Ave., a french girl lies and smiles at the sun without seeing us. (SE, 30-31, my emphasis)

In Stieglitz's gallery at 291 Fifth Ave., the Matisse measures the distance between European and American art. Williams is more than a little bemused at the fact that American women do not lie nude in the sun, but the fact is, they do not. An American cannot paint a nude in the sun, because to do so would show no regard for the place he is in. The nude sunbather is French subject matter. And in the window of Stieglitz's gallery, she is out of place. On Fifth Ave., questions of "decency" and "propriety" surround her. It is easy enough to imagine someone saying "No woman in my country is naked except at night" with pride, instead of with Williams' chagrin. The irony is that Williams must "americanize" the Matisse by saying that America would find it immoral.

Following "A Matisse" in Contact, and separated from it by a single dotted line, was a short quotation from John Dewey's "Americanism and Localism" which had appeared in The Dial several months earlier. "We are discovering," it read, "that the locality is the only universal."²⁸ Dewey had intended the statement to spur on the investigation of America which had already begun, and to defend that investigation from charges of provincialism. The investigation, he believed, would help to create an indigenous American art. The remainder of Dewey's statement, which Williams did not quote reads: "When the discovery [that the locality is the only universal] sinks in a little deeper, the novelist and dramatist will discover the localities of America as they are, and no one will have to worry about the future of American art." In the spirit of Contact, Williams could not have agreed more. Here, after all, was a formula for the dance between abstraction (the universal) and reality (the local) which Williams sought to achieve. But juxtaposed to "A Matisse," Dewey's statement becomes

ironic. Matisse's nude was painted with all "regard for the place she was in." It makes contact with the local. By all rights then, if Dewey's formulation is correct, it should have universal significance. But Americans cannot understand the Matisse. What it says apparently cannot be universalized. Either Dewey is wrong, or Americans have lost any sense of what the "local" in America really is.

Williams firmly believed that it was the Americans who had lost touch with the local. He championed the photography of men like Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, and Walker Evans because they made contact with the local. Strand, in fact, described his photographs in terms which directly recall Williams' "Great Sex Spiral": "The quality of touch in its deepest living sense is inherent in my photographs. When that sense of touch is lost, the heartbeat of the photograph is extinct. . . . When I photograph I make love."²⁹ In the photograph, the abstracting mind touches the concrete world; the universal and the local make love. Stieglitz, Williams wrote, "carried the fullest load forward" in his realization that "the photographic camera and what it could do were particularly well suited to a place [America] where the immediate and the actual were under official neglect" (SE, 160). And in an essay on the photography of Walker Evans, he wrote: "We Americans go about blind and deaf. We fight off convictions that we should welcome as water in the desert, could we possibly get into the right mind. The artist must save us. He's the only one who can. First we have to see, be taught to see. We have to be taught to see here, because here is everywhere, related to everywhere else."³⁰ The camera is like "The Eyeglasses" which Williams describes in Spring and All (CEP, 256-257). Both correct the "distortion" of our eyes, the distortion of hazed surfaces

beneath which lies "the universality of things." Lying on the table, "earpieces folded down," the glasses are "tranquilly Titicaca": the lens is the glassy surface of the world's deepest lake, beneath which lie the secrets of that depth we do not think it possible to see. The eyeglasses testify that we can, if we would but use them, and use them well. The photographer and the poet see, and with such acumen that what they see amazes us. They might see what the painter Georgia O'Keeffe, Stieglitz's wife, found when she looked closely at flowers. Her paintings which magnify flowers immensely--Black Iris, for instance--revealed a flowering world of sexuality. But more likely they would see what Demuth saw when he painted an industrial landscape in which two smokestacks lie flatly against one another. He called it Aucassin and Nicolette, after the thirteenth-century French romance, implying that this was what was left of love in America. Or they might look closely at the hindquarters of a New York cabbie's horse, and see that it was gelded. Stieglitz called his photograph of this desecrated anatomy Spiritual America.

The American "local" seemed, in fact, to have two faces. Williams was very attracted to the one O'Keeffe portrayed, and repelled by the one Stieglitz and Demuth revealed. But he ignored neither. If someone had asked him, in the early 'twenties, to explain what it was that had caused this almost schizophrenic duality to arise in the American "local," he no doubt would have answered that O'Keeffe revealed the female's sensitivity and closeness to the land, Demuth and Stieglitz the male's disassociation from the same land. Sadly, what Demuth and Stieglitz had witnessed was the prevalent scene.

There was however an explanation for the prevalence of this spiritual

and physical sterility. One had only to look as far as American history for the answer. Everywhere one looked there were males. American history was a history of males: males encountering the land, taking it, and refusing for the most part to accept the land on its own terms. The subjects of the essays in his own In the American Grain, published in 1925, testify to this: Eric the Red, Cortez, Columbus, Ponce de Leon, Sir Walter Raleigh, De Soto, Champlain, Cotton Mather, Père Raslas, Daniel Boone, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, Aaron Burr, Sam Houston, Edgar Allan Poe. Not a woman in the lot: "They existed, we know, degraded and demeaned in the pioneer camps, as in Maine--discredited save in a few bad narrative verses and short stories, drunk and waking up in a whore's bed, etc. . . . [But] never a character to raise into a [real] story" (IAG, 185-186). The result, Williams felt, was devastating, for the female's inherent contact with the land was degraded by and buried beneath the weight of the male's "star-gazing" spirituality.

Williams found the roots of this American subjugation of feminine earthliness (and earthiness) in Puritanism. The Puritans, he wrote, "stressed the 'spirit' . . . [but] this stress of the spirit against the flesh has produced a race incapable of flower" (IAG, 65-66). The American male does not understand what it means to be of the flesh, and so he suppresses it:

If a girl is--(not generous, bah!) but discerning with her whole body--that's it, a woman must see with her whole body to be benevolent. --If in the eighth grade she begins to discern the depth of her necessity--she is made to feel there is something wrong about her, not reckless but fundamentally wrong. . . . So she is frightened, if possible. She is a low thing (they tell her), she is made to feel that she is vicious, evil--It really

doesn't do anything save alter the color of her deed, make it unprofitable, it scrapes off the bloom of the gift--it is puritanical envy. When she gives, it will probably be to the butcher boy--since she has been an apt pupil and believes that she is evil, believes even that her pleasure is evil.

It's the central lie! but she is sure of it and gives her virginity to the butcher boy instead of having at least a decent romance. As Ken [Burke] says: we get (that is, presuming we are poets) the daughters of the butcher. (IAG, 182-183)

Puritanism was a monster, Williams felt, "a kind of mermaid with a corpse for tail . . . a bad breath in the room . . . stinking all about you" (IAG, 115).

The spiritual product of a male mind which had lost touch with the world, a doctrinaire religion, Puritanism nevertheless possesses a certain "purity" of "form":

A form, that is to say, fixed--but small. . . . I mean that this form, this FORM ITSELF . . . is bred of brutality, inhumanity, cruel amputations and that THIS is the sum of its moral effect. You speak of Mather's books--? Yes, they were the flower of that religion, that unreasonable thing, on which they prided themselves for its PURITY. That is, its rigid clarity, its inhuman clarity, its steel-like thrust from the heart of Jehovah. . . . There it is, concise, bare, PURE: blind to every contingency, mashing Indian, child and matron into one safe mould. (IAG, 111-112)

Puritanism is, in short, "an immorality that IS America. Here it began. You see the cause. There was no ground to build on, with a ground all blossoming about them--under their noses" (IAG, 114). In their spiritual madness, the Puritans had left the ground behind.

For this reason, Williams writes in "To Elsie" (CEP, 270-272), "the pure products of America go crazy" caught in the confusion between the physical presence of the American land and the spiritual mould of American Puritanism. These "pure products" are "mountain folk from Kentucky," mountain folk with perhaps "a dash of Indian blood." On the one hand, theirs is a world of "isolate lakes / and valleys." Their free and easy

sexuality is let loose on Saturday nights, a world where

promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken
to railroading
out of sheer lust of adventure--

and young slatterns

is taken for granted. On the other hand, theirs is a world "hemmed round /
with disease or murder." It is a world in which women succumb to their
devil-may-care men

without

emotion
save numbed terror

under some hedge of choke-cherry
or viburnum--
which they cannot express--

But Williams can express their terror, the desolation and joylessness of
their promiscuity. That we should even call Elsie's peasant sexuality
"promiscuous" expresses "the truth about us":

as if the earth under our feet
were
excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth

Women like Elsie try to address themselves to the Puritan civilization which
has left the ground behind. Their "flopping breasts" are "addressed to
cheap / jewelry," and "bathed / in filth" they attempt to cover their
closeness to the land "with gauds." This attempt to escape the land,
Williams says, "seems to destroy us," and makes for the crazy, "broken / brain"
of women like Elsie. Confronting these women, Williams'

imagination strains
after deer
going by fields of goldenrod

but "it is only in isolate flecks that / something" of their original affinity with the land "is given off."

There were, however, instances in American history where men had made some contact with the land, men whose experiences Williams would hold up as models. There was, for instance, Père Sebastian Rasles, the Jesuit priest who "lived thirty-four years, October 13, 1689 to October 12, 1723, with his beloved savages, drawing their sweet like honey, TOUCHING them every day" (IAG, 120):

He was a great MAN. Reading his letters, it is a river that brings sweet water to us. THIS is a moral source not reckoned with, peculiarly sensitive and daring in its close embrace of native things. His sensitive mind. For everything his fine sense, blossoming, thriving, opening, reviving--not shutting out--was tuned. He speaks of his struggles with their language, its peculiar beauties, "je ne sais quoi d'energique," he cited its tempo, the form of its genius with gusto, with admiration, with generosity. Already the flower is turning up its petals. It is this to be moral: to be positive, to be peculiar, to be sure, generous, brave--to MARRY, to touch--to give because one HAS, not because one has nothing. And to give to him who HAS, who will join, who will fertilize, who will be like yourself: to create, to hybridize, to crosspollenize,--not to sterilize, to draw back, to fear, to dry up, to rot. It is the sun. In Rasles one feels THE INDIAN emerging from within the pod of his isolation from eastern understanding, he is released AN INDIAN. He exists, he is--it is an AFFIRMATION, it is alive. (IAG, 121)

There was also Aaron Burr, who as a young man had been seduced by the Indian princess Jacataqua, the only female character in Williams' history who "gave to womanhood in her time, the form which bitterness of pioneer character had denied it" (IAG, 186). Burr carried his seduction--the contact he had made with the Indian, the female and the land--with him to Washington, where his fellow politicians, perhaps because women always surrounded him,

"said he was immoral." But if he was immoral:

He was, safely so, by the flesh. He found safety in that flesh and among its sturdy guardians--woman. Were they too idle in recognizing him? They loved him. Frivolous? He was perhaps the only one of the time who saw women, in the flesh, as serious, and they hailed and welcomed with deep gratitude and profound joy his serious knowledge. . . . The rest were frivolous with women. The rest denied them, condoned the female flesh, found them helpmates at best and at the worst, horses, cattle, provincial accessories, useful workers to make coffee and doughnuts--and to be left to go crazy on the farms for five generations after--that's New England, or they'd hide the bull behind the barn, so that the women would not think it knew the cows were--Bah, feudal dolls gone wrong, that's Virginia. Women? necessary but not noble, not the highest, not deliciously a free thing, apart, feminine, a heaven; afraid to delve in it save like so much dough. Burr found the spirit living there, free and equal, independent, springing with life . . . [The women] drank of him like water. (IAG, 204-205)

Daniel Boone, the foremost frontiersman of his day, accepted the land just as Père Rasles had:

Filled with the wild beauty of the New World to overbrimming so long as he had what he desired, to bathe in, to explore always more deeply, to see, to feel, to touch--his instincts were contented . . . And among all the colonists, like the Indian, the ecstasy of complete possession of the new country was his alone. . . . There must be a new wedding. But he saw and only he saw the prototype of it all, the native savage. . . . If the land were to be possessed it must be as the Indian possessed it. Boone saw the truth of the Red Man, not as an aberrant type, treacherous and anti-white to be feared and exterminated, but as the natural expression of the place, the Indian himself as "right," the flower of his world. (IAG, 137-138)

"What then is it like, America?" Fräulein von J. asks in "The Venus." And Dev Evans, né William Carlos Williams, finally replies by showing her an arrowhead.

Many of Williams' poems of this period--especially the poems about flowers and trees--are explicit efforts to realize the "new wedding" he recognized in the lives of Rasles, Burr and Boone. There is a kind of

double action in all these poems: in "Queen Anne's Lace," for example, woman is identified with the land, and Williams makes love to both. The poem becomes the record, then, of what Williams claims in "The Great Sex Spiral" is "man's only positive connexion with the earth . . . the sex function." In the poems where Williams most successfully makes contact with the earth, as in "The Wildflower" (CEP, 287), the last poem in Spring and All, he is able to escape the frustrations of the "mountain folk from Kentucky" no longer treating the earth as "excrement" and rejoicing in his own sexuality and savagery. What he needs, explicitly, is to make contact with the wild flower. The "white daisy / is not enough" because it is too much like "crowds" and "farmers / who live poorly." The daisy is too "white," too Puritan, as bourgeois and common as crowds and farmers. It implicitly supports impotent and love-sick America in its she-loves-me, she-loves-me-not melancholy. So Williams addresses the wildflower:

Black eyed susan
 rich orange
 round the purple core

 you
 are rich
 in savagery--

Arab
 Indian
 dark woman.

The wildflower calls up in him the same appreciation for the female and the land that Jacataqua called up in Aaron Burr. In another poem from Spring and All, "The Avenue of Poplars," Williams watches "the leaves embrace / in the trees." He knows then that

He who has kissed
 a leaf
 need look no further--

for this act draws man back to his own savage beginnings, as Williams recalls

prehistoric caves
in the Pyrennes--

the cave of
Les Trois Frères

But he recalls something else as well in "The Avenue of Poplars." "I am still with," he writes, "Gypsy lips pressed / to my own." This is a reference, I think, to an earlier poem in Spring and All, "Quietness" (CEP, 277):

one day in Paradise
a Gypsy

smiled
to see the blandness

of the leaves--
so many

so lascivious
and still

The word "still," in both "The Avenue of Poplars" and "Quietness," takes on an ambiguity which partially undermines the validity of Williams' return to savagery. Williams' desire to recover a savage state is a desire to return to a prelapsarian condition. And he knows that he is a postlapsarian man. In the context of Williams' Gypsy in Paradise there is nothing negative about the word "lascivious." But in the context of "The Avenue of Poplars," Williams' "ascent" into the leaves is simultaneously a "descent" into a modern world where the "lascivious" kiss is forbidden. In order to recover a prelapsarian world he must remain "still," for to say "lascivious" is to suggest connotations he does not mean. The world of the poplars must remain "a wordless / world," a world unnamed.

The poem, however, is an address, a communication, a conversation. The recovery of the land in "The Wildflower" is, in the context of "The Avenue of Poplars," revealed to be a fragile one. The question arises that if he addresses a wildflower, and by extension a woman, whether there is a woman--or anyone--who can understand. He is alone in his car in "The Avenue of Poplars." He dismisses the "crowds" in "The Wildflower." The very presence of the poem--the poem as communication reaching to its audience--asserts Williams' trust that there is someone to understand. But these poems, finally, reverberate with their own "quietness"; their atmosphere is like that in "The Petunia" (CEP, 424):

Purple!
for months unknown
but for
the barren sky.

A purple trumpet
fragile
as our hopes

We know the purple of "the barren sky" which surrounds us, but we ignore "the purple trumpet"--the flower, the land, the music which is the poem, our hopes unseen and unheard.

This sense of isolation ties Williams again to Rasles, Burr and Boone. Rasles was hated by the Puritans, and "they tried without ceasing to kill the offending Jesuit" (IAG, 127). Because Burr dared to attack the Puritan righteousness of America, he "was heavily censured by his time, immoral, traitorous and irregular" (IAG, 207). The price men like Boone had to pay for their "new wedding" with the land, was that although they had "made contact with the intrinsic elements of an as yet unrealized material of which the new country was made . . . [they] had no way to make their realization vocal. . . . They in themselves had achieved a culture

. . . which was of the first order, and which, at the same time cut them off from the others" (SE, 140-141). But this sense of alienation from society connects Williams especially to the fourth hero of In The American Grain, Edgar Allan Poe:

His greatness is in that he turned his back and faced inland, to originality, with the identical gesture of a Boone. And for that reason he is unrecognized . . . Poe must suffer by his originality. Invent that which is new, even if it be made of pine from your own yard, and there's none to know what you have done. It is because there's no name. This is the cause of Poe's lack of recognition. He was American. He was the astounding, inconceivable growth of his locality. Gape at him they did, and he at them in amazement. Afterward with mutual hatred; he in disgust, they in mistrust. It is only that which is under your nose which seems inexplicable. (IAG, 226)

Like the Williams of the flower and tree poems, Poe is trying to recover his prelapsarian origins. He is Adamic, a namer. And if both find their sustenance, and their greatness, in approaching language with the same "gusto" and "admiration" that Rasles discovered in Indian language, if they discover there the same "je ne sais quoi d'énergique" that Rasles discovered, they may as well be speaking in an Indian tongue, for America cannot understand. In fact they are speaking like Indians, and that is the trouble.

In other words, to make contact with the land, with the local, is to accept the Indian's place in the American tradition. In accepting his savagery, Williams accepts the role of antagonist to the onslaught of American "civilization." For "civilization is, again, dominated by the machine:

Deanimated, that's the word; something the sound of "metronome," a mechanical means; Yankee inventions. Machines were not so much to save time as to save dignity that fears the animate touch. It is miraculous the energy that goes into inventions here. Do you know that it now

takes just ten minutes [of labor] to put a bushel of wheat on the market from planting to selling, whereas it took three hours in our colonial days? That's striking. It must have been a tremendous force that would do that. That force is fear that robs the emotions; a mechanism to increase the gap between touch and thing, not to have a contact. (IAG, 177)

The machine Williams describes is like Duchamp's Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass), the mechanical bride separated forever from touch or contact with the bachelors below her, who themselves have been reduced to chocolate grinders and optical discs. And the situation Williams confronts is the same situation which Duchamp resolves by his "alternate version" of The Large Glass, that is, by the work constructed in secret in New York from 1946 to 1966 after Duchamp had become an American citizen: Etant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage.

Williams never knew Etant Donnés. No one did, for that matter, until after Duchamp's death. But he knew The Large Glass well--his friend Demuth called it "the great picture of our time"³¹--and in 1950, in his Autobiography, he would mourn the fact that Duchamp was "idling in a telephoneless Fourteenth Street garret in New York" (A, 318). Duchamp was, in fact, making Etant Donnés in this garret. That Williams and everyone else should think he was "idling" is part of the mystique of Duchamp's final masterpiece.³² The guise of Duchamp's idleness suggests a capitulation to the impossibility of the artist's communication and conversation with his world. What the presence of Etant Donnés suggests is the opposite. By keeping things secret, Duchamp could have it both ways, simultaneous silence and communication. This silence is mirrored in The Bride Stripped Bare and Etant Donnés taken individually;

in each the bachelors are forever separated from contact with the bride. And conversation is emphasized if we consider the two works as alternate versions of the same theme, as a kind of dialogue; together they define the space where contact is made. Williams knew The Large Glass, and it represented for him the divorce of the American people, a people enraptured of the machine, from their land. He never knew Etant Donnés, but in this work Duchamp discovered the same land that Williams wished his own people to discover. The resolution of the tension which the presence of Etant Donnés makes possible is the same resolution at which Williams would himself arrive.

Etant Donnés cannot be photographed, and perhaps the closest thing to a reproduction of it we have is the perceptive description by Octavio Paz, the Mexican poet and longtime admirer of Duchamp's work. Paz captures not only its beauty, but its ambiguity as well:

As everyone knows, it is located in the Philadelphia Museum beyond the large gallery where much of Duchamp's work is collected and where the Large Glass occupies the central spot. The visitor goes through a low doorway, into a room somewhat on the small side, completely empty. No painting on the plastered walls. There are no windows. In the far wall, embedded in a brick portal topped by an arch, there is an old wooden door, worm-eaten, patched, and closed by a rough crossbar made of wood and nailed on with heavy spikes. In the top left-hand corner there is a little window that has also been closed up. The door sets its material doorness in the visitor's way with a sort of aplomb: dead end. The opposite of the hinges and their paradoxes. But if the visitor ventures nearer, he finds two small holes at eye level. If he goes even closer and dares to peep, he will see a scene he is not likely to forget. First of all, a brick wall with a slit in it, and through the slit, a wide open space, luminous and seemingly bewitched. Very near the beholder--but also very far away, on the "other side"--a naked girl, stretched on a kind of bed or pyre of branches and leaves, her face almost completely covered by the blond mass of her hair, her legs open and slightly bent, the pubes strangely smooth in contrast to the splendid abundance of her hair, her right arm out of

the line of vision, her left slightly raised, the hand grasping a small gas lamp made of metal and glass. The little lamp glows in the brilliant three-o'clock-in-the-afternoon light of this motionless, end-of-summer day. Fascinated by this challenge to our common sense--what is there less clear than light?--our glance wanders over the landscape: in the background, wooded hills, green and reddish; lower down, a small lake and a light mist on the lake. An inevitably blue sky. Two or three little clouds, also inevitably white. On the far right, among some rocks, a waterfall catches the light. Stillness: a portion of time held motionless. The immobility of the naked woman and of the landscape contrasts with the movement of the waterfall. The silence is absolute. All is real and verges on banality; all is unreal and verges--on what?³³

As a work of art conceived, as Duchamp thought it was, "in the American grain," The Large Glass represents the Puritan love for the machine and the Puritan's fear of physical contact. Etant Donnés is also conceived "in the American grain." What differentiates Duchamp's nude sunbather from Matisse's is that access to Duchamp's nude is forever forbidden us. Because of our Puritan roots, we can never touch her; we can only be voyeurs. We pass from the room which houses The Large Glass into the room occupied by Etant Donnés. Duchamp stipulated this arrangement in his will.

Anne d'Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, in their introduction to Etant Donnés describe how the two works function together: "If there is a law informing the whole, it is Paradox, the resonance of apparently contradicting alternatives. . . . The great mythic theme of the elemental encounter between female and male, Bride and Bachelors, is inseparable from a series of speculations on the relationship of mind and matter. The Large Glass and Etant Donnés . . . would appear to be alternative modes for combining these themes."³⁴

Although The Large Glass is composed of forms that are recognizably machines, or parts of machines, the function these machines serve, how they operate, is enigmatic. The Large Glass is in fact a blueprint and

design, an abstraction, for a landscape beyond it. That is why it is etched on glass: so that we can see through it to that landscape. In alternate, but not necessarily paradoxical terms, as we shall see, The Large Glass, Duchamp said, "is like the hood of an automobile. That which covers the motor."³⁵ In a sense it represents an alternate dead end to the door we confront in Etant Donnés: the dead end of a purely visionary window, the dead end of abstraction. Etant Donnés, on the other hand, with its readymade waterfall, the reality of its twigs and bricks, the frightening fleshiness of its bride, is a realization of the landscape predicted by The Large Glass. But the machinery, the abstraction, of The Large Glass has been lost: in the stillness of the realized landscape, the visionary window which made the realization possible has been put to rest. If there is a real motor working in Etant Donnés--keeping the waterfall shimmering, the landscape lighted and the lamp lit, a motor Duchamp himself constructed--it paradoxically keeps things perpetually as they are. What we have here are the two poles of human experience--abstraction and realism--described as dead ends. Read The Large Glass as the abstraction of a motorless car ("the hood"), and Etant Donnés as a carless motor. A motor will go nowhere without a car, the car nowhere without its motor. The two are one work, and life we assume, the bride making contact with her bachelors, goes on somewhere in the passage between them, in that place where the abstract and the real converge. We look toward life through the window of one, and we are shut off from life by the door of the other.

The place in Duchamp's work, however, where the abstraction of The Large Glass and the realism of Etant Donnés make contact is in language,

that is, the language of the notes which make up the 1934 Green Box. These notes form a bridge between the two works, defining them both. The Green Box is an explication of The Large Glass and a projection of Etant Donnés. The title of Etant Donnés derives, in fact, from the "Preface" to the Green Box:

Preface

Being given 1^o--the waterfall
2^o--the illuminating gas,

we shall determine the conditions
for the instantaneous State of Rest (or allegorical appearance)
of a succession [an ensemble] of diverse facts
seeming to necessitate one another
by law, in order to isolate the sign
of the concordance between them, on the one hand,
This State of Rest (capable of all the innumerable eccentricities)
and, on the other hand, a choice of Possibilities
authorized by the law and also
bringing it about.³⁶ [all punctuation Duchamp's]

In The Large Glass, the waterfall and the gas are givens. They do not appear in the construction, though according to Duchamp, they inform it. We should be able to see this landscape through the window, but all we see in the window is a reflection of ourselves, our divorced condition, the machine.

In Etant Donnés, both the waterfall and gas are given being. In the former work, in the abstract design, we have "a choice of Possibilities"; in the latter, the concrete representation, a "State of Rest." "Take a Larousse dictionary," Duchamp writes in another note to the Green Box, "and copy out all the so-called 'abstract' words. i.e. those which have no concrete reference. Compose a schematic sign designating each of these words . . . These signs must be thought of as the letters of the new alphabet."³⁷

Let us consider The Large Glass and Etant Donnés as two letters of this new alphabet designating "abstraction" and "realism." Let us say, further,

that on the one hand we have the abstraction of the illuminating gas of the imagination, and on the other the reality of the waterfall. What then, is "the sign of the concordance between them?" It is the pendulum swing between them, the arc from abstract conception to concrete realization. That concordance is, in fact, the sign of the two letters joining together. In A l'Infinifif, a collection of notes Duchamp composed between 1912 and 1920, there is a note which describes the passage from the window pane of The Large Glass to the objects in Etant Donnés perhaps better than any other: "No obstinacy, ad absurdum, of hiding the coition through a glass pane with one or many objects of the shop window. The penalty consists in cutting the pane and in feeling regret as soon as possession is consummated."³⁸ The Large Glass might be said to be Duchamp's work of mental "coition," and Etant Donnés the consummation of his possession. The sign of the concordance, then, is the simple pleasure of existing and acting between abstraction and realism, mind and matter, between the two polar extremes which "necessitate one another by law." And the concordance is, furthermore, the pleasure of making notes, making concrete signs for abstract language and giving concrete meaning to abstract signs. The bridge between the concrete and the abstract rests in language itself, and the language of the Green Box in particular.

Duchamp's resolution in the language of the Green Box of the tension between abstraction and realism is the kind of resolution that Williams' work defines. Williams' major complaint about Gertrude Stein's prose, for instance, is that she falls too heavily on the abstract side of things:

Stein's pages have become like the United States viewed from an airplane--the same senseless repetitions, the endless

multiplications of toneless words, with these she has had to work.

No use for Stein to fly to Paris and forget it. The thing, the United States, the unmitigated stupidity, the drab tediousness of the democracy, the overwhelming number of the offensively ignorant, the dull nerve--is there in the artist's mind and cannot be escaped by taking a ship. She must resolve it if she can, if she is to be.

That must be the artist's articulation with existence.
(SE, 119)

Stein must descend from the heights of abstraction--where, though possibly she does not know it, her form mirrors the monotony of American existence--and "articulate" with "existence" itself. She must confront the "unmitigated stupidity" of America head on. Then, and only then, might her pages reflect something other than that same stupidity and monotony. Poe, on occasion, had the same problem: "With Poe words were figures; and old language truly, but one from which he carried over only the most elemental qualities to his new purpose; which was, to find a way to tell his soul. Sometimes [and as a result] he used words so playfully his sentences seem to fly away from sense, the destructive! with the . . . abandon, foreshadowed of a Gertrude Stein." But when Poe is at his best his "particles of language" are "clear as sand" (IAG, 221). His abstract investigation of the soul makes contact with the earth from which it springs and his writing is "the flower of a locality" (IAG, 231). At his best, Poe "articulates" with "existence" because his language is the authentic language of American existence.

Significantly, Poe abhorred much of what he saw in America, just as Williams abhorred the "deanimated" America of Puritanism and the machine. But, for Williams, this is Poe's strength. He contrasts him with Hawthorne: "what Hawthorne loses by his willing closeness to life of his locality in its vague humors; his lifelike copying of the New England melancholy; his

reposeful closeness to the town pump--Poe gains by abhorring" (IAG, 228). What Poe and Williams gain by abhorring the life of their people is what Duchamp gains in the passage between The Large Glass and Etant Donnés. These two works of art are perhaps more conscious of their audience than any two works of art in the century, and they abhor us: we are invited to look through a window and we do not understand what we see; we confront a door through which we cannot pass to the inviting scene within. Only Duchamp works in the landscape they describe, and Duchamp has to explain to us, in the Green Box, what that landscape is. If it is the landscape of our soul--which we have to look for beyond the window or see as voyeurs through a knothole--if we dare--Duchamp is telling us that we are cut off from our souls. He despises us for it, but in his notes--his language--he provides the path for the recovery of what we have lost. The Green Box is addressed to all of us. It is a program for action.

Poe's writing is, for Williams, a comparable plan of action. Abhorring the local conditions of Puritanical America, it nevertheless begins with those conditions. The greatest ambiguity of Duchamp's Large Glass is that if, as an abstraction, it fosters "a choice of Possibilities," it is also, but superficially, in a "State of Rest": the bachelors are forever cut off from the bride, both are frozen in glass. Likewise if Etant Donnés is as a concrete realization, in a "State of Rest," it is one choice among many, a single possibility which implies the existence of other possibilities, other actions. Poe's work thrives on this sense of possibility and activity. The American condition--which he abhors--is but one choice among many. Poe begins with the American language and strips it of its Puritan veneer. He begins with a "primitive awkwardness of diction, lack of polish,

colloquialism that is, unexpectedly, especially in the dialogues, much in the vein of Mark Twain" (IAG, 230), with "authentic particles, a thousand of which spring to mind for quotation" (IAG, 231), and then, having "taken apart and reknit [this language] with a view to emphasize, enforce and make evident, the method" (IAG, 231), Poe lets "the real business of composition show" (IAG, 230). What his abstract method, composition and form reveal is an alternative condition to the one which predominates in America. He debunks the notion that America need be what it is; it is only superficially in a state of rest. His stories reveal "a method springing so freshly from the local conditions which determine it," that the local conditions are "overshadowed . . . [by] the abstract . . . philosophy of their joining together" (IAG, 231). Out of abhorrence and out of defeat, Poe creates a new possibility, a new order, and a new world--a world unsuspected out of a world he detests.

Williams' self-appointed task, then, like Poe's, was to rebuild the American scene by presenting a new possibility for it. Men like Boone and Rasles had "married" themselves to a still animate land, but Williams' land is "civilized," "deanimated" by the machine which increases "the gap between touch and thing." The landscape that Boone and Rasles embraced is still present, and Williams deals with it in his flower and tree poems. Nevertheless that landscape is seen now, as is Duchamp's Large Glass, through a window which reflects the machinery of our world. In the 1927 poem "Paterson" (CEP, 233-235), the seed for the later epic, Williams reminds himself that he cannot alienate himself totally from this mechanized world:

never, in despair and anxiety
forget . . .
the grace and detail of
a dynamo--

There is something in this "deanimated" world which produces a beauty, and that beauty must simply be put to a better end. Williams presents then, a new possibility for the machine. In short, he would animate the machine. His new machine would be made of words instead of cold steel. In his 1944 "Author's Introduction" to The Wedge (CLP, 3-5), he writes: "There's nothing sentimental about a machine, and: A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words. When I say there's nothing sentimental about a poem I mean that there can be no part, as in any other machine, which is redundant." For Williams, "poetry is the machine which drives" experience forward, and as such, it becomes the life "we live and breathe by." "As in all machines," the poem's "movement is intrinsic . . . [and] this movement is distinguished in each case by the character of the speech from which it arises." There is, finally, nothing sentimental or redundant about the poem because the poem depends upon the verb "to make." The making of a poem, like the making of a machine, is an act of "formal invention," an act designed "to give language its highest dignity, its illumination in the environment to which it is native." In calling attention to the possibility that the poem might be a machine, that it might save us energy, spare us trouble, ease the conditions of our lives, Williams is, in fact, making a plea for the public's attention, and making a claim for his own usefulness as a poet. His claim is that something unsuspected--an invention, a new form--can be made out of the "character" or our "speech."

The poem as machine, then, demands a simultaneity of two things: formal beauty and local character, the abstract and the real. Without

local character, whatever beauty the poem possesses will be inauthentic. The world may be ugly, grotesque, and deformed, but whatever beauty must originate in the world. If it does not, it will be only what Williams damns in Spring and All as "the beautiful illusion" (I, 89). "Coarseness for its own sake is inexcusable," Williams wrote Marianne Moore in 1935, "but a Rabelasian sanity requires that the rare and the fine be exhibited as coming like everything else from the dirt" (SL, 155-156). In a poem called "To All Gentleness" (CLP, 24-29), Williams unites the landscape of the machine and the landscape of the flower: "the new and the unlikely, bound / indissolubly together in one mastery." The image which opens the poem is "a profusion / of pink roses" placed in "a cylindrical tank fresh silvered / upended on the sidewalk to advertise / some plumber's shop." This poem is the machine which allows conversation between the rose and the cylinder, the "rare and the fine" and the coarse, a conversation between what some had called, to Williams' dismay, the poetic and the anti-poetic:

they speak,
euphemistically, of the anti-poetic!
Garbage. Half the world ignored
.
.
.
Slender green
reaching up from sand and rubble (the
anti-poetic they say ignorantly, a
disassociation)
premissing the flower
without which, no flower.

The roses grow from the cylinder, and without the cylinder they would perish. "One by the other, alternates" the rose and the cylinder define the poles of a "valid juxtaposition." The cylinder, the anti-poetic, premises not only the flower, but the poem itself.

It was the city, the cylinder, dirt and garbage from which the flower

grows, which was the dominant feature of the twentieth-century landscape, and which Williams' poetry had to reflect if it was to make contact with the local and in that contact reveal new possibilities to the people who inhabit it. From the mid-'twenties on, Williams increasingly turns to the urban environment as a source for his poetry. His ability to do so reflects a growing ease with two notions he had promulgated as early as Improvisations: "After thirty years staring at one true phrase he discovered that its opposite was true also," he writes (I, 65); and "A poem can be made of anything" (I, 70). The city is an image--perhaps the best image we have--of the collision of values which Williams' first statement reflects, and the poem which is made of the city is testimony to the validity of his second statement. "From cubism and futurism, Duchamp and Schwitters, to the present," art critic William Seitz writes, "the proper backdrop . . . [for modern art has been] the multifarious fabric of the modern city--its random patchwork of slickness and deterioration, cold planning and liberating confusion, resplendent beauty and noxious squalor. The cityscape gives striking evidence of the world-wide collision of moralities and panaceas, facts and propagandas, and sets in relief the countless images--tender, comic, tragic, or drably neutral--of contemporary life."³⁹ And Williams, commenting on his choice of a city for the subject of the epic Paterson, which he began planning in the late 'twenties, would himself reflect Seitz's formulation: "The thing was to use the multiple facets which a city presented as representations for comparable facets of contemporary thought, thus to be able to objectify the man himself as we know him and love him and hate him."⁴⁰

He would describe the city, in the title to one poem, as being in a

state of "Perpetuum Mobile," (CEP, 384-390), almost too chaotic for the poem to describe, let alone raise to order. But, juxtaposed to this chaos--a perpetual "milling about," murders, robberies, garbage piling up in what he calls "the foulest / sink in the world"--is the rationale, the idea for the city itself. Again and again Williams repeats the phrase "for love!" against this backdrop of chaos, until the phrase takes on an almost brutal irony. The city, made originally

of love
and of
desire

for community and fellowship, the common good, has been lost. The real city is divorced from its abstract ideal. A later poem, "A Place (Any Place) to Transcend All Places," (CLP, 113-115) begins with this same sense of chaos, asking if "New York? That hodge-podge?" can possibly be raised into an ordered poem. The city has been built like a Puritan "church in New Hampshire," built of the land's "wood" to monstrous purpose. Although the city is composed as if it were "leaves filling, / making, a tree" the tree, the form, which it makes is a kind of chaotic hybrid:

not just leaves
leaves of one design that
make a certain design

but a tree in which "no two" leaves are "alike." Somewhere near the city however is "a / tree! Imagine it!" New York, finally, is "obscure / beyond belief," as obscene as Puritanism was for Williams, a city where although the people "talk . . . nothing is exchanged / unless that guff / can be retranslated." Still, at the end of the poem, he discovers the beginnings of that retranslation in something as

Obscene and
 abstract as excrement--
 that no one wants to own
 except the coolie
 with a garden of which
 the lettuce particularly
 depends on it--if you
 like lettuce, but
 very, very specially, heaped
 about the roots for nourish-
 ment.

In the coolie's activity, the multiple facets of the city are composed,
 and "New York / is dignified, created."

This discovery of the city's composition in the coolie's garden which
 ends "A Place (Any Place)" might well serve as a gloss for "The Red
 Wheelbarrow," and "The Red Wheelbarrow," a gloss for it. The coolie takes
 the most mundane thing in existence--the gross product of the city--and
 uses it to make his composition, his lettuce. Further his composition
depends upon that obscene excrement. What "depends upon" the mundane things
 Williams sees in the farmyard of "The Red Wheelbarrow" (CEP, 277) is
 likewise his composition, an ordering of experience in which

a red wheel
 barrow

glazed with rain
 water

beside the white
 chickens

is dignified and created. Conversely, the coolie's activity exemplifies
 Williams' belief that the pastoral serenity he had discovered in poems
 like "The Red Wheelbarrow" could be discovered as well rising up out of
 the urban environment.

The poem "Between Walls" (CEP, 343) is the clearest example of this

discovery of a new form and a new possibility in the American cityscape. On the one hand, Williams partakes of the coolie's active creation and makes a thing of beauty out of the city's refuse. On the other hand, the poem's formal design, its composition, is almost identical to that of "The Red Wheelbarrow":

the back wings
of the

hospital where
nothing

will grow lie
cinders

in which shine
the broken

pieces of a green
bottle

Out of the decomposed, fragmented and nearly complete void of the modern landscape, a poem is born. From a broken bottle, the Phoenix springs. As Williams would later write, any ideal to which poem and poet aspire--the ideal of discovering beauty in the urban environment for instance--"must change; it must reappear in another form, to remain permanent. It [the ideal and its realization in the poem] is the image of the Phoenix. To stop the flames that destroy the old nest prevents the rebirth of the bird itself. All things rot and stink, nothing stinks more than an old nest, if not recreated" (SE, 208). To recreate the Phoenix out of cinders between hospital walls, to recreate it in the form of a broken bottle, to make flower that which seems incapable of flower, this is Williams' dream. Each of the multiple facets of the city, he would write in another poem ("The Flower," CEP, 236-238), is "a petal, colorless and without form."

But "at its heart (the stamen, pistel / etc.)" the city/flower

is a naked woman, about 38, just

out of bed, worth looking at both for
her body and her mind and what she has seen

and done. She it was put me straight
about the city

At the heart of the formless city is a naked woman, and in conversation--
contact--with her, Williams begins to make form of the city. Each "petal"
of the city is organized by her presence at its center, and Williams'
conversation with her posits the possibility of inventing "a machine made
of words," a new formal invention in which language is given "its highest
dignity, its illumination in the environment to which it is native."

Williams' interest in the cityscape is only surpassed, in fact, by his
interest in conversation and language itself, the language of which his new
machine would be made. It was, after all, from "authentic particles" of
language that Poe had formed his "new possibility." Although a poem like
"A Place (Any Place)" is concerned with the discovery of the "heart" of
New York City, the purpose of this discovery is to "retranslate" the "guff"
which passes for conversation in New York into something "dignified." In
an interview conducted by Stanley Koehler for The Paris Review just before
his death, Williams explained that the short stories which preoccupied
him throughout the 'thirties were attempts to place himself "in continuation
of a common conversation" with the people of his native environment. "I
wasn't interested in impressing them with my power of speech, but only with
the seriousness of my intentions toward them. I had to make them come
alive," he said. Williams strove in these stories to realize the same
"conversation as design" which he had so admired in Juan Gris' painting.

The stories, he said, "were written in the form of a conversation which I was partaking in. We were in it together."⁴¹ The design of these conversations, Williams believed, their realization of form in the "American idiom," was the basis for making the formal beauty of the poem accessible to the people, and was therefore a way "to make them come alive."

Just as the city held at its heart the principles upon which a new possibility for America might be founded, the "American idiom," the language of the city, possessed its own "hints toward newness." The introductory passage to Williams' 1934 tribute to Alfred Stieglitz underscores, however, the problems inherent in discovering the "heart" of the local language. When the English first landed on American shores, Williams writes, "they saw birds with rusty breasts and called them robins. . . . But at a cost. For what they saw were not robins. They were thrushes only vaguely resembling the rosy, daintier English bird. . . . Blur. Confusion." The problem is that although "a new language might have sprung up with the new spectacle and the new conditions," it did not (SE, 134). Old words were used to describe new things. In his poetry, Williams directs us to the awareness that will allow us to recognize "American speech as distinct from English speech," that the word "robin" is part of a language "full of . . . hints toward newness" (SE, 289-290). Noah Webster was one of Williams' heroes because his dictionary, based on American usage as opposed to English usage, represented a "radically subversive thesis" against the notion that Americans speak English (SE, 136). And he considered H. L. Mencken's The American Language, which he reviewed in 1936, to be a "piece of genius" because "the book is primarily of words, slang, proper names; words having Indian, Spanish, Irish, even Chinese derivations--

as if the whole of the words in the world had broken loose from books and come deluging upon us to realize themselves in a new condition, under new circumstances, to form a new language" (SE, 171, 173). Like the American photographer, he says in the Stieglitz essay, the American poet's task is to "appraise the real through the maze" (SE, 143) and discover the American language despite the superficial appearance that it is English.

To borrow a phrase from the aesthetics of photography, Williams resorts again and again in the poetry to the "straight" presentation of the American speech act in an effort to rediscover the "hints toward newness" which he believes lie at its heart. It is as if, instead of using a camera to empirically record the objects of the American scene, Williams uses a tape recorder to empirically record the American idiom. His objective is the same as the photographer's: to reveal the formal character of the "local" or individual utterance, to reveal the universal in the local, the abstract design in the particular "facet" of experience. At the conclusion of "Sunday" (CEP, 109-110), Williams records what he can hear of this conversation:

"Over Labor Day they'll
be gone"
"Jersey City, he's the
engineer--" "Ya"
"Being on the Erie R.R.
is quite convenient"

"No I think they're--"
"I think she is. I think--"
"German-American"
"Of course the Govern--"

These voices are part of the "sounds" which make up the day, the experience: the "clatter of metal in a pan," "a splash of water," the "clap of a door," and the "scrape of a chair / clickaty tee." Clatter, splash, clap, clickaty

tee, these voices describe "a tune nameless as Time," and a tune as American as the Sunday comics.

But the American idiom does not become poetry simply by virtue of the fact that it "sounds." There is a difference between mere saying and poetic saying. The question becomes, by what operation is saying elevated to poetry. The question, in the terms of Williams' own poetry, is by what right does his famous note apologizing for eating the plums become something more than a note, by what right does something called "This is Just to Say" (CEP, 354) become a poem? In the end, this is the same question that Williams had to ask himself when he decided to write poetry about the city. And the answer is the same: unless it is formed, unless its form is revealed, it is not poetry. The poem's intrinsic necessity is to design the conversation it records.

As early as "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," Williams had recognized that although the poem would be constructed of "all temperaments, all phases of our environment, physical as well as spiritual" as Whitman's was, it equally "must be governed," and it was in the discovery of this governing principle that the poem and America would be "rebuilt." In the 'thirties and 'forties, in the poems which empirically record the American idiom as it is spoken--in the four separate "Detail" poems (CEP, 427-428), in "At the Bar" (CEP, 431), "To Greet a Letter Carrier" (CEP, 432), and in "Après le Bain" (CLP, 196)--Williams discovered what he believed this governing principle to be. In the first place, these poems exist in a poetical space which isolates them from and raises them above normal discourse. Selected from the discourse of daily activity, they have been framed and given a transcendent presence, that is, their constitution as

poems implies that they have crossed a threshold of discontinuity which separates them from "normal" utterance. Thus, when we confront this "Detail":

Doc, I bin lookin' for you
I owe you two bucks.

How you doin'?

Fine. When I get it
I'll bring it up to you.

two separate "readings" are necessarily provoked. In the first place, we accept the poem for what it is--a humorous anecdote which in some way epitomizes a country doctor's relationship with his patients. As a representative "detail" from the doctor's experience, the poem establishes a kind of priority in life where a man's respect for his doctor is secondary to his own needs. But at this point, our reading begins to seem strained, to reach beyond the simplicity of the poem itself and to elevate it in a way that is antagonistic to its own matter-of-factness. Poems like this "detail" call to task our literary competence, the assumptions about reading poetry which we bring to the poem. In this case, in order to regard Williams' dialogue as a poem we have decided it is "representative" of a way of life. We have taken it as a symbol. We have done this in order to allow ourselves to accept Williams' implicit assumption that this "detail" is a poem. Nevertheless, the poem's matter-of-factness draws attention to the self-conscious reading we have brought to it, and it is this self-consciousness of our own activity as readers, our own symbol-mongering, that provides the framework for a second, perhaps more satisfactory, reading. The poem, in effect, asks why it is a poem. And the inescapable answer is that it is a poem because it is made, structured,

like a poem. It exists in poetical space.⁴²

This second "reading" is not as simple as it might at first appear, for it encompasses the terms of Williams' dialectic--speech and poetry, reality and abstraction--in a single embodiment, and yet maintains the separate identity of each. Furthermore, it draws our attention to the question of the nature of poetry itself, that is, to the privileges language as poetry holds over language as speech. Although this poem--like all poems--is made of language, language is not poetical unless it occurs in poetical space. The poem posits all language as potential language for poetry. In the poem "Fragment" (CEP, 453), itself a recorded conversation, Williams explains what his records of conversation accomplish:

My God, Bill, what have you done?

What do you think I've done? I've
opened up the world.

Where did you get them? Marvellous
beautiful!

Where does all snot come from? Under
the nose.

Yea-uh?

--the gutter, where everything comes
from, the manure heap.

Under our noses there is, to borrow Duchamp's phrase, "a choice of possibilities." We can leave the American idiom in "the gutter," as part of "the manure heap," or we can elevate it to poetry. As poetry it becomes "marvellous / beautiful," and in his choice to elevate the idiom to poetry, Williams has in fact "opened up the world."

More importantly, the "Detail" poems underscore the discontinuity between language (mere saying) and poetry (poetical saying), that is, a

discontinuity between utterance and utterance given the form of poetry. If we take the poem as a representation of this discontinuity, the inadequacy of our first symbolic "reading" is exposed. For our first reading depends, like utterance, on the establishment of a limiting context, an implicit narrative or life, in order to reveal its signification. The idea that the poem is a "detail" provokes, of course, this contextual effort, the urge to see it as a part of a larger experience. This effort to discover a context in which to place the poem denies, however, the poem's integrity. The idea that the poem is a poem, above and beyond the fact that it is a detail, establishes it as a text independent of the necessity for a specific context. Williams calls these lines simply "Poem" (CEP, 340) for the same reason:

As the cat
 climbed over
 the top of

 the jamcloset
 first the right
 forefoot

 carefully
 then the hind
 stepped down

 into the pit of
 the empty
 flowerpot

Manifestly a group of details without context (and for which we cannot establish any adequate context), the poem describes not so much the activity of the cat as the activity of the poem itself. As a text, the poem fills, and rises out of, "the empty / flowerpot," and moves as "carefully" as the cat, slowly and almost word by word. In Book Five of Paterson, in an interview with Mike Wallace of CBS which he incorporates into the poem,

Williams rejects a poem by E. E. Cummings as poetry because he "can't understand it." The poem reads:

(im) c-a-t (mo)
b,i;l:e

FallleA
ps!fl
Oattumbli

sh?dr
IftwhirlF
(UI) (lY)
&&&

(P, 224)

But Cummings is demonstrating in a more radical way what Williams' "Poem" demonstrates. The poem, deciphered, reads: "I'm cat, mobile, fall, leaps, float, tumblish, drift, whirl, fully, etc." Cummings is drawing attention to the difference his poem's typography makes in our ability to understand even simple language. The poem possesses the power to transform language. In the case of Cummings' poem language has nearly been destroyed, but it has been changed, just as Williams insists language "must change . . . reappear in another form, to remain permanent" (SE, 208). The privilege of poetic activity is that it draws attention to itself, to its form, to the fact that a "Poem" has been made, to the discontinuity between undifferentiated space and poetical space.

Poetic space, in short, is a visual as well as aural space. Lifting the American idiom into the poem involves more than simply recording, as in the poem "Sunday," the idiom's sounds. In I Wanted to Write a Poem, Williams describes the impact that the publication of The Complete Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams 1906-1938 had on the subsequent development of his poetry:

The Collected Poems gave me the whole picture, all I had gone through technically to learn about the making of a poem. I could look at the poems as they lay before me. I could reject the looseness of the free verse. Free verse wasn't verse at all to me. All art is orderly. Yet the early poems disturbed me. They were too conventional, too academic. Still, there was orderliness. My models, Shakespeare, Milton, dated back to a time when men thought in orderly fashion. I felt that modern life had gone beyond that; our poems could not be contained in the strict orderliness of the classics. The greatest problem was that I didn't know how to divide the poem into what perhaps my lyrical sense wanted. Free verse was not the answer. From the beginning I knew that the American language must shape the pattern; later I rejected the word language and spoke of the American idiom--this was a better word than language, less academic, more identified with speech. As I went through the poems I noticed many brief poems, always arranged in couplet or quatrain form. I noticed also that I was peculiarly fascinated by another pattern: the dividing of the little paragraphs in lines of three. I remembered writing several poems as quatrains at first, then in the normal process of concentrating the poem, getting rid of redundancies in the line--and in the attempt to make it go faster--the quatrain changed into a three line stanza, or a five line stanza became a quatrain, as in:

The Nightingales

<u>Original Version</u>	<u>Revised Version</u>
My shoes as I lean unlacing them stand out upon flat worsted flowers under my feet	My shoes as I lean unlacing them stand out upon flat worsted flowers
Nimble the shadows of my fingers play unlacing over shoes and flowers.	Nimble the shadows of my fingers play unlacing over shoes and flowers.

See how much better it conforms to the page, how much better it looks. (IWWP, 65-66, my emphasis)

Although Williams' revision is an attempt to get "rid of redundancies in the line," a concentration of the poem's particular details, his awareness that the revised version "looks" better has nothing whatever to do with the poem's subject matter. In his 1936 essay, "How to Write," he had attempted to describe what he called the "two great phases of writing." The first was "the anarchical phase" in which the writer must "forget all rules, forget

all restrictions" and which "has no connection to ordered society." The second is the phase of "intelligence" and occurs because "once the writing is on the page it becomes an object . . . definite words on a piece of paper." The writer then "attacks" this object, not in order to make it "conform to rules" but so that whatever inherent rules the object possesses "should be made clear." These inherent rules, Williams writes, are the rules which govern "the personality speaking, the middle brain, the nerves, the glands, the very muscles and bones of the body itself speaking."⁴³ Williams does not admit it in "How to Write," but perhaps the inherent rule which most closely approximates his own "personality speaking" is the urge for order, the realization he comes to in his review of the poems-turned-objects assembled in the 1938 Collected Poems that "all art is orderly." Both Williams' reaction to the publication of Collected Poems and the essay "How to Write" indicate that the realization of order or design in the poem takes place in what we might call a set of conditions which is discontinuous, although perhaps simultaneous, with the realization (or writing) of the poem's material. The poem is essentially the product of two separate activities: one the ungovernable and anarchic activity of making contact with the world, the other the realization of order out of this contact. The first is the activity of realism. The second is the activity of abstraction.

The abstract form the poem assumes, then, is the realization of inherent rules in the anarchy of the "speaking," or mere saying, which it records. This speaking is, of course, a speaking in the American idiom. "I know," he says, "that the American language must shape the pattern." This discovery of pattern is central in many of Williams' poems, and the

difficulties that this discovery entails are nowhere more apparent than in the 1948 "Two Pendants: For the Ears" (CLP, 214-229). The poem has been brilliantly analyzed by Neil Myers, who notes that Williams' determination "to make the language / record it [the particulars of experience] / facet to facet" is the source, in this poem at least, of Williams' despair.⁴⁴ The only thing Myers fails to take into account is Williams' desire to formally design these details, a desire which is the source of Williams' salvation. If, as Myers notes and the epigraph to the poem's first section suggests, "the particulars of morning are more to be desired than night's vague images," the particulars of morning happen to be the particulars of his mother's death and are a nightmare in themselves. The poem is founded in crisis, the crisis of an Easter Week in which the despair of Williams' dying mother becomes the poet's own:

Don't go. I am unhappy.

About what? I said.

About what is what.

Williams cannot make "what is what" disappear just as he cannot respond adequately to his mother's plea:

Can't you give me
something to make me disappear
completely, said she sobbing--but
completely!

No I can't do that
Sweetheart (You God damned belittling
fool, said I to myself)

The poem's first nightmare, the night-vision of the crowd huddled underground in terror of the killer tiger, is a scene in which Williams can "make out nothing clearly" and so he is "helpless." This "dream" is supplanted by the view from Williams' bathroom window, a view in which "everything is

clear," a view of his garden "marked (plotted) by the squares / and oblongs of the flower beds" where the flowers will eventually blossom "in rows / irregularly." The first section concludes with the reassuring and redeeming recognition of "the characteristic shape" of a "battered watering can." When Williams turns, in the second section, "Elena," to a recording of the conversation surrounding his mother's death, this "characteristic shape" is apparently lost in the sheer bulk of the poem's range of detail. This chaotic record of "speaking," which records "what is what" as conscientiously and clearly as the description of the garden in the first section, apparently stands in direct contrast to the garden description. But it is only an apparent contrast, for the second section begins to look, on the page, like the garden Williams describes: "squares / and oblongs . . . in rows, irregularly." The implication, certainly justified by the poem's Easter setting, is that the discovery of a "characteristic shape" is all that is needed to rescue this pattern from its apparent chaos, a shape which, just as a watering can will promote the blossoming of flowers, will promote the blossoming of the poem. This is the salvation which the "record of language" implies.

Yet, all in all, it is the absence of "characteristic shape" in the "Elena" section of "Two Pendants" which accounts for the undeniable despair of the poem, its dominating nightmare quality. If the poem's lines fall into "rows /irregularly," the oblongs and squares which spatially and visually compose the "Elena" section are themselves irregular. The poem possesses no reassuring and "characteristic" stanzaic shape, anything which, in the midst of its recording of the chaotic and particular details of morning, will act as a counterpoint to the chaos itself. Williams has,

in short, made a poem which, as the title implies, is solely "for the ears." Interestingly enough, the one moment that Williams finds himself at ease in the poem is that moment when he looks out the window of his bathroom and sees shapes, forms, design. "Overlooking the / garden" he no longer can "hear" the world's "howls." His lines succeed in recording the irregular length of aural speech. His stanza must reflect a regular spatial shape which counterpoints the chaos of speech. In other words, he must discover a visual form which makes an ordered poetical saying out of the irregularity of mere saying, and simultaneously reflects and records both.

The poetic form by which Williams synthesized visual order and aural irregularity is the triadic variable foot of his late poetry. As he would describe it in 1946, it is based on "a line as loose as Whitman's, but measured as his was not."⁴⁵ The inspiration for the triadic variable foot can be seen to originate both in the ordered stanzaic form of the brief poems and in the stanzaic arrangement, usually much looser, of poems which "record the language" like the "Detail" poems or the "Elena" section of "Two Pendants." The triadic variable foot is a formal synthesis of both. The brief poems arranged in two-, three- or four-line stanzas have the advantage of "looking" like poetry. The poems that record the language "facet to facet" are patterns "shaped" by the American idiom. To the eye, they appear much looser, their stanzaic pattern determined usually by the unit of statement; that is, a stanza is a unit of speech, the record of a complete utterance.

Williams described the 'thirties as "a time when I was working hard for order, searching for a form for the stanzas, making them little units,

regular, orderly. The poem 'Fine Work With Pitch and Copper' [CEP, 368] is really telling about my struggle with verse" (IWWP, 57). The poem is literally about roofing a house. Before the "flat roof" of the house can be gravelled, the top edge of the masonry wall, the "coping" must be edged with pitch and copper in order to waterproof the roof. In other words, the roof must be framed before "the sacks / of sifted stone" can be "opened and strewn." If this necessity of house-making is extended to poem-making, Williams is positing that the poem must be framed, that this frame must be composed of regular and measured units (like "the copper in eight / foot strips"), and that each unit must be "beaten lengthwise" so that when the poet/carpenter "runs his eye along it" its shape will fit into the final pattern. Similarly the sacks of gravel, the material of which the roof/poem will be made, must rest in their sacks until the framing pattern is completed. It is not surprising that this material rests in "fleckless light," for if as Williams wrote in an earlier poem

It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off

it is only after the material is distributed about the roof that these flecks of stone will be exposed to the light, "separately in unison" to make a roof and a poem.

Now, what is interesting about "Fine Work in Pitch and Copper" is that although it "looks" like a poem just as a house, before its roofing is completed, looks like a house, the poem implies that "the fine work" of measuring the line waits to be completed. Williams had recognized the importance of the overall frame or order at least as early as "The Red Wheelbarrow" where the poem's formal organization determines the importance

we attach to it, drawing our attention to the verbal relationships we might otherwise ignore. The rationale for the stanza divisions in "The Red Wheelbarrow" is clearly based on the idea of "phrase," and the second line of each stanza is in turn the word which completes the phrase and upon which the phrase depends. In effect, this pattern is achieved through a careful consideration of the inherent shape of the "American idiom." Curiously, when Williams attempts to empirically "record" the language "facet to facet" in later poems, this characteristic and orderly shape achieved in "The Red Wheelbarrow" stanza is generally lost, so that in "Two Pendants," for instance, the stanza indicates, as in the paragraphing of dialogue in prose, simply who is speaking. The stanza is one line or many, depending upon the length of the particular speech act Williams records. The stanza is literally "beaten lengthwise." Compared to the stanzaic arrangement of "Two Pendants," the ordered stanzaic arrangement of "The Red Wheelbarrow" seems gratuitous: "The Red Wheelbarrow" is ordered by the happy coincidence that all four "phrases" happen to be more or less the same length, but the "phrases which make up the American idiom empirically recorded "facet to facet" simply do not reflect this order.

The idea that utterance possesses length, however variable, is a notion that allows Williams finally to order what appears impossible to order. For the idea of length implies empirical measurement, the idea that a measuring is taking place. "Measure serves us as the key," he would write in 1955. "We can measure between objects; therefore, we know that they exist" (SL, 331). He had forwarded the same notion seven years earlier in the University of Washington lecture: "The subject matter of the poem is always phantasy--what is wished for, realized in the 'dream'

of the poem--but . . . the structure confronts something else." In a poem's structure "we come into contact with reality" and "the only reality we can know is MEASURE" (SE, 281, 283). But measure is complicated, as Williams notes in the same lecture by the mutability and ambiguity of existence: "How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity, affecting our very conception of the heavens about us of which the poets write so much, without incorporating its essential fact--the relativity of measurements--into our own category of activity: the poem" (SE, 283). In order to deal adequately with his world, Williams needs "a relatively stable foot, not a rigid one" (SE, 340). Each line in Williams' later poetry represents, then, a "foot" or a beat, a unit of measure, but one capable of reflecting the essential fact of modern existence--relativity. He would describe how this unit of measure functions in a 1954 letter to Richard Eberhart:

If we keep in mind the tune which the lines (not necessarily the words) make in our ears, we are ready to proceed.

By measure I mean musical pace. . . .

By its music shall the best modern verse be known and resources of the music. The refinement of the poem, its subtlety, is not to be known by the elevation of the words but--the words don't so much matter--by the resources of the music.

To give you an example from my own work--not that I know anything myself about what I have written:

(count):--not that I ever count when writing but, at best, the line must be capable of being counted, that is to say measured--(believe it or not). --At that I may, half consciously, even count the measure under my breath as I write.--

(approximate example)

- (1) The smell of the heat is boxwood
- (2) when rousing us
- (3) a movement of the air

- (4) stirs our thoughts
 (5) that had no life in them
 (6) to a life, a life in which

(or)

- (1) Mother of God! Our Lady!
 (2) the heart
 (3) is an unruly master:
 (4) Forgive us our sins
 (5) as we
 (6) forgive

- (7) those who have sinned against

Count a single beat to each numeral. You may not agree with my ear, but that is the way I count the line. Over the whole poem it gives a pattern to the meter that can be felt as a new measure. (SL, 326-327)

Once again Williams is taking advantage of our literary competence, for his "new measure" defies all traditional metrical exegesis.⁴⁶ Seeking a metric in the poem, which is superficially absent, we are forced to discover a new conception of meter. Any given line possesses its own particular rhythm but this rhythm can in no way be generalized into a traditional metric. The only consistent aspects to Williams' "metric" is metrical inconsistency. On the other hand, as the last sentence of the Eberhart letter suggests, "over the whole poem" we can feel a "meter," the "new measure." Williams creates a sense of consistency, and creates it by the pattern of repetition into which he arranges his variable lines. Although this arrangement is generally three-stepped groups, the differing formal arrangements of the poems which make up the late "Some Simple Measures in the American Idiom and the Variable Foot" (PB, 47-52) reveal that any pattern will do. What is important is that in pattern, the line, or variable foot, does in fact relinquish whatever traditional metric or seeming lack of metric it might possess to the larger pattern, and this pattern in turn enforces the idea that each line is equal--whatever its length--to the others in the poem. In his interview with Stanley Koehler,

Williams helps us to understand how this pattern operates. In a discussion of "The Descent," (PB, 73-74), which Williams published as a separate poem, interpolated into Paterson, and claimed to be the first example of the variable foot at work in his poetry, Koehler states: "The appearance of this poem on the page suggests you were conscious of it as a thing--something for the eye." Williams replies: "Yes, very good. I was conscious of making it even. I wanted it to read regularly. . . . The total effect is very important."⁴⁷ In essence the overall effect of the poem's visual pattern, its "characteristic shape," is to equalize or make "even" the uneven dissimilarity of the poem's lines. And the pattern of repetition that this shape establishes makes each line, over the whole poem, seem "a single beat" that is, a unit of measure equal to the other units of measure in the poem.

The device of the variable foot in pattern solves a number of problems for Williams. Since the length of each "foot" is variable, the line can legitimately derive from the American idiom. Each line can be an empirical and realistic record of that idiom, and need not distort it. When the line is put in pattern with other lines, however, its irregularity becomes an aspect of a larger orderliness, an abstraction. But this larger order in no way denies the individual line's inherent disorder. Both order and disorder, abstraction and realism, occur simultaneously. If "from disorder (a chaos) / order grows" (CEP, 460), and if, as Williams put it in his 1937 review of Wallace Stevens' Man With the Blue Guitar and Other Poems, here we can see "a meter discovering itself in the language,"⁴⁸ what is equally obvious is that poetic order and meter are made up of disorder and ametricality. The poem is a conversation between reality and abstraction

and is the sign of the concordance between them. Like Duchamp's "hinge" art and his double vision of the "bride" (the abstract Large Glass and the realistic Etant Donnés), the poem is a double action in which the demands of empirical reality and the demands of the abstracting mind act "separately in unison."

The patterned variable foot, in the end, represents the revolution in poetic form, and in turn poetic content, which in 1939 he had seen as an absolute necessity:

The mutability of the truth, Ibsen said it. Jefferson said it. We should have a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth has to be redressed, re-examined, reaffirmed in a new mode. There has to be new poetry. But the thing is that the change, the greater material, the altered structure of the inevitable revolution must be in the poem, in it. Made of it. It must shine in the structural body of it. (SE, 271)

Paterson is the embodiment of this revolution. Its "double action" is asserted at the outset of its Preface:

To make a start,
out of particulars
and make them general, rolling
up the sum

it opens, asserting the importance of beginning in reality. But, a few lines later, Williams asserts the value of beginning in abstraction--"from mathematics to particulars"--and both are the way "to Paterson" (P, 5):

it can't be
otherwise--an
interpenetration, both ways. Rolling
up! obverse, reverse:
the drunk the sober; the illustrious
the gross; one.

The poem is an "interpenetration, both ways," a conversation between abstraction and reality. The poem even represents the "ten years" revolution which Williams believed necessary in America. Initially conceived as a

four-part narrative--"I took the river as it followed its course down to the sea Each part of the poem was planned as a unit complete in itself,--reporting the progress of the river" (IWWP, 73)--the first part was published in 1946, and the next three books soon followed. But in 1958 Paterson revolted against itself: a fifth book appeared, shattering this narrative structure completely. And finally, it is in Paterson II that Williams discovered the variable foot, the device which would free him to realize in "the structural body" of the poem "the mutability of truth." In a moment of despair, at a moment when it seems that all a man can do is "chatter of his doom" these lines, and the pattern which these lines anticipate, provoke "a reversal / of despair":

No defeat is made up entirely of defeat--since
 the world it opens is always a place
 formerly
 unsuspected. A
 world lost
 a world unsuspected
 beckons to new places. (P, 78)

"Now I had it," Williams would later say of these lines, "a sea change" (IWWP, 83).

Chapter IV

The Achievement of Paterson

When in an airplane America is there underneath,
the symmetry America has there underneath is one
that although there are no more Indians red
Indians living here, the symmetry of living the
way they did is still here. And the Indians
moved around, so does the American symmetry when
it is there underneath and it is clear. It is a
country made in which to move around.

--Gertrude Stein
"The Capital and the Capitals
of the United States of America"

In December of 1951, William Carlos Williams was invited to address a dinner meeting of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Three years previously the Institute had awarded him the Loines Award for Poetry on the merits of the first two books of Paterson alone. Now, with his life's work concluded--the Autobiography had just been published, and so too the fourth, and for the moment, final book of Paterson--the invitation was a further tribute to his accomplishment. It was a moment to sum up that accomplishment, and to chart, perhaps, the directions that accomplishment might lead. The subject of his lecture that evening was what he called generally "The American Spirit in Art," but more particularly he talked of the "impasse" between modern art and its public, an impasse rooted, he knew, in modern art's "obscurantism" and abstraction. "In art," Williams told his audience, "the time-drift favors America. . . . The obscurity of the modern poem as well as abstraction in the pictorial arts are however both the children of that time-drift which has brought our cultural pattern,

what we call America, to the fore. We have only to devote ourselves to them to realize their possibilities and make them ours." He wished, he said, to "take up the proposal that the abstract in painting was inevitable for us and that the [obscure] modern poem must be our typical resort."¹

The proposal Williams took up in this talk, whether or not he recognized it at the time, was a proposal for Paterson V, a continuation of the first four books of Paterson and the realization of what in those books had been only a dream. In speaking of the inevitability of abstraction in modern art, he was speaking of the inevitability of Paterson V as well. He told his audience, as he seems to have told every audience in those years, the Hartpence story, Hartpence declaring, "that Madame . . . straightening and looking at her, that is paint." It is in this story, Williams said again, "that we begin to say that it is no longer what you paint or what you write about that counts but how you do it: how you lay on the pigment, how you place the words to make a picture or a poem." From this story "through cubism, Matisse to Motherwell, the ultimate step is . . . gesture."² It is in the painting of "such a one as Motherwell, the abstractionist, who says that the whole occupation of painting is a matter of the relationship between pigment and the surface to which it is applied" that "the excitements of all art and all thought" are first realized. In abstract painting such as his "we do not know what savannas, what elemental forests, what seas of the white whale we shall next be called upon to penetrate."³ "Only by a multiplication of the gestures of art," he declared, "does any man show himself to be alive on the earth." The "gesture" of which Motherwell's art is representative, his placement of pigment on the canvas,

drives us to believe that we are alive (something worth saving) now, here--as others have lived in days past--or as others, we hope, have lived in the past, of whom we are jealous that they may have known and experienced more than we. We too, we may say, having an art of our own, having a corn dance, are alive!⁴

The work of art, this "corn dance," is "a repository for the perplexities of mind which surround us on all sides":

[It] gives the concerns of man a tactile reality. . . . It makes the unknown a form which eyes, ears, nose, mouth and fingers can experience; even nothingness at the hands of the artist becomes a thing, "a thing of beauty," if you will.

Speaking to the high school pupils of my suburb I told them: Our heads are oysters. Take the oyster! A grain of sand enters its secret domain, in other words, between its shells. The poor oyster (living perhaps in Greenwich Village) unable, for cosmic reasons, such as not being able to spit it out, to get rid of its torment, frets over it, rolling it back and forth until, miracle of miracles, it makes of it a beautiful thing, a pearl! That is the artist at work!⁵

Williams was speaking of works of art such as Motherwell's 1949 The Voyage, painted after the poem by Baudelaire which opens "true voyagers are those who leave for the sake of leaving" and concludes "to the depths of the unknown to find the new."⁶ In a 1946 statement called "Beyond the Aesthetic," Motherwell had written that the artist's "task is to find a complex of qualities whose feeling is just right--veering toward the unknown and chaos, yet ordered and related in order to be apprehended."⁷ His Elegy to the Spanish Republic XXXIV, seemingly a disturbed and purely imaginative design in black and white, can also be seen as "the phallus and 'cojones' of a sacrificial bull hung on the whitewashed wall,"⁸ or the remains of a Spanish Republican executed by the firing squad against some other anonymous wall. In The Voyage perhaps we can detect the sun and the moon, perhaps a sailboat, set into a seascape. In both, we are balanced delicately between the unknown and its recognition, chaos and order, and in the Elegy it is

exactly as if, taking the "torment" of the bull ring, Motherwell, "miracle of miracles, . . . makes of it a beautiful thing."

Through four books of Paterson, Williams had allowed himself to concentrate so much on the grains of sand which tormented him that he writes at one point in Book Four, "What I miss . . . is the poetry, the pure poem of the first parts" (171). The poetry of the first parts of Paterson had been lost in Williams' attempt to embrace the entirety of his world, and Book Four ends with that poetry--the oyster's pearl--promised but unaccomplished, as Paterson comes up out of the sea to begin again. The abstraction of a Motherwell was inevitable for America because it ordered things seemingly incapable of being ordered--from the unknown depth of the subconscious to the brutal chaos of war--and in doing so it realized what Williams believed to be America's destiny. His own fifth book of Paterson would attempt to do the same. It would be, in the first place, evidence that Williams--beset by heart attacks and crippling strokes--was "alive!": a "multiplication of the gestures" of his art, his "corn dance." It would, furthermore, balance the chaos of the descent into the unknown which the first four books represent with an abstract order which would allow us, as he said, "to realize their possibilities," the possibilities the first four books promise, "and make them ours." Book Five, in short, would be

Not prophecy! NOT prophecy!
but the thing itself! (208)

a gesture, a corn dance, a pearl.

To fully appreciate Williams' achievement in Paterson, then, the poem must be considered as two poems: not the first four books, and then the addendum, Book Five; but rather, the first four books, and then the

assimilation of these books into a larger, five book scheme. Paterson is, in other words, first a four book poem, then a five book poem: the fifth book changes everything. The first four books describe the narrative of a "life":

From the beginning I decided there would be four books following the course of the river whose life seemed more and more to resemble my own life as I more and more thought of it: the river above the Falls, the catastrophe of the Falls itself, the river below the Falls, and the entrance at the end into the great sea.

Paterson is a man (since I am a man) who dives from cliffs and the edges of waterfalls to his death--finally.

But Paterson, the man, is also Paterson, the poem, destined, as Williams wrote in Book Five, to take its place in

A WORLD OF ART
THAT THROUGH THE YEARS HAS

SURVIVED! (209)

In a chapter of the Autobiography written after the first four books were completed, Williams writes: "The Falls let out a roar as it crashed upon the rocks at its base. In the imagination this roar is a speech or a voice, a speech in particular; it is the poem itself that is the answer" (A, 392). Soon after Williams must have realized that only sporadically did the poem answer back. The narrative of the first four books had been rendered, predominantly, by the roar and speech of the Falls itself. It was a narrative ending in death with only the promise of rebirth and survival. Book Five completes the conversation, the lyric and ordered reply to the chaotic crash of the Falls: Williams' ascent into abstraction balances and answers his descent into reality. The ascent into abstraction is present, however, in the first four books, not only as a kind of continual if unrealized promise, but also in the design of the books themselves. The

weight of that design, juxtaposed to the chaos of details which the poem describes, makes for a conversation between abstraction and realism, "conversation as design." But the inadequacy of this initial design, finally necessitates Book Five. Poetic saying, the language of design is buried beneath the weight of the Falls' own roar and speech.

The design of the first four books, which the design of Book Five modifies, is based on patterns of repetition. Paul Mariani notes in his recent review of Williams and his critics, that because the poem is so large, and because its "five-part unfolding" would require twelve years to complete, "it would take the critics nearly twenty years to begin to find even an adequate vocabulary with which to treat the poem's lexical density and radical poetics."¹⁰ But Randall Jarrell's description of the structure of Book One, in what is one of the poem's earliest reviews, seems to me still one of the best. It reveals the pattern of the first four books: "Dr. Williams introduces a theme that stands for an idea, repeats it over and over in varied forms, develops it side by side with two or three more themes that are being developed, recurs to it time and time again throughout the poem, and echoes it for ironic or grotesque effects in thoroughly incongruous contexts."¹¹ In Book Three, for instance, Williams attaches the idea of the "beautiful thing" first to the library (102), then to a girl who smells "like a whore" (105), then to "the riddle of a man and a woman," marriage (106), then to the fire which destroys the library and to "the whole city doomed" (116), to death

flying papers
from old conflagrations, picked up
haphazard by the undertakers to make
moulds, layer after layer
for the dead

Beautiful thing

(119)

"What end but love, that stares death in the eye?" (106). Thus he is asked to sing "a song to make death tolerable, a song / of a man and a woman . . . deathless song" (107). The tragedy is he cannot. His language is "an offense / to love" (108), and this in turn ties Williams' third book to the theme of Book One, the deformity of language itself, which is in turn mirrored in the grotesque deformity of the "Beautiful Thing" with her "busted nose." This is an example of the kind of complexities Williams' patterns of repetition can generate. The theme of destruction is connected to divorce, death and deformity. The resolution of this bleak existence he knows is in "song," a pattern and order juxtaposed to the deformity of his language, a song of marriage, and furthermore a "deathless song," a song of life itself.

On a Paterson manuscript sheet in the Collection of American Literature at Yale, entitled "OVERALL PLOT AND STRUCTURAL THEME: hint for the nature of a poem," Williams writes that "there are two interchanging themes through whatever else, alternating, interrupted as may be desired, in sequences but always returning. . . . Unless a poem be beyond thought new, full of amazing juxtapositions, a new pace a new and unsuspected order--it is not worthy."¹² These two "always returning" and "interchanging" themes are, as the Preface indicates, abstraction ("from mathematics to particulars") and realism ("To make a start, / out of particulars / and make them general"). The passage between the two (the "interpenetration, both ways"), and the difficulty of realizing that passage, is the poem's overriding theme. Above and beyond deformity, divorce, destruction and death on the one hand (each a kind of realism), design, marriage, recreation and life on the other (each a kind of abstraction), the tension between abstraction and

realism subsumes everything else, and through it, the first four books of the poem become most accessible.

Book One is called "The Delineaments of the Giants," and it describes two kinds of giants, one sleeping and the other monstrously alive. The sleeping giants, a male and a female, from the landscape of the city Paterson and its pastoral environs:

Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls
its spent waters forming the outline of his back. He
lies on his right side, head near the thunder
of the waters filling his dreams! (6)

And there, against him, stretches the low mountain.
The Park's her head, carved, above the Falls, by the quiet
river; Colored crystals the secret of those rocks;
farms and ponds, laurel and the temperate wild cactus,
yellow flowered . . . facing him, his
arm supporting her, by the Valley of the Rocks, asleep. (8)

This marriage of the city to the pastoral, a marriage in which the male abstraction and female concreteness lie easily side by side, is the poem's opening dream, its expressed hope for the realization of "A man like a city and a woman like a flower / --who are in love" (7). Juxtaposed to these sleeping giants are the people of Paterson themselves, the crowd which Williams calls several times in Book Two, "the 'great beast'" (46, 55, 67, 80). The characteristics of this "great beast"--the giant monstrously alive--are detailed by several prose fragments which Williams weaves into the poem. The first describes an 1857 mussel hunt, spurred on by David Hower's discovery of two pearls valued at \$900 and \$2,000 respectively: "The Unios (mussels) at Notch Brook and elsewhere were gathered by the millions and destroyed often with little or no result. A large round pearl, weighing 400 grains which would have been the finest pearl of modern times, was ruined by boiling open the shell" (8-9). A pearl, Williams told his Institute of Arts

and Letters audience, was a poem, and a poet the mussel or oyster who creates the pearl. The "great beast" recurs in many other variations. It is seen in the story of the hydrocephalic who lives in Paterson: "This is a monster in human form . . . his face from the upper part of his forehead to the end of his chin, measures twenty-seven inches . . . His body is twenty-seven inches in length, his limbs are small and much deformed." The "monster" was hawked about as a "natural curiosity . . . existing in the community" (10). The "great beast" recurs again when the Bergen Express and Paterson Advertiser, under the headline "The Monster Taken," devotes half a column to the capture of a sturgeon "seven feet six inches long, and weighing 126 pounds" which had been "pelted with stones by boys until he was exhausted" (10-11). Still later, there is a long description of a time when a nearby lake was drained and "millions" of fish and eels were carted away to market by the crowd (35). There is, perhaps most pathetic of all, the estimation of a man's life and worth represented in the detailed list of Cornelius Doremus' possessions at death, "goods and chattels appraised at \$419.58½" (34). The dream of the giants of the landscape is the antithesis of the milling about of the "great beast." The "wonder" of the "great beast" is found in deformity and violence--nature and anomalies of nature destroyed by the greedy perversions of human nature. The "wonder" of the sleeping giants is found in beauty and love. The one is the reality of the poet's world, the other the abstraction of the poet's dreams. They are antagonists.

Nowhere is this antagonism more pronounced than in the inability of the two sides to communicate with one another. The people who inhabit Paterson know that the world of the sleeping giants surrounds them. They express

this knowledge in perverted form in the monstrousness of their own activity, their fascination with the "wonder" of the hydrocephalic dwarf or the "miracle" of a lake drained of its water--reported, it is important to note, in prose as opposed to poetry. Their activity is a misunderstanding of the sleeping giants' dream. When they do confront the beauty of the giants' world, their language cannot capture it, even if their feeling can. Williams describes the response of one young girl, for instance:

a willow twig pulled from a low
 leafless bush in full bud in her hand,
 (or eels or a moon!)
 holds it, the gathered spray,
 upright in the air, the pouring air,
 strokes the soft fur--

Ain't they beautiful! (19)

In Paterson, the people "walk incommunicado" (9), and "they die also / incommunicado:

They sink back into the loam
 crying out
 --you may call it a cry
 that creeps over them, a shiver
 as they wilt and disappear (11)

Life is sweet
 they say: the language!
 --the language
 is divorced from their minds,
 the language . . the language! (12)

It is the language of the Falls, the abstract "torrent in / their minds" (12), that they are divorced from, "language (misunderstood) pouring (misinterpreted)" (15). And it is of the language of the Falls, the language of the sleeping giants, that poetry (as opposed to prose) is made. "Geeze, Doc, I guess it's all right," says one representative of the "great beast" in Book Three, "but what the hell does it mean?" (114).

In the first book, both the desire and the failure of the people to

know "the wonder" of the world of the sleeping giants, the wonder of the poem, is epitomized by the death of Sam Patch. Patch was a man compulsively drawn to the roar and speech of the Falls, "a famous jumper" (16):

The water pouring still
from the edge of the rocks, filling
his ears with its sound, hard to interpret.
A wonder! (17)

On the day of his leap into the Passaic, he made a short speech: "A speech! What could he say that he must leap so desperately to complete it? And plunged toward the stream below. But instead of descending with a plummet-like fall his body wavered in the air--Speech had failed him. He was confused. The word had been drained of its meaning" (17). He disappeared and "a great silence followed." The inarticulate sensations of the crowd mirror those of Mr. Cumming's after he had seen his wife fall into the river: "[they] may, in some measure, be conceived, but they cannot be described" (15). There is no language to describe the assimilation of Patch and Mrs. Cumming into the Falls and the river below

: a body found next spring
frozen in an ice-cake; or a body
fished next day from the muddy swirl--

both silent, uncommunicative (20-21)

And the great difficulty for Williams is that he feels his poem too verges on "the uncommunicative." Having made contact with the earth, the world of the sleeping giants which the "great beast" cannot understand, Williams has cut himself off from the people. "The theme" of his poem, he writes,

is as it may prove: asleep, unrecognized--
all of a piece, alone
in a wind that does not move the others-- (19)

As opposed to the others, the "great beast," Williams is "all of a piece" with the land, as is the poem. But the poem is as asleep and unrecognized

as the landscape of the sleeping giants whose bodies, lying together in love, define the land itself. Williams sees "a kind of springtime / toward which" the minds of his people aspire, but which, because he cannot communicate it, remains "within himself--ice bound" (36).

Paradoxically, and importantly, the "great beast" public is as much a part of Williams' world as the landscape of the sleeping giants. This is the basis of the first book's central oxymoron, "all of a piece, alone." On the one hand, he listens to the "speech" of his people, and with their version of the "earth his ears are full, there is no sound" (31):

He picked a hairpin from the floor
and stuck it in his ear, probing
around inside-- (30)

On the other hand, his "thoughts" soar to regions "of imagined delights / where he would probe" (31). At one point he addresses the half of him which desires to make contact with the people:

Into the sewer they threw the dead horse.
What birth does this foretell?

Your interest is in the bloody loam but what
I'm after is the finished product-- (37)

"Such," he writes, "is the mystery of [the poet's] one two, one two" (38), the dialectic between the abstraction of the poem, "a mathematic, calm, controlled, the architecture" (38), and the reality of his world, "things, things unmentionable" (39). In the cavern of the Falls, behind the "pouring torrent," is however the basic element from which all speech springs, both the poetic speech of the sleeping giants and the inarticulate saying of the crowd:

And standing, shrouded there, in that din,
Earth, the chatterer, father of all
speech (39)

To write a poem that his people can understand, Williams believes that he must arrive at an understanding of this original language. The approach is two-pronged: through the realistic language of his people and through the abstract language of the falls.

In Book Two, "Sunday in the Park," Williams turns inland, with the gesture of a Boone or a Poe, to see what "authentic particles" he can extract from the language of his people. He discovers so little, however, that the temptation is to throw himself into the abstract language of the Falls. The poet is divorced from his people, and he is equally divorced from his poem:

Go home. Write. Compose .

Ha!

Be reconciled, poet, with your world, it is
the only truth!

Ha!

(84)

Divorced from his people, he is divorced from his poem; and divorced from the poem, he serves his people no purpose.

The book opens with the dialectic between mind and matter, abstraction and reality, as its central concern:

Outside

outside myself

there is a world,

--a world

(to me) at rest,

which I approach

concretely--

The scene's the Park

upon the rock,

female to the city

--upon whose body Paterson instructs his thoughts
(concretely)

(43)

The poet will attempt to begin with the concrete, "to make a start, / out of particulars / and make them general." In the frustrations of this effort however, he seeks solace in the opposite alternative, finding, he says, "a counter-weight or counter buoyancy / by the mind's wings!" (48).

This book, of all the books in Paterson, takes up the concerns of Duchamp's Large Glass and Etant Donnés most thoroughly, verging at its end dangerously close to what Williams thought to be Duchamp's silence and withdrawal from the world of art and of men. Duchamp's apparent inactivity seems, at the end of Book Two, to be an attractive alternative to Williams' own poetic activity which he senses is a failure. The tension between mind and matter is, in fact, a tension between "the choice of possibilities" which is open to the mind, and "the state of rest" which defines material reality. This tension is heightened, just as in Duchamp's Large Glass (where the window is a blueprint for the discovery of the landscape beyond), by Williams' realization that his "choice of possibilities" is sleeping unarticulated and ice-bound with the sleeping giants whom Williams' people cannot see because they are leading mindless lives. Furthermore, like Duchamp's final realization of the landscape of Etant Donnés, Williams' work of art must "awaken the mind to the land of the sleeping giants. Only through artistic activity, active invention, will that land be made known. Although Duchamp's aesthetic withdrawal is an attractive possibility, the poet must invent a design that is made of the things of material reality--its language and its objects--just as Duchamp would invent a landscape made of the sticks and bricks of existence. The only "hints," "authentic particles" of the landscape of the sleeping giants that Williams encounters in his walk through the Park are in sexuality (repressed) and

idealism (false). The suppression of sexuality is witnessed in the two dog incidents (53-54). Taking advantage of the idea that a man's dog reflects his personality, Williams describes first "a new-washed Collie bitch" being combed out by her master in the Park: "she stands patiently before his caresses in that bare 'sea chamber.'" She is the man's Venus, innocent and pure. Immediately after the description of the "Venus," Williams describes the Park in overt sexual terms:

to the right
 from this vantage, the observation tower
 in the middle distance stands up prominently
 from its pubic grove (53)

Following this suggestive description, the "Venus's" country cousin Musty is despoiled. Williams quotes a letter from a distraught dog-sitter apologizing for the fact that, while in her care, "Musty" was the victim of male aggression: "Your dog is going to have puppies although I prayed she would be okay . . . Don't think I haven't been worrying about Musty. She's occupied my mind almost every day since that awful event." The tragedy is that sexual activity is an awful event in the eyes of Williams' people. How then can he sing them a love song, the "song of a man and a woman," which they so desire? Later, in the "idlers' favorite / haunts," in the groves of the female Park's mountain, "the center of movement, the gore of gaiety" (56), Williams witnesses the same suppressed sexuality in a group of picnickers. A woman tries to sing the song of a man and a woman to her companions, but she fails because no one understands. Mary

--lifts one arm holding the cymbals
 of her thoughts, cocks her old head
 and dances! raising her skirts:

La la la la!

What a bunch of bums! Afraid somebody see
you?

Blah!

Excrementi!

--she spits.

(57)

This dance, Williams says, is "the old, the very old, old upon old, the undying: even to minute gestures" (57). The dance is a hint, an authentic particle, that connects the energies of his people to the energy of the Falls, its Cavern:

--the leg raised, verisimilitude .
even to the coarse contours of the leg, the
bovine touch! The leer, the cave of it,
the female of it facing the male, the satyr--
(Priapus!)
with that lonely implication, goatherd
and goat, fertility, the attack, drunk,
cleansed .

Rejected. . . .

suppressed : but . . . persistent

(58)

The spirit of Priapus, whose giant phallus Williams sees as the observation tower rising out of this grove, is suppressed by the picnickers. A female picnicker lies beside her male companion, just as the male city and the female Park lie side by side, but she "stirs, distraught / against" him because he is "flagrantly bored and sleeping" (59). Because his people will not waken to their own sexuality, Williams cannot awaken the sleeping giants of the landscape.

The other hint of his people's dreams is discovered in the sermon of Klaus Ehrens. Ehrens' lesson is that if you "give away your money," the Lord "will make you the richest man in the world" (70). Williams is in part sympathetic. Money, he realizes, is part of the reason he cannot communicate with his people, a people who measure the worth of Cornelius Doremus's life by his net worth at death. Williams damns the

Federal Reserve System and Paterson's early "Society for Useful Manufactures: SUM," an acronym suggesting that financial achievement is the sum of society's identity and purpose (73). But Williams despairs of Ehrens' insistence on "the beauty of holiness" (71), which suggests that beauty is a thing unobtainable on earth:

Is this the only beauty here?
And is this beauty--
torn to shreds by the
lurking schismatists?

Can the doctrinaire religion of Protestant Puritanism which Ehrens preaches be beautiful? Clearly not, if it instigates a schism between the ideal and the real rather than seeing the beauty there is within the real; clearly not, if it would suppress the sexuality of Williams' people, as it does. Ehrens' "harangue," finally possesses the same "monotonous insistence" as the roar of the Falls. It hangs "featureless / upon the ear" (70). The attraction Ehrens' speech has for the people is the attraction of the Falls for Sam Patch--it compels a leap into "uncommunicative" death, a capitulation to man's divorce from his world.

The sermon section of the second book opens with the lines

Blocked.
(Make a song out of that: concretely) (62)

The divorce of man from his world blocks, in fact, the dream of the poem, which is to marry man and his world in one design. The phrase "blocked" is a direct reference to the Marcia Nardi letters ("La votre, C.") which Williams weaves into the poem throughout the book. The letters, from a young poetess to Williams, a kind of father figure, are direct evidence of Williams' failure to communicate as well as evidence of the dangers of noncommunication. "The outcome of my failure with you," the poetess writes,

"has been the complete damning up of all my creative capacities. . . . That kind of blockage, exiling one's self from one's self--have you ever experienced it?" (45). Williams, of course, has experienced it and is experiencing it in the poem. The blockage exists between his mind and his world, "exiling one's self from one's self." On the one hand, "the imagination soars" (55) but in doing so, in escaping the "orchestral dullness" which "overlays" the world (62), it leaves reality behind, betraying the world which it desires to renew. This possibility of renewal is hinted at by the sexuality (repressed) and the idealism (false) which Williams sees in the people. The difficulty in trying to awaken the beauty of his people--in the people "concretely"--compares, however, very unfavorably with the already existent beauty which Williams finds in the finished achievements of the world of art. Walking through the Park, Williams' feet churn up "a flight" of grasshoppers, and these in turn remind him of a red basalt carving of a grasshopper discovered in "a rubble-bank disintegrating beneath a / tropical downpour" at Chapultapec:

--his mind a red stone carved to be
 endless flight .
 Love that is a stone endlessly in flight,
 so long as stone shall last bearing
 the chisel's stroke . (49)

This work of art, the product of the mind, is separate from the people--"The stone lives, the flesh dies" (49)--and it surpasses both the people and Williams' concrete investigation of them. It is the image of a prelapsarian world.

His attraction to this world of art is compelling, and it is reflected in what Williams calls "the temple incident" in his manuscript.¹³ Here, in the world of art which Octavio Paz calls "The Castle of Purity,"¹⁴ Williams

confronts a voice that sounds very much like the voice of Marcel Duchamp:

I asked him, What do you do?

He smiled patiently, The typical American question.
In Europe they would ask, What are you doing? Or,
What are you doing now?

What do I do? I listen, to the water falling. (No
sound of it here but with the wind!) This is my entire
occupation. (45)

This pure aestheticism, contemplation of the poetry of the landscape, the language of the Falls, with no intention to communicate its meaning, is an attractive possibility. The counter-weight to this possibility is the cry of the people themselves. A woman, the same voice who asks Williams to sing "a song / of a man and a woman" in Book Three, pleads with him in this book to forget the Falls--"What answer the waterfall?" (82). "Poet, poet!" she begs, "sing your song quickly":

Marry us! Marry us!
Or! be dragged down, dragged
under and lost (83)

Listening only to the abstract language of the waterfall, his destiny is that of Sam Patch. But Williams cannot turn away from it:

Clearly, it is the new, uninterpreted, that
remoulds the old, pouring down (82)

What he has seen and heard in his walk through the Park, the suppressed sexuality and the sermon of Klaus Ehrens, is like "a dwarf, hideously deformed" whose "voice is drowned / under the falls" (83). The "language" of the people "is worn out" (84), deformed, and only poetry, the language of the waterfall, can rescue it. But the woman charges that Williams is divorced from both her and his people, which is also the charge of the long letter from "La votre, C." which concludes the book:

You have abandoned me! (84)

The pure poetry of the waterfall lies in "a state of rest," and Williams knows this, yet he cannot awaken it. Again, at the end of Book Two, he promises to return

fearlessly--
to the bases; base! to the screaming dregs (85)

and through renewed contact with the people attempt again "to regain / the sunkissed summits of love!" (85). The abstraction of poetic speech and the reality of his people's speech are still divorced, and the poem has yet to marry them. The poet still can discover "no syllable in the confused / uproar" of the falls, and the syllables of his people are alternately "words without style!" (81). Like the poetess who writes him, one half of his self is exiled, divorced, from the other half.

There is, however, a moment in the second book, as night falls in the Park, that gives Williams the direction he will follow in his renewed attempt to marry abstraction and realism in Book Three. He writes that in the darkness, a darkness closely associated with death itself, "the end . . . the death / of all" (77),

Love without shadows stirs now
beginning to awaken
as night
advanced. (78)

Although his world is "lost," a second "world unsuspected / beckons to new places." In the defeat of his attempt to marry the abstract and the real he

realizes a new awakening:
which is a reversal
of despair. (78)

This via negativa, an almost complete immersion in the destructive element where "man must chatter of his doom" (77), is the path of "memory," a search

into the dead past. The secret to renewing his world might lie, Williams believes, among the dead in the traces of what man has lost, the traces of his origins. "Memory," he says, is "a sort of renewal" (77)

and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory
of whiteness . (78)

In Book Three, then, he goes to "The Library" in order to see what "memory of whiteness" he can discover there. And once again, in "The Library" his search is defeated, but paradoxically, he does discover what he believes to be the origin of beauty itself.

"The Library" opens with Williams among the books, stifled by them. The books are dead, in a "state of rest." There is only a "ghost of a wind / in all books echoing the life / there" (95). And what is compelling, again, is not the books themselves, their "orchestral dullness," but the wind, "a wind moving / to lead the mind away" (96). "As in all things," he says, there is "an appetite / that awakes" (98), but the language of the Falls is awakened in the ghost of "the book's winds":

something
has brought him back to his own
mind.
in which a falls unseen
tumbles and rights itself
and refalls--and does not cease, falling
and refalling with a roar, a reverberation
not of the falls but of its rumor
unabated

Beautiful thing (96)

immersed in facts--"So be it. So be it" he repeats throughout the library section--Williams nevertheless is compelled toward the opposite of facts, toward the abstract language of the Falls and the imagination. It is as if the mind must escape the confinement of books, for these books finally "enfeeble the mind's intent" (102). They are repositories for "the

pitiful dead":

Let us read

and digest: the surface
glistens, only the surface.
Dig in--and you have

a nothing, surrounded by
a surface, an inverted
bell resounding, a

white-hot man become
a book, the emptiness of
a cavern resounding

(123)

Books surely possess something of the roar of the Falls, or the wind which is all one can hear of the Falls in the Falls' absence, but they are, again, with Sam Patch, frozen and ice-bound. They do not provoke the artist's activity, the renewal of language, rather they destroy it, assimilate it into the cavern of "Earth, the chatterer."

The problem with libraries, with books, is exemplified by the library's motto: "SILENCE!" (101). Encountering their burden of facts and data, their reality, the poetic mind is crushed:

Give it up. Quit it. Stop writing.

Give up
the poem. Give up the shilly-
shally of art.

What can you, what
can YOU hope to conclude--
on a heap of dirty linen?

(108)

All that Williams discovers in the books is the record of a people's "dirty linen"--murders, monsters, "the bloody loam" as he called it earlier. Faced with this horrifying array of facts, it is no wonder that the abstract language of the Falls is so compelling. The sad facts of the matter are

we die in silence, we
 enjoy shamefacedly--in silence, hiding
 our joy even from each other (121)

But the "Beautiful Thing," the roar of the Falls, is a presence which Williams believes must be acknowledged, expressed.

The way to escape the "library stench" is "not by running / away. Not by 'composition'" (103). He will not turn to total abstraction, the expression of the language of the Falls in such a manner that no one would understand. This language remains a language that "cascades into the / invisible" (145); its meaning cannot be articulated in words by men. Instead Williams will adopt the patience of a Madame Curie who separated, after a long struggle, radium and lead from the mother substance of uranium, discovered a "stain / of sense from the inert mass" (108), and separated energy from its dead weight. Or he will follow the example of Toulouse Lautrec who, deformed himself and living among the whores, "recorded them" and made art of them (110). Or finally, he will be like one of the many tightrope walkers who crossed the Falls in the 1870's, the crowd urging them on and joying in their performance, the Falls roaring beneath them and bespeaking their death

--the being taut, balanced between
 eternities (103)

Williams will balance himself between the language and demands of the crowd and the language and demands of the Falls. He will, he insists, make a thing of beauty out of the bloody loam. He will make a poem, he insists, out of "all manner of particularizations" (137).

The thing which Curie, Lautrec, and the tightrope walkers share is their activity. They do not sit in libraries and contemplate the facts. They do not sit idly and contemplate the sound of water falling. They act.

Their activity is mirrored in the dominant activity of the book itself, natural activity of tornado, fire and flood. At the end of the first section, "a tornado approaches," a wind like the Falls that "pours over the roofs of Paterson" (111). But unlike the Falls, the tornado changes Paterson permanently. So too the Paterson fire of 1902 which Williams connects to the fire which destroyed the Alexandria Library and "burnt Sappho's poems" (119). But the fire is not a tragedy, it is a "beautiful thing." Williams is "calling the fire good" (117):

An old bottle, mauled by the fire
 gets a new glaze, the glass warped
 to a new distinction

. . . .
 --the flame that wrapped the glass
 deflowered, reflowered there by
 the flame: a second flame, surpassing
 heat .

. . . .
 Poet Beats Fire at Its Own Game! The bottle!
 the bottle! the bottle! the bottle! I
 give you the bottle! What's burning
 now, Fire? (118)

"What's burning now" is the flame of creation which surpasses the fire's flame. The old bottle here is perhaps the same old bottle which Williams recreated from the ashes in the poem "Between Walls." Both bottles suggest the image of the Phoenix; both are recreated out of their own destruction. The bottle is another of Williams' "Beautiful Things." It is like the girl who is made beautiful by her "busted nose," the sign that she has been actively touched. It is, in fact, this sign which reveals her very life, separates her from the crowd. In activity itself, an activity which destroys "worn-out" forms, beauty is created.

In Section III, Williams pays tribute to the French dramatist Antonin Artaud (137), quoting a fragment of a line from the French edition

of The Theater and Its Double. In his preface to that book, Artaud describes why "the library of Alexandria can be burnt down":

There are forces above and beyond papyrus: we may temporarily be deprived of our ability to discover these forces, but their energy will not be suppressed. It is good . . . that forms fall into oblivion: a culture . . . restrained only by the capacity of our own nerves will reappear with all the more energy. It is right that from time to time cataclysms occur which compel us to return to nature, i.e., to rediscover life. The old totemism of animals, stones, objects capable of discharging thunderbolts . . .--everything, in short, that might determine, disclose, and direct the secret forces of the universe--is for us a dead thing, from which we derive nothing but static and aesthetic profit, the profit of an audience, not of an actor.¹⁵

The elemental world Artaud describes, like the elemental language of the Falls, is a dead thing unless we act. The cataclysm, in short, provokes our activity, an activity that begins from nothing and thereby makes contact with the secret forces of the universe out of the necessity to rebuild anew. The cataclysm makes us actors. Thus, after the flood which ends Book Three, Williams invites his people to "further maceration":

the slums
unless they are (living)
wiped out they cannot be re-
constituted .

The words will have to be rebricked up, the
--what? What am I coming to
pouring down? (143)

Williams is coming again to the language of the Falls: "The past is dead" (143), destroyed by cataclysm, and all he hears is the vast energy of

the present pouring down: the roar
the roar of the present, a speech--
is, of necessity, my sole concern (144)

The language of the Falls is "invisible," but once again he is convinced he must find some way to make "of it a replica" (145). The Falls have "no meaning," and yet, Williams declares:

I must
 find my meaning and lay it, white,
 beside the sliding water: myself--
 comb out the language--or succumb (145)

He must, now for the fourth time, reapproach the Falls and attempt to decipher its language. If he fails he knows the fate of a Patch or a Mrs. Cumming awaits, both of whom fell, he says, in order "to make an end."

The project of the fourth and temporarily the final book, was of course "to make an end," but like the other books, it refuses to do so. Its only completion is the realization of what Joseph Riddel has recently called "the poetics of failure,"¹⁶ both failure to make the poem accessible to the people for whom it is written, and failure to realize the language of the Falls which is what the poet desires. In short, it testifies to the failure of the poet to realize his dream, the marriage of the abstract and the real in a single embodiment, the poem. The first two sections of this book detail the terms of the dialectic.

The first section is an "idyl" born of reality. It details a love affair between a sophisticated lesbian, Corydon, and her country-girl companion, Phyllis, as well as Paterson's own frustrated attempts to seduce Phyllis. Both the lesbian and Paterson fail. The world is sterile--either homosexual or old and impotent. Its sterility is mirrored by the poem Corydon writes for Phyllis. The idyl, "with its pathetic yearning for Anticosti and a Yeatsian Innisfree," Riddel writes, "is another version of the pastoral, a final disclosure that lost origins are irrecoverable."¹⁷ It is, in fact, an open parody of the pastoral, a satire in which love is discovered only

in the tall
 buildings (sliding up and down) . . . where
 the money's made
 up and down
 directed missles
 in the greased shafts of the tall buildings .

 unsexed, up
 and down (without wing motion) (165)

There is no love, finally, because there is no "wing motion," nothing of the abstract beauty of the imagination.

The second section is a treatise on the value of abstract thinking and links Curie's discovery of radium to "a plan for action" which would eliminate "money." Curie's discovery of radium was a result, Williams writes, of her realization of "a dissonance / in the valance of uranium" and

Dissonance
 (if you are interested)
 leads to discovery (176)

Her discovery is a metaphor for the discovery Williams himself has been seeking throughout the poem, and her method, he realizes, is his own: "Love, the sledge that smashes the atom? No, No! antagonistic cooperation is the key" (177). Dissonance, or antagonistic cooperation of opposites, is what makes the molecule uranium, just as the dissonance between abstraction and reality is what makes Williams' world. This dissonance, he claims, has been mirrored throughout the poem, especially in its juxtaposition of poetry and prose, a juxtaposition as old as Chaucer and springing from the necessity for difference, for different ways of saying:

Sir Thopas (The Canterbury Pilgrims) says (to Chaucer)
 Namoor--
 Thy drasty rymyng is not
 worth a toord
 --and Chaucer seemed to think so too for he stopped and went
 on in prose (177)

But Curie's achievement is in her ability to break down her world into its constituent parts, to separate the radium's "radiant gist" (186) from the dead weight which carries it, lead. And this also is the value of August Walter's "credit" scheme: credit, Williams claims, is "stalled / in money" (183), it is the "radiant gist" of financial dealings, and can be separated out from "money." So too, poetry is the "radiant gist" of all language, and the discovery of the language of the Falls remains the discovery Williams himself must make. Curie's discovery of radium--a "LUMINOUS" discovery that Williams compares to the discovery of America by quoting his own In the American Grain (178; IAG, 25-26)--verifies Mendelief's projection of the existence of radium in his standard table of molecular weights. Paterson's own projection--that the language of the Falls can be discovered--is pure thought, like Mendelief's table, a poem which charts the path for subsequent discoveries:

adept at thought, playing the words
 following a table which is the synthesis
 of thought, a symbol that is to him [Paterson],
 sun up! a Mendelief, the elements laid
 out by molecular weight, identity
 predicted before found! and .

Oh most powerful connective, a bead
 to lie between continents through
 which a string passes . (179)

This pure thought, the possibility that the "radiant gist" of language might be found now that Williams has predicted it, connects the continents of abstraction and reality.

This Mendelief passage is one of the most crucial in all of Williams' poetry, for it modifies significantly his dialectic between mind and matter. The dialectic in fact remains one between abstraction and reality, but the mind now rests between the two: "the mind is neutral, a bead linking /

continents, brow and toe" (179). The dialectic between abstraction and realism is encompassed by the image of man himself. The active mind, its "playing" is now the "most powerful connective," a paradigm for the antagonistic cooperation and the dissonance between the split forces of the world, and inevitably embracing both.

The third section opens with the reminder

Haven't you forgot your virgin purpose,
the language? (187)

The poet hasn't, but "it is almost the hour" for the poem to end, for death to descend, and for the river to reach the sea. Asking about the language is like asking "did you ever know of a sixty year / woman with child?" (187). The answer simply is that it is "too late" (187). Until the language of poetry is found, however, the antagonistic cooperation which Williams believes to be "the order, perfect and controlled / on which empires, alas, are built" (179) cannot be realized. Half the world--the poetry half--still waits to be discovered. There can be no cooperation if one of the partners is as "invisible" as the language of the Falls. Presumably Williams' rationale for including the letters from Allen Ginsberg is that the discovery of the poetry rests with the poets of Ginsberg's generation. "I envision for myself," Ginsberg writes, "some kind of new speech . . . in that it has to be clear statement of fact about misery (and not misery itself), and splendor . . . out of the subjective wanderings through Paterson I know that you will be pleased to realize that one actual citizen of your community has inherited your experience in his struggle to love and know his own world-city" (174). Until this "new speech" is discovered, "La Vertue," Williams writes, "est toute dans l'effort" (189); the virtue is in the mind's active effort to discover what

the nostalgic sea
 sopped with our cries
 Thalassa! Thalassa!
 calling us home .
 I say to you, Put wax rather in your
 ears against the hungry sea
 it is not our home! (201)

Rather we must believe that life, in fact, "the whole poem," can "begin again, again, here / again" (200). The word "again" Williams had written in Book Three,

is the magic word .
 turning the in out :
 Speed against the inundation (135)

And so at the end of Book Four, the poet rises once again out of "the blood dark sea" on the one hand like the male Odysseus and on the other like the female Venus "a girl standing upon a tilted shell / rose / pink" (202). He hears "the water's steady roar, as of a distant / waterfall" (203) and turns "inland" repeating endlessly the gesture of a Poe or a Boone. His "eternal close" is the "final somersault" of birth as well as death. "The end," the final words of Book Four, are indeed a beginning, concluding a stanza that is a satire of Eliot's conclusion to "The Hollow Men," for Williams is turning inland to embrace his people as well as the waterfall, a people whom Eliot had forsaken as "hollow."

The "beginning again" which concludes Book Four is, of course, indication enough that Book Five would ultimately follow. There are other elements in the first four books, however, which point toward Book Five, and chief among them is the idea of "breath" and its connection to "in-spiration."¹⁸ Early in Book One, Williams juxtaposes the idea of "breath"--life, spirit, anima, inspiration--to the idea of death and divorce. His own breath is contrasted to the deaths of Sam Patch and Mrs. Cumming

which represent a world "stale as a whale's breath," and Williams calls out, as if drowning in the Falls himself, "breath! / Breath!" (20):

Only of late, late! begun to know, to
know clearly (as through clear ice) whence
I draw my breath or how to employ it
clearly--if now well: (21)

Although in a sense Williams is frozen in ice like Patch, he has begun, he claims, to know something of his breathing. And the employment of his breath is integrally connected to the writing of a poem which will be able to convey the landscape of the Falls. His "breath" is drawn from "the green bush," and when it is "swaying, all of a piece" with the bush, though still "separate," it "liveness briefly, for the moment / unafraid" (22). Similarly, in "The Library" Williams is left "breathless" (97) in the midst of the "library stench" which "sweats of staleness and of rot" (103). The inspiration here is again in nature, in the wind which blows like a "ghost" of a life through the books and finally leads "the mind away" on the giant breathing of a tornado.¹⁹

There is a possibility that Williams' connection of "breath" to inspiration, and in turn to the elemental language of the Falls, is in fact derived from Artaud's The Theater and its Double, especially his chapter on "Affective Athleticism." Artaud writes that "for every feeling, every mental action, every leap of human emotion there is a corresponding breath which is appropriate to it," and furthermore, "breath rekindles life, sets it afire in its own substance."¹⁹ The control and proper employment of the breath is, for Artaud, the actor's primary tool, the force which orders his activity. At least two years before Artaud's essay even appeared, however, Williams was moving toward Artaud's formulation of the importance of breath. In his 1936 essay, "How To Write," as we have

already seen, Williams speaks of the poet discovering the "inherent rules" of the poem, rules which govern "the personality speaking, the middle brain, the nerves, the glands, the very muscles and bones of the body itself speaking."²⁰ By 1950, he was so convinced of the importance of "breath" and its proper employment in the poem that he dedicated a chapter of his Autobiography to Charles Olson's famous essay on "Projective Verse," quoting the essay at some length (A, 329-332). Olson writes, in part: "Verse now, 1950, if it is to go ahead, if it is to be of essential use, must, I take, catch up and put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings. . . . The line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes, and thus is, it is here that, the daily work, the WORK, gets in, for only he, the man who writes, can declare, at every moment, the line, its metric, and its ending--where its breathings shall come to, termination . . . the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE."²¹ In other words, in learning the inherent rules of breath, the rules which govern "the new measure," the variable foot, the poetic line, might be discovered. And from Olson's point of view at least, unless Williams' verse "put into itself" the laws of its breathing, the poem Paterson would be of no "essential use."

In I Wanted to Write a Poem, Williams admits that it was not until "several years" after the publication of "The Descent" section of Paterson Book Two that he realized he had "hit upon a device" in that section which in fact defined the laws of breathing in the poem, the new measure (IWWP, 82). The concept of the variable foot was not in fact defined clearly until after Book Four was completed. In these lines in Paterson he had unwittingly

discovered a device which "allows order in so-called free verse," abstract design in the midst of chaos. These lines bespeak the productive use to which Williams would ultimately put them. Defeated in his attempt to marry abstraction and reality, "a world lost," Williams projects in these lines "a world unsuspected" which "beckons to new places" (78). In the context of the first four books these lines are just another promise, another dream, the poem will not fulfill. But in the context of the new measure and Book Five, these lines become the center of the poem, the projection of an achievement which Williams will fulfill.

Olson's essay is probably in part responsible for Williams' recognition of his discovery in Book Two. But equally responsible is Williams' contact with the milieu from which Olson's essay springs--the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the United States. Olson was himself intimately acquainted with the work of the Abstract Expressionists. As director of the famous Black Mountain College in North Carolina, he was close friends with the abstract artist Josef Albers, who conducted the Art Institute at the college for many years. Guests of the Art Institute included Walter Gropius, Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning, and de Kooning taught at Black Mountain through the summer session of 1948, visiting from time to time afterwards. John Cage, the composer and close friend of Duchamp, also taught for several years at the college. And Katherine Dreir, co-founder of the Société Anonyme with Duchamp, lent the college a large portion of her private collection of paintings--the work of Léger, Kandinsky, Mondrian--which faculty and students were allowed to hang in their rooms.²² The Large Glass, however, remained in Dreir's apartment in New Haven. In 1950 Williams was invited to be a guest member of the faculty with the likes

of Mark Tobey, Jackson Pollock, de Kooning, and Mark Rothko.²³ The implication was that Williams shared something with the company he was invited to keep.

In an essay introducing the 1974-1975 exhibition Poets of the Cities: New York and San Francisco 1950-1975, Robert Creeley who was himself closely associated with Black Mountain, has gone a long way toward defining what Williams' work has in common with Abstract Expressionism:

All assumptions of what a painting was were being intensively requalified. Hence the lovely definition of that time: a painting is a two-dimensional surface more or less covered with paint. Parallel is Williams' definition of a poem: a large or small machine made of words Writers have the true complication of using words as material and then depending on them as well for a more reflective agency. It would be absurd to qualify artists as non-verbal if, by that term, one meant they lacked a generative vocabulary wherewith to articulate their so-called feelings and perceptions. The subtlety with which they qualified the possibility of gesture was dazzling. . . . [The poet Robert Duncan] recognized "that you see the energy back of the brush as much as you see color, it's as evident, and that's what you experience when you're looking." . . . Seeing the text [of Olson's Projective Verse] in manuscript, [Williams] had responded enthusiastically, noting that "Everything leans on the verb." The terms of energy and field are insisently in mind as is his attempt to desentimentalize accumulated senses of poetry by asserting thingness "The poem is made of things--on a field."²⁴

The last quotation is from Williams' essay on "Projective Verse" in the Autobiography. Williams' connection to Abstract Expressionism--Action or Gesture Painting as it was commonly called by 1950--lies in this "COMPOSITION BY FIELD" as Olson calls it (A, 330), or as Williams calls it "The Poem as Field of Action" (SE, 280). Action is what the poem and painting must express: "Is it not the PLAY of a mind we are after," Olson asks, "is [it] not that [play] that shows whether a mind is there at all?" (A, 332). Action is energy expressed by the same gesture which Williams praises in Motherwell's art, and if the gesture of painting is revealed in the record

of the brushstroke, the gesture of the poem is revealed in the measure of the line which records--the poet's breath. Speaking of Motherwell's abstraction Williams had said "Only by a multiplication of the gestures of art does any man show himself to be alive on earth."

The fact that the "breath" for Williams is a kind of "gesture," closely related to the totally nonrepresentational Gesture Painting of a Pollock or a Rothko, or the nearly nonrepresentational painting of a Motherwell, is crucial to an understanding of Williams' accomplishment in Book Five of Paterson. Both Rothko and Pollock gave up representational art in order to tap and express energies that they believed were buried deep within themselves. They wished to record on canvas what Williams calls "the personality speaking, the middle brain, the glands, the very muscles and bones of the body itself speaking." This is the spirit of Pollock's famous 1947 statement: "When I am in my painting . . . the painting comes out well."²⁵ He means, literally, that when his being as well as his body is in the painting, it comes out well. Rothko reflects Pollock's statement when he describes the rationale behind his own immense canvases: "I paint very large pictures . . . because I want to be very intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience, to look upon an experience as a stereoscopic view. . . . [But when] you paint the larger picture, you are in it."²⁶ Elsewhere Rothko says that his "real model is an ideal which embraces all of human drama."²⁷ Finally the poet and art critic Frank O'Hara describes the method of his friend Robert Motherwell's painting: "The impetus for a painting or drawing starts technically from the subconscious through automatism (or as he may say "doodling") and proceeds toward the subject which is the finished work."²⁸

Williams told a newspaper interviewer in 1950 that he felt his poetry was

like some kinds of modern painting. The painter tries to produce a particular emotion in the beholder. To do so he does not necessarily have to paint a photographic representation of his subject. . . . Once a man has penetrated the obscure jungle [Pollock?], he is likely to come out on the plateau where he has a much broader vision than he ever knew before.²⁹

And when a second interviewer asked him in 1961 if one of the things he did in his poetry was to "abstract the elements of a work . . . in a way that indicates what seems . . . to be somehow the essential principle of design," Williams replied: "Very definitely. . . . The design of the painting and of the poem I've attempted to fuse. To make it the same thing. And sometimes I don't want to say anything. I just want to present it . . . I don't care if its representational or not. But to give a design. A design in the poem and a design in the picture should make them more or less the same thing."³⁰

The connection of Williams' later poetics to Abstract Expressionism has been briefly noted by Paul Mariani and Thomas W. Lombardi,³¹ but only Christine Rabin has begun to get at the significance of total abstraction in Williams' work. Noting that the Action Painter's brushstroke "records the movement of the artist's body or his presence," she writes: "The inscriptional or typographical desire for presence occurs in the free play of regular recurrence or the 'variable foot' as Williams invented it."³² In effect, the regular recurrence lends to the appearance of the poem, defines the boundaries of the field upon which Williams' gestures or breaths play. There is a section of a poem from The Clouds, published the same year as Paterson Book Two, that explains Williams' thinking on the nonrepresentational

design of the stanza perhaps more clearly than anything else in his writings. He speaks of seeing "a small print" of "Leonardo's Last Supper":

for the first time in my life, I noticed this famous picture not because of the subject matter but because of the severity and simplicity of the background! Oh there was the passion of the scene, of course, generally. But particularly, ignoring the subject, I fell upon the perpendiculars of the paneled woodwork standing there, submissive, in exaggerated perspective.

There you have it. It's the background from which my dreams have sprung.

("Russia," CLP, 95-96)

The perpendiculars of the abstract design of The Last Supper are closely related to the horizontals of the design of Williams' lines in the triadic pattern of the variable foot. Williams' abstract design is the background from which his dreams spring. It is elemental. It is wordless. It is, finally, Williams' version of the roar and speech of the Falls.

Jackson Pollock's paintings have been described as "energy made visible," and the nonrepresentational abstraction of the triadic variable foot is a way for Williams to make visible the inarticulate and heretofore "invisible" energy of the sleeping giants themselves. It is a way for him to bring those giants to life.

Williams' triadic pattern, then, is a subtle visual backdrop that draws us into, and almost without our noticing, makes us listen to the elemental speech which is the Falls' poetry. If we can ignore, for a moment, what Williams' words say, the effect of the horizontals of his backdrop, we find, is closely related to the effect of the giant blocks of color in Rothko's

paintings. Irving Sandler writes: "[Rothko's] abstractions become a kind of stage set for a drama. . . . The evolution of Rothko's painting points to this: in many of his earlier mythic pictures, the forms themselves are the actors in front of a backdrop of horizontal bands; in the abstractions after 1950, the backdrops become the sole image, whose quiescent simplicity calls into existence a complexity of introspective thoughts and feelings."³⁴

The design of the triadic backdrop of the variable foot is also strikingly similar to Duchamp's 1913-1914 3 stoppages étalon, a work later incorporated into The Large Glass, and which was reproduced and discussed, for the first time, in the 1945 Marcel Duchamp number of View, a magazine to which Williams himself contributed regularly. In 3 stoppages étalon, Harriet and Sidney Janis say in the View article, Duchamp discovered "a new unit of measure." Duchamp took a length of thread one meter long, held it above a horizontal plane, and then, allowing "the intervention of nature"--"wind" and "gravity"--to direct the thread's flight, he let it fall: "The experiment was repeated three times, giving three variations of the chance line. . . . [These lines], arranged into three different groupings for a total of nine, were projected on the large glass," another map or blueprint for the landscape that lay beyond the window.³⁵ Duchamp also constructed three "meter sticks," their edges traced from the curvature of the thread. They all had a different length, though each was still one meter long. They proved, as Duchamp himself said, that "the unit of length is variable."³⁶

Although Duchamp's meter sticks imply that they should be used to measure the world, his sticks, Rothko's color bands, and Pollock's drip paintings all remain backdrops, abstractions, for life and its living. The value of their example, for Williams, was that they discovered a way

to express--in nonrepresentational pattern and design--the language of the Falls which heretofore had been for him inexpressible. The project, now, was to bring the language of the people into this design. In an unpublished article on the painter Emanuel Romano, Williams defined the painting of Pollock and the other abstractionists as "the non-representationalism of incompleteness."³⁷ Apparently unaware that Pollock and de Kooning, at least, had given up total abstraction and returned to the representation of the human figure in their later paintings (see, for example, Pollock's 1953 Portrait and a Dream, the transitional painting in Pollock's cessation of the drip technique),³⁸ Williams believed that their reliance on total abstraction was no more accessible to the public than was the language of the Falls. Furthermore, their work implied the choice of abstraction over and against reality. Although Williams realized that this was a misinterpretation, he knew it was the kind of misinterpretation the public was likely to make. This failure of communication was the "incompleteness" that their work represented. And here was the distinct advantage that the poet held over the painter. Contrary to Creeley's formulation that "writers have the true complication of using words as initial material," words were the source of the completion Williams so desired. Words are the expression of the very drama for which the abstraction of a Rothko or the abstract design of the triadic stanza serves as a backdrop. The language of the Falls, then, is communicated through the nonrepresentational pattern of the poem itself, and the language of the people through the poem's words. Abstraction rests in the triadic form. Reality rests in the syllables of human speech. Working between the two is the mind of the poet himself, "neutral, a bead linking /

continents, brow and toe."³⁹ On the one hand, his mind records the syllables of the American idiom. On the other hand, he shapes these syllables into a form. The dual nature of the line itself is the measure of his gesture, the record of the artist's neutral presence between abstraction and reality. Each line taken by itself is formless, a deformity in fact which mirrors the deformity of reality itself. But each line is also the length of a breath, and in the abstract form of the poem as a whole, is revealed to be part of a larger design. Williams' gesture is both as free as the breath and as measured as the breath. He thus records the life and measures the soul of man simultaneously. The sense of the poem's order pulls against the disorder of the poem's lines and vice-versa, but abstraction and reality can finally lie beside each other in a harmony of "dissonance," in "antagonistic cooperation." The artist, his gesture, is the go-between.

Just as the achievement of the triadic variable foot is the culmination of the search for the form Williams had envisioned as early as 1916 in "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," a form capable of including "all temperaments, all phases of our environment, physical as well as spiritual, mental, and moral," Paterson, Book Five, is the culmination of Williams' art. Formally, it is dominated by the triadic variable foot. Thematically, it realizes the marriage of abstraction and realism, the language of the Falls to the language of the people, in a world of art. In art, in the always "present" world of art (214), the two sides dance "contrapuntally" together (239). In art, the past is dead--"The past is for those that lived in the past. Cessa!" (239)--and the future, the inevitability of death, is stymied. "On its rock" (209), art survives,

as durable and timeless as an Aztec sculpture:

at the bottom of the cavern
of death, the imagination
escapes intact. (212)

In Book Five, Kora, the maiden of the Spring, escapes from Hell after over thirty-five years of imprisonment in Williams' work. It is Spring, finally, and it is a flowering.

But it is not a Spring without its ironies. The first outline for Paterson (c. 1939) is a manuscript headed "Detail and Parody for the Poem Paterson."⁴⁰ It contains about one hundred "Details," among them all the records of conversation discussed in the previous chapter, as well as several other passages that occur in the final draft of the poem. One of these passages is the poem's opening statement of its dream: "A man like a city and a woman like a flower / --who are in love." Now what Williams means by "Parody" in this context is not entirely clear, but the concluding lines of Book One, the quotation from Symonds' Studies of the Greek Poets headed Nota Bene, helps explain what he had in mind, and reveals further something about the nature of the dream which he hoped his poem could realize:

In order apparently to bring the meter within the sphere of prose and common speech, Hipponax ended his iambics with a spondee or a trochee instead of an iambus, doing thus utmost violence to the rhythmical structure. These deformed and mutilated verses were called . . . lame or limping iambics. . . . The choliambi are in poetry what the dwarf or cripple is in human nature. Here again, by their acceptance of this halting meter, the Greeks displayed their acute sense of propriety, recognizing the harmony which subsists between crabbed verses and the distorted subjects with which they dealt--the vices and perversions of humanity--as well as their agreement with the snarling spirit of the satirist. Deformed verse was suited to deformed morality. (40)

This passage has obvious application to sections of Paterson such as Williams'

satire of the Yeatsian "idyl" in Book Four. It also goes a long way toward explaining Williams' inclusion of long passages of prose in the body of the poem; juxtaposed to the poetry, their deformity, both thematic and "poetic," almost satirizes itself. This passage is, in addition, a defense for the lack of a consistent metric in Williams' own verse: his own deformity of line mirrors the deformity of his people. Archilochus, the founder of Greek satire, "invented" the iambic meter in order to write a line as near as possible "to the language of common life," Symonds tells us; in the same way, Williams' variable foot was an invention designed in part to bring his poetry closer to the language of his people.⁴¹ Furthermore, Symonds notes, the birthdays of Homer and Archilochus were celebrated on the same day, and in Greek statuary their faces were joined Janus-like in one bust, Homer representing the Voice and Archilochus representing the Breath or Soul.⁴² Finally, the word satire derives from the Latin word satura, a medley of voices, and Williams' notion of interweaving a great many voices in Paterson may be indebted in part to this derivation.

But none of these facts, however interesting, sufficiently explain how the notion of satire or parody affects Book Five's realization of Williams' dream to marry "a man like a city and a woman like a flower." Archilochus' satires, as well as the satires of Hipponax, were recited publicly at the festival of Demeter, mother of Kora (Persephone). The name for the Iambic meter itself was derived from a myth which told of Demeter mourning the loss of Kora and unable to laugh until the jokes and sarcasms of Iambé made her smile.⁴³ In a sense then, the Greek satire was a substitute for the joys of the Spring, but it was also a celebration of the return of Spring, the return of Kora, recited as it was at Demeter's festival in March.

The other Greek ceremony in celebration of the Spring was, of course, the festival of Dionysus, and Williams clearly associates the two festivals in Paterson, perhaps unintentionally falling victim to, or perhaps simply ignoring, the falsity of the etymology of the word satire from the Greek satyr plays.⁴⁴ The celebration of human sexuality in these plays which were performed at the festival of Dionysus, undoubtedly was attractive to Williams, and certainly offered a counter-weight to the "divorce" theme which so occupied him (recall the vision of the phallic satyr Priapus which Williams sees underlying the dance of the old woman in Book Two).⁴⁵ But most importantly, both the festival of Demeter and the festival of Dionysus celebrate rebirth and immortality, especially artistic creation and the immortality of art itself. Although the satyr plays were the source of Greek tragedy, celebrating sexuality in the face of eventual death, the tragedies themselves are an important part of the world of art which has "SURVIVED." The mood of Williams' satire in Book Five is, then, a tempered one: just as the poem's prose, juxtaposed to its poetry, satirizes itself, Williams' poem satirizes our own prosaic lives, the immortality of art juxtaposed to the mortality of life itself. But beyond its satiric undertones, Book Five is the achievement of a poet's life, the record of an artist's gestures and breathings, preserved. It is what he would call in another poem "a celebration of the light" (PB, 181). It is itself a festival that testifies to our own ability to exceed the limitations of our world.

In celebrating art and artists, then, Book Five celebrates itself, and celebrates its own accomplishment. It is dedicated to Toulouse Lautrec who is praised in Book Three for creating Beautiful Things out of the brothels

of Paris, works of art out of deformity and by way of deformity. Its predominant image is the Unicorn Tapestries, a series of seven panels housed in the Cloisters galleries in New York under the auspices of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Unicorn Tapestries also appear in Book Three, but there Williams presents us only with an image of the sixth tapestry which, like Book Three, is a funereal image of destruction and death:

A tapestry hound
with his thread teeth drawing crimson from
the throat of the unicorn (126)

Book Five fills out the image and finishes the narrative of the tapestries in its own completion. Like the tapestry of art which was envisioned by Juan Gris, Williams' poem is "a fabric, all of a piece and uniform, with one set of threads as the representational . . . and cross threads as the . . . abstract."⁴⁶ And the triadic variable foot, the realization of the new measure which dominates the prosodic structure of the book, itself fulfills the demands made by the first four books. "Blocked," Williams begins the second section of Book Two, "make a song out of that, concretely" (62). And Williams does make a song out of blocks. With the concrete abstraction and design of a Rothko painting, Williams' abstract design turns the phrase "blocked" back on itself, its original force as an image for divorce recreated as an image for marriage.

The poem opens with an image of flight:⁴⁷

In old age
the mind
casts off
rebelliously
an eagle
from its crag (207)

The mind of Paterson views its world "from the air" (209). This is the same mind, we remember, that in 1919 did not "give a damn for airplanes and airplane poetry," but did care desperately about "the distraught brain that must find its release in building gas motors and in balancing them on cloth wings in its agony." Now, in this "machine made of words," Williams himself has built a set of wings--"the mind's wings" (48)--which escape the soil. But his flight mediates between the sky and the soil: he is neither in the world of total abstraction, that place where "every intelligible perception of the world [is] lost," nor imprisoned by the soil itself. He flies at that altitude "at which the eyes . . . [have] their power" to see the world (I, 79), and yet have made contact with the realm of the imagination. The place where worldly things--"the whore"--and abstract ideals--"the virgin"--become "an identity" (210) is in the "WORLD OF ART" (209). Because art makes contact with both the facts of our existence and the ideals of our dreams, it is the only voice capable of proclaiming

"la réalité! la réalité!
la réa, la réa, la réalité!" (209)

And art is, of course, the image of the voice of the artist himself, Paterson's voice which is both the voice of the Falls and the voice of the people simultaneously. Paterson's voice is the immortal and "regal" voice of "The Unicorn / the white one-horned beast" of the tapestries who roams the world "root toot a toot!" (208):

The Unicorn
has no match
or mate . the artist
has no peer . (211)

But on the other hand, Paterson's voice is also the one which proclaims:

the times today
are safer for the fornicators
the moral's
as you choose but the brain
need not putrefy
or petrify
for fear of venereal disease
unless you wish it

"Loose your love to flow"
while you are yet young
male and female
(if it is worth it to you)
'n cha cha cha (216)

The tone and form of this subtle self-indictment (Williams had refused, in the 'twenties, the invitation of the titled Dadaist poetess, Elsa von Freytag Loringhaven, to contract a case of her syphilis), this description of the modern scene, is juxtaposed to the tone, form and description of the Unicorn tapestries which precede it. In describing the tapestries (215-216), Williams requires less "art" because the tapestries are already "art": there is no regularity to Williams' stanza and, in the middle of his description, he even includes a passage of prose. But the description of the modern scene must be shaped, formed into the triadic stanza of the variable foot, and Williams draws our attention to these lines as poetry, makes us consider them as art through the dissonance of the poetic quotation in their midst: "Loose you love to flow" is brought out of the world of art and into the world of "cha cha cha," while simultaneously it lifts "cha cha cha," fornication and venereal disease into its own realm. This is the "interpenetration--both ways" between abstraction and reality of which Williams has dreamt, and its image is the interpenetration of the "starry-eyed" male and the "concrete" female, their marriage.

But the paradox, what we might call the satiric gist, of Williams' realization of this interpenetration, is that the Unicorn/poet has "no match / or mate." "Through art alone," Williams writes, can "male and female, a field of / flowers, a tapestry, spring flowers unequaled / in loveliness" be realized (212). In this way, Williams reintroduces the oxymoron of Book One--"all of a piece, alone"; the poem is now "a fabric all of a piece" which weaves together the abstract and the representational, but a fabric which escapes into a world that is not the world of men and thereby separates itself from men. Men die: "death is a hole / in which we are all buried" (211). The world dies yearly: "The flower dies down / and rots away" (212). But if death is a hole, it is "through this hole / we escape":

Through this hole
at the bottom of the cavern
of death, the imagination
escapes intact. (212)

The product of the imagination is its art. Art mediates between our mortality and our dreams of immortality. It is a concrete thing in the world which, like the sculpture of the grasshopper in Book Two, lives on to tell of our breathing "as long as stone shall last bearing / the chisel's stroke." Yet Williams knows that art is largely ignored and that, again like the grasshopper, it is left to the "rubble-bank disintegrating beneath a / tropical downpour," waiting for its accomplishment to be discovered. Only when the accomplishments of art are discovered does "the museum become real" (209).

Thus the second section of Book Five is a kind of plea to the public, a plea for their own imaginative involvement in the world of art. It is

also a statement of faith and "the basis of faith in art." Its opening lines draw the poet to his people, an assurance that it is from them that his inspiration springs:

Peer of the gods is that man, who
face to face, sits listening
to your sweet speech and lovely
laughter. (217)

Williams uses a letter from Pound to ask his public if at any point anything "seems cloudy to you, or INComprehensible" (217), to ask "if there is anything here that is OBskewer," and if so, "do you want DEetails?" (218). Then Williams describes a woman he has confronted in the street

neither short
nor tall, nor old nor young
her
face would attract no
adolescent. (219)

Though he does not know her, he wants to sit with her "face to face" and listen to her "sweet speech." In a question addressed to someone he does not know, the almost featureless but somehow beautiful everywoman, Williams addresses us all:

. have you read anything that I have written?
It is all for you (220)

Duchamp's Large Glass invites its public to imagine the landscape beyond it, and then, in Etant Donnés, puts that landscape provocatively beyond the public's grasp, in order to assert the special province of the artist, the artist's actual presence in a world of which the public only dreams. The two works damn the public, but in the damning and by their example, urge the public on to imaginative activity. Williams is making the same claim not only for his own poetry but for all art. Art is like a

pre-tragic play,
 a satyric play!
 All plays
 were satyric when they were most devout. (221)

Art satirizes man's estate, but is itself a statement of faith in man's ability to create--"Ribald as a Satyr"--and in creation let "all deformities take wing" (221). The jazz of Mezz Mezzrow, "the writings / of Gertrude / Stein," the "figures of / Paul Klee," Dürer's Melancholy, Leonardo's La Gioconda, Bosch's "congeries of tortured souls," Beethoven's Fifth,

Freud
 Picasso
 Juan Gris (222)

all present "the cure" for man's deformities, the revelation of "abstraction," the concrete realization of the imagination (222). "The dream / is in pursuit!" (222), Williams writes, echoing Book Four's "La vertue / est toute dans l'effort." But the pursuit is no longer his so much as ours, a pursuit we must follow in order to "know" with him

 that a stasis
 from a chrysalis
 has stretched its wings . (223)

"Dreams possess me," Williams writes, but likewise he has possessed his dream, "the dance" of "animals," unicorns, and "the blameless beasts," the "great beast" of his people (224).

The artist, then, mediates for us between the world which we have and the world of our dreams, if we but let him. The last section of Book Five is Williams' final statement of that mediation. It is, in effect, Williams' final "corn dance." Like the Kinte Kaye, the death dance the original Indians of the Paterson area (Book Three, 102, 132), this last section is Williams' own dance, "the measured dance" (239) that testifies

in which Unicorn and poet become one. And it is a tapestry in which this Unicorn/poet is slain, hunted down by the world and destroyed by the world, inviting even his own destruction by the call of his "root toot a toot." But it is a tapestry finally in which the Unicorn, slain, is reborn in a world of flowers. Out of "defeat," "a world unsuspected" is born:

Yellow centers, crimson petals
and the reverse,
dandelion, love-in-a-mist,
cornflowers,
thistle and others
the names and perfumes I do not know.
The woods are filled with holly
(I have told you, this
is a fiction, pay attention) (236)

The Unicorn--Paterson, the city--rests in a world of flowers. The dream of "a man like a city and a woman like a flower / --who are in love" has been realized. But this is a fiction, and a "living" one. The poem ends with a call to the hunt--"Yo ho! ta ho!"--an invitation to dance with Williams,

to dance to a measure
contrapuntally,
Satyrically, the tragic foot (239)

It is an invitation to join in the activity of creation ourselves, an activity which marries abstraction to reality, an invitation to bring our fictions to life. In an interview just before his death, Williams was asked to comment on Paterson's last lines. "The Satyrs are understood as action, a dance," he said. "I always think of the Indians there. . . . The Indians had a beat in their own music, which they beat with their feet."⁴⁸ Paterson, Book Five, is Williams' Kinte Kaye, a tribute to both life and the living, a stay against the "long winter sleep" (207).

Notes

Introduction

¹ Hans Hofmann, "The Color Problem in Pure Painting--its Creative Origin," Hans Hofmann (New York: Abrams, n.d.), p. 46.

² Ezra Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir (1916; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1970), pp. 81-82. This statement first appeared in Pound's article "Vorticism" in the Fortnightly Review of September 1914. The "Vorticism" article is reprinted in its entirety in the Gaudier-Brzeska book.

³ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, Cubism, in Modern Artists On Art, ed. and rev. trans. Robert L. Herbert (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 7.

⁴ Guillaume Apollinaire, The Cubist Painters: Aesthetic Meditations, trans. Lionel Abel (New York: Wittenborn, 1944), p. 12.

⁵ In Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902-1918, ed. Leroy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 264.

⁶ Quoted in Werner Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century, Vol. 1, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 113.

⁷ Quoted in "Art Notes," New York Times, November 19, 1913, p. 14.

⁸ Mme. Buffet-Picabia was, at this time, demonstrably thinking along lines very close to Schönberg. In a short article which appeared in Les Soirées de Paris, 15 Mars 1914, entitled "Musique d'aujourd'hui," she maintains that the conventional traditions of music must disappear under the pressure of invention, and that the renewal of the material, techniques and forms of musical expression is in fact inevitable. She made similar statements, and extended them to painting, in the June 1913 Special number of Camera Work, in an article entitled "Modern Art and the Public," pp. 10-14.

⁹ In Modern Artists on Art, pp. 26-27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹² Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Painting in Particular, trans. Michael Sadleir (New York: Wittenborn, 1947), p. 50.

¹³ Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Aires abstraits (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1957), p. 24. My translation.

14 Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, "Qui est Francis Picabia?" unpublished article cited in Marc Le Bot, Francis Picabia et la crise des valeurs figuratives 1900-1925 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968), p. 45.

15 "Preface" for the Picabia Exhibition, New York, Photo-Succession Gallery, March 1913, rpt. Camera Work, 42-43 (April-July 1913), pp. 19-20.

16 Buffet-Picabia, "Qui est Francis Picabia?" cited in Le Bot, pp. 96-97. Mme. Buffet-Picabia also states that the work was not titled Caoutchouc (meaning either "galoshes," "rubber," or "rubber band") until several years after its completion. It is, of course, the arbitrariness of its title, together with its implication of elasticity, which gives the painting a sense of complete removal from the objective world. The implication is that Picabia later chose the title in order to hide the painting's inspiration in objective reality.

17 See for example: Lincoln (Neb.) Journal (Feb. 9, 1913), Minneapolis Morning Tribune (Feb. 23, 1913), Milwaukee Evening (Feb. 23, 1913), Chicago Examiner (March 19, 1913), New York City Star (March 22 and 23, 1913), Colliers Weekly (Feb. 15, 1913), New York Herald (Jan. 21 and March 18, 1913), New York Sun (March 3, 1913), New York Times (Feb. 28, 1913), Chicago American (March 25, 1913), Chicago Post (March 26, 1913), Newark (April 3, 1913), Kansas City (Feb. 25, 1913). Marc Le Bot gathered this partial list from Mme. Buffet-Picabia's scrapbooks which contain the original clippings.

18 Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, p. 87.

19 The most thorough introduction to the problems inherent in comparing the literary and the visual arts is the collection of ten essays which comprise New Literary History, 3 (Spring, 1972). Indispensable full length studies which form the ground-work for all comparisons include Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry, trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: Noonday Press, 1968); Heinrich Wölfflin, Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art, trans. M. D. Hottinger (1932; rpt. New York: Dover, 1950); Mario Praz, Mnemosyne: The Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970); and two works by E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1961) and Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art, 2nd ed. (New York: Phaidon, 1971). All of these writers generally agree with me that the real value in drawing comparisons between the arts is the revelation of shared aesthetic values, which may or may not manifest themselves in analogous techniques. The province of comparisons between the arts, therefore, is primarily intellectual or cultural history, and only secondarily literary or art history. All of these writers also deal primarily with the tradition of ut pictura poesis, or the language of representation, and certain of their concerns (such as how can a picture be "narrative") can be modified in the context of modern abstract art. Of particular interest to the student of modern art and literature is the last chapter of Gombrich's Art and Illusion, "From Representation to Expression."

Two books which have provided me, circuitously, with useful ways of comparing Stein and Williams to Cubism in particular are Gérard Bertrand, L'illustration de la poésie à l'époque du cubisme 1909-1914: Derain, Dufy, Picasso (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971) and Gerald Kamber, Max Jacob and the Poetics of Cubism (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971). Two books that have been indispensable in connecting Williams to trends in modern art in an historical rather than aesthetic way are Bram Dijkstra, The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969) and Dickran Tashjian, Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde 1910-1925 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1975). Dijkstra's article, "Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams: Poetry, Painting and the Function of Reality," in Encounters: Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts, ed. John Dixon Hunt (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 156-172, helped me to formulate the tension between abstraction and realism in Williams' poetry. Dijkstra sees Stevens as embracing the abstract and Williams the real, while I see Williams as embracing both. Finally, Barbara Novak's formulation of the history of American painting as a dialectic between what she calls "realism" and "idealism" in her American Painting in the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience (New York: Praeger, 1969), helps to place Williams' preoccupation with reconciling abstraction and realism as part of a continuing American tradition.

20 J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers (1965; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1969), pp. 285-359.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 287-289. Sister Bernadette Quinn's "Paterson: Landscape and Dream," Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (May 1971), 523-548, takes an approach opposite to Miller's argument, seeing Williams' poetry more as a leap into the self. An argument closer to my own is Powell Wood's "William Carlos Williams: The Poet as Engineer," Modern Poetry Studies, 1 (1970), 127-140.

22 Camera Work, Special Number (August 1912), pp. 13-14.

23 "Marsden Hartley," Camera Work, 45 (January 1914), pp. 17-18. From 1912 to 1914, Hartley was in Europe, first in Germany studying with Kandinsky, then later in Paris where he met Stein. Stein was so impressed with his abstract paintings of this period that she wrote Stieglitz in 1913: "In his painting he has done what in Kandinsky is only a direction. . . . He has used color to express a picture and he has done it so completely that . . . each canvas is a thing in itself and contained within itself. . . . He is the only one working in color, that is considering the color as more dominant than the line, who is really attempting to create an entity in a picture which is not a copy of light." Quoted in Donald Gallup, "The Weaving of a Pattern: Marsden Hartley and Gertrude Stein," Magazine of Art 41 (November 1948), 258.

24 Epsom-Chantilly-Deauville vus par Raoul Dufy, Text by Gertrude Stein, was originally scheduled for an edition of 200 copies by the Paris publisher

Darantière. A folio in the Salle de la Réserve of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris contains Stein's original hand-corrected typescript and two rough printer's proofs, together with twenty-one black and white photographs of the Dufy watercolors to be included in the book. A letter from Darantière to Dufy dated 23 December 1946 indicates that all the reproductions were to be in color, and a final proof of two pages from the scheduled edition includes a half-page color print. Publication was suspended due to Stein's death and the consequent confusion over the status of her estate.

- 25 "Glorious Weather," Contact, 5 (June 1923), n.p.
- 26 Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," in The Blaue Reiter Almanac, ed. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, trans. Henning Falkenstein, English language edition ed. Klaus Lankheit (New York: Viking, 1974), p. 168.
- 27 "Glorious Weather," n.p.
- 28 Juan Gris, "On the Possibilities of Painting," in Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Juan Gris: His Life and Work, trans. Douglas Cooper (1947; rev. New York: Abrams, 1969), p. 197.
- 29 Quoted in Reed Whittemore, William Carlos Williams: Poet from Jersey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), p. 271.
- 30 Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," p. 161.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 158-160.
- 32 Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century, p. 203.
- 33 Quoted in Robert Motherwell ed., The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology (New York: Wittenborn, 1951), p. xix.
- 34 The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), p. 10.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 337.
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

Chapter I: The Example of Gertrude Stein

- ¹ Quoted in Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century, p. 33.
- ² Letter to Emile Bernard, 26 May 1904, quoted in Gerstalt Mack, The Life of Paul Cézanne (New York: Knopf, 1942), p. 321.
- ³ Gleizes and Metzinger, Cubism, pp. 3, 2-3.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
- ⁵ Quoted in Haftmann, pp. 33-34.
- ⁶ Quoted in Haftmann, p. 32.
- ⁷ Letter to Emile Bernard, 15 April 1904, in Mack, p. 314.
- ⁸ Henri Matisse, "Notes d'un peintre," in Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Matisse: His Art and His Public (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951), p. 121.
- ⁹ Quoted in Haftmann, p. 32.
- ¹⁰ Quoted in Haftmann, p. 32.
- ¹¹ Michael J. Hoffman, The Development of Abstractionism in the Writing of Gertrude Stein (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1965).
- ¹² The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and her World (Boston: Little Brown, 1959), p. 129.
- ¹³ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Picasso: Fifty Years of his Work (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), pp. 56-57. Barr includes three reproductions of these composition studies. Christian Zervos has reproduced 17 separate composition studies in volume two of his catalogue of the works of Picasso: Picasso (Paris: Cahiers d'Art, 1932), plates 629-645.
- ¹⁴ Barr, Picasso, p. 57.
- ¹⁵ Cf. Fernhurst, Q.E.D., and Other Early Writings (New York: Liveright, 1971), pp. 3-49 and The Making of Americans, pp. 429-440.
- ¹⁶ (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), pp. 223-225. In her book Gertrude Stein and the Present (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), Allegra Stewart has claimed a knowledge of Chinese characters and their visual roots for Stein by early 1913 or late 1912. If true--and I find Stewart's evidence less than conclusive--then Stein's interest in Chinese characters antedates Pound's acquisition of Fenollosa's MS by several months. It is certain that by the 1920's, however, Stein knew something of

them--largely through Picasso's "calligraphic painting." Her discussion of Picasso's "calligraphic style" in Picasso (1938) is replete with references to the Chinese written character.

17 "'To Abstract Reality': Abstract Language and the Intrusion of Consciousness in Wallace Stevens," American Literature, 45 (April 1974), 93.

18 Stein's interest in movement might lead one to think that she would have been quite taken by Futurist painting, with its interest in speed, motion and the machine. To the contrary, she recalls in The Autobiography that she found Futurism wrong-headed and "very dull" (pp. 117-118). Although she does not explain herself, her reasoning is probably very close to Apollinaire's 1912 formulation: "They want to paint forms in movement, which is a perfectly legitimate aim," but at the same time they "are scarcely interested in plastic problems . . . their chief concern is the subject" (Apollinaire on Art, pp. 199, 203). Samuel H. McMillan's unpublished dissertation (Univ. of Texas, 1964), "Gertrude Stein, the Cubists, and the Futurists," is the only discussion of the similarities between her work and futurism that I know. McMillan does little more than point out their similar interest in movement and their separation of the word from punctuation, narration and thematic unity. Stein had accomplished all of this long before futurism was even born, and McMillan fails to note this. More important, Stein's chief concern is with the "plastic problems" of composition. The futurist interest in subject matter, however, draws attention away from the integrity of the composition to things outside the composition's scope. At base, the futurist aesthetic is antithetical to Stein's, and she recognized this. If she found it "very dull," it is probably because it was to her way of thinking old-fashioned despite the modernity of its themes.

19 Joshua C. Taylor, "Two Visual Excursions," Critical Inquiry, 1 (September 1974), p. 93.

20 Quoted in Barr, Picasso, p. 271.

21 Quoted in Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, p. 132.

22 Henri Bergson, Introduction to Metaphysics, trans. T. E. Hulme (1913; rpt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949), p. 24.

23 Edward Fry, Cubism, Document #6 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 53. This is part of the earliest recorded statement by a Cubist artist on his art and is taken from an interview with the American Galett Burgess which was published in an article called "The Wild Men of Paris" in the Architectural Record of May 1910.

24 Gleizes and Metzinger, Cubism, p. 13.

25 Winthrop O. Judkins, "Towards a Reinterpretation of Cubism," Art Bulletin, 30 (1948), 275-276. The reader interested in seeing how these

devices operate in Cubist painting itself should turn to Judkins' article where they are all explained with reference to specific paintings illustrated in the text.

²⁶ Ibid., 276.

²⁷ Gleizes and Metzinger, Cubism, p. 7.

²⁸ Two examples of Braque's use of this device are Violin and Palette and Still Life with Violin and Pitcher, both 1910.

²⁹ Robert Rosenblum, Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art (New York: Abrams, 1961), p. 30.

³⁰ William Wasserstrom, "The Sursymamericubealism of Gertrude Stein," Twentieth-Century Literature, 21 (February 1975), 92.

³¹ Richard Bridgman, Gertrude Stein in Pieces (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 162.

³² Quoted in Hoffman, Abstractionism, p. 154.

³³ In Gertrude Stein and the Present, Allegra Stewart agrees: ". . . in those still lifes she is discussing, in a peculiarly garbled and dislocated way, not so much the object as the cubistic vision of the object" (p. 76). Noting that Stein was a trained anatomist, Stewart goes on, rather ingeniously, to annotate references in the "Objects" section of Tender Buttons to the anatomy of the eye: "The general idea of the development of the eye from the primitive ocular vesicle is introduced in 'A Carafe, That is a Blind Glass,' the first piece in the book. 'Glazed Glitter' seems to describe the cornea and the sclerotic coat of which it is a part. With 'Object' we come to the perception of images, to the function of the lens itself, and to the possibility of three dimensional perspective. 'An Umbrella' might well describe the fovea or macula lutea; 'A Little Bit of a Tumbler,' its function; 'A Waist,' the ciliary muscle. 'A Little Called Pauline' is an especially interesting clue to the intention of the whole, since the witty linguistic suggestion in the title certainly seems to convey a reference to the pupil. 'Pauline,' of course, is the feminine form of 'Paul' (L. paulus, little). 'A Little' refers clearly to a little girl, but equally clearly (when we have caught the idea of Latin derivation) to the pupil of the eye (L. pupa, girl; diminutive pupilla, whence not only pupil, a young student, but pupil of the eye)."

³⁴ Hoffman, Abstractionism, pp. 174, 155.

³⁵ L. T. Fitz, "Gertrude Stein and Picasso: The Language of Surfaces," American Literature, 45 (May 1973), 228-237.

³⁶ The original hand-written MS from which I have made this transcription is reproduced in Jerome Rothenberg, ed., Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of American Avant-Garde Poetry 1914-1945 (New York: Seabury, 1974), p. 26.

37 Ibid.

38 Marcel Duchamp, Salt-Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp (Marchand du Sel), ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 125.

39 Ibid.

40 Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century, p. 181.

41 Hans Richter, Dada: Art and Anti-Art (New York: McGraw-Hill, n.d.), p. 219.

42 In Motherwell, ed., The Dada Painters and Poets, p. 92.

43 Tristan Tzara, Lampisteries (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963), p. 104.

44 Witness her almost monthly appearance in Picabia's numbers of the Little Review, and in Eugene Jolas' transition, or later the appearance of Four Saints in Three Acts in the French Surrealist publication Orbes, which its editor Jacques-Henry Levasque described to Robert Motherwell as follows: "[Its] first number appeared in the spring of 1928, with, for its motto, only 'Life,' and, as contributors, Cendrars, Picabia, Duchamp, Erik Satie, Pierre Reverdy, le Douanier Rousseau, Gertrude Stein (Four Saints in Three Acts, the first French translation published in a magazine and which appeared in the spring number, 1929, accompanied by the first article published in France on her, The Life of Gertrude Stein, by Georges Hugnet), Pierre de Massot, Camille Bryen, Fernand Léger, Georges Hugnet, the former dadaists, Tristan Tzara, Arp, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Philippe Soupault, whose names were then indicative of one of the essential tendencies of that publication, maintaining the position taken by the dada movement--then abandoned by all other reviews--against art, literature, dogmas, schools and systems" (The Dada Painters and Poets, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv). Stein's inclusion in this group, let alone the importance M. Levasque seems to attach to his publishing her, reveals how fully she was associated with both Dada and Surrealism.

45 Quoted in George Lemaître, From Cubism to Surrealism in French Literature (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1947), pp. 170-171.

46 André Breton, "The First Surrealist Manifesto (1924)," in Surrealists on Art, ed. Lucy R. Lippard (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 19.

47 Gertrude Stein, "Normal Motor Automatism," Harvard Psychological Review, 3 (September 1896), and B. F. Skinner, "Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?" Atlantic Monthly, 153 (January 1934), pp. 50-57.

- 48 John Tancock, "The Influence of Marcel Duchamp," in Marcel Duchamp, ed. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShire (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), p. 160.
- 49 The Dada Painters and Poets, p. xvii.
- 50 Quoted in Ibid., p. xxvii.
- 51 Marcel Duchamp, Salt-Seller, p. 32.
- 52 Ibid., p. 125.
- 53 Octavio Paz, "*water writes always in* plural," in Marcel Duchamp, p. 157. Etant donnés is discussed more fully in Chapter III.
- 54 Marcel Duchamp, Salt-Seller, p. 124.
- 55 Ibid., p. 126.
- 56 Ibid., p. 125.
- 57 David Antin, "duchamp and language," in Marcel Duchamp, pp. 113-114.
- 58 Bridgman, Gertrude Stein in Pieces, pp. 140-141.

Chapter II: Williams and the Idea of Abstraction

¹ Ivor Winters, In Defense of Reason (Chicago: Swallow Press, n.d.), pp. 83, 86. Edmund Wilson dedicates a chapter to Stein's work and includes Tristan Tzara's "Memoirs of Dadaism" as an appendix in Axel's Castle: A Study of the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (1931; rpt. New York: Scribners, 1958), pp. 237-256, 304-312. There is, incidentally, an excellent discussion of E. E. Cummings' affinities with Dada in Dickran Tashjian's Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde 1910-1925 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 165-187.

² In "Schools," Apollinaire on Art, p. 407.

³ Hilaire Hiler, "A Painter Tries to Articulate," Contact 2, 1 (October 1932), p. 10.

⁴ William C. Seitz, The Art of Assemblage (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 37.

⁵ Mina Loy, "Gertrude Stein," transatlantic review, 2 (December 1924), 430.

⁶ Quoted in Christopher Grey, Cubist Aesthetic Theories (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 123.

⁷ Juan Gris, "Possibilities," p. 199.

⁸ Peter and Linda Murray, A Dictionary of Art and Artists (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 113.

⁹ Williams was sometimes mistaken in calling his work Dadaist. There is, for instance, his 1929 translation of Philippe Soupault's Last Nights of Paris, which Williams calls, in I Wanted to Write a Poem, a Dada novel (IWWP, 47). It is nothing of the sort. A bizarre, dreamlike and illogical account of a French whore who wanders about the Paris nights turning the city into a labyrinthine and senseless (though undeniably sensual) hell, it is categorically Surrealist. Likewise in I Wanted to Write a Poem, he calls both Kora in Hell, finished in 1918, and A Novelette, finished in the mid-'twenties, examples of Dadaism, and in the next breath, examples of "automatic writing" (IWWP, 49). And they are often much closer to Surrealist "psychic automatism"--Soupault's and Breton's Les Champs Magnetiques, for instance--than to most Dadaist production. In fact Williams had so many ties to Surrealism that when the French Surrealists migrated to New York in 1941 in order to escape the second World War, Williams was asked to be senior editor of the Surrealist publication VVV with André Breton (see Mike Weaver, William Carlos Williams: The American Background [Cambridge, England: University Press, 1971], p. 139). Williams turned the offer down because, he felt, Surrealism turned its back on "what is found in life" (SE, 252), and concentrated on portraying the artist's imagination to the

exclusion of material reality. In this way, Surrealism failed "to communicate with people" (SE, 252). Weaver's explanation of Williams' rejection of Surrealism, pp. 141-142, though more complicated than my own, is a very useful one.

10 "Further Announcement," Contact, 1 (December 20, 1920), p. 10.

11 George Lemaître, From Cubism to Surrealism in French Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1947), pp. 176, 155.

12 Ibid., pp. 172-173.

13 Motherwell, The Dada Painters and Poets, pp. 154-155.

14 Ibid., p. 395.

15 Manuel L. Grossman, Dada: Paradox, Mystification, and Ambiguity in European Literature (New York: Pegasus, 1971), pp. 165-166.

16 Quoted in Ibid., p. 165.

17 For the sake of clarity, I have consolidated and abridged several paragraphs of Williams' text. Williams probably derived the phrase "conversation as design" from Gris' "Des Possibilités de la Peinture" which appeared in French in two parts in the transatlantic review, 1 (June 1924), 482-488 and 2 (July 1924), 75-79. "Conversation" is a reasonable translation for Gris' concluding statement that "la seule possibilité de la peinture est l'expression de certains rappports du peinture avec le monde extérieur" and that the painting itself "est l'association intime de ces rappports entre eux." And "design" is a reasonable translation for the "architecture des éléments formels" which, for Gris, reveals this "association intime."

18 This discussion is part of Williams' prose discussion of Gris' work that is interrupted by the poems "The Rose" and "At the Faucet of June." Before the poems are introduced Williams writes that there is a picture of Juan Gris' which he has never seen in color, that defines "what the modern trend is." In The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech, Bram Dijkstra, apparently ignoring Williams' continuing discussion after the poems, has asserted that the picture to which Williams refers is Gris' 1912 collage Roses, and that the poem "The Rose" is an attempt to realize this painting in poetic language (p. 174). However, I can discover no reproduction, black and white or otherwise, of Roses in any publication before 1930. The Open Window, on the other hand, was reproduced in Broom, 1 (January 1922), p. 264, and in black and white. A number of Dijkstra's other examples of Williams' poetic realizations of specific plastic works are similarly suspect. In the recent The Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), Rod Townley perpetuates Dijkstra's error, pp. 142-145.

19 Letter dated 26 March 1915, Letters of Juan Gris, trans. and ed. Douglas Cooper (London: privately printed, 1956), p. 26.

- 20 Letter dated 25 August 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 21 Rpt. in Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, p. 193.
- 22 Rpt. in Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, p. 193.
- 23 Grey, Cubist Aesthetic Theories, p. 98.
- 24 Grey, p. 99. It is on Kahnweiler's authority that Grey labels these formal devices "rhyme" and "metaphor." Kahnweiler says that Gris intended them as such in Juan Gris, pp. 140-141.
- 25 (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 13-14.
- 26 The Blaue Reiter Almanac, pp. 161-165.
- 27 Letter of 14 October 1912, quoted in Dorothy Norman, Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 116.
- 28 "Photography," Camera Work, 41 (January 1913), pp. 17, 19-20.
- 29 Quoted in Norman, Alfred Stieglitz, p. 76.
- 30 Paul Strand, "Photography," Camera Work, 49/50 (June 1917), p. 3.
- 31 Quoted in Norman, Alfred Stieglitz, p. 161.
- 32 "Our Illustrations," Camera Work, 49/50 (June 1917), p. 36.
- 33 Quoted in Norman, Alfred Stieglitz, p. 161.
- 34 Critical Inquiry, 1 (June 1975), 852-855.
- 35 Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, p. 77. For a good brief description of the early influence of Kandinsky on Williams, see Weaver, William Carlos Williams, pp. 37-39.
- 36 Letter dated 25 March 1921, in Letters, p. 105.
- 37 Gris, "Possibilities," p. 199.
- 38 Gris, 1921 Statement for L'Esprit Nouveau, rpt. Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, p. 193.
- 39 Gris, "Possibilities," p. 200.

Chapter III: The Americanization of a Poetic

¹ "Picabia, Art Rebel, Here to Teach New Movement," The New York Times (February 16, 1913), Section V, p. 9.

² "The Iconoclastic Opinion of M. Marcel Duchamps [sic] concerning Art and America," Current Opinion, 59 (November 1915), 346.

³ Charles M. Rosenberg, "Cubist Object Treatment: A Perceptual Analysis," Artforum, 9 (April 1971), p. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵ "French Artists Spur On American Art," New York Tribune (October 24, 1915), Section IV, p. 2. I am heavily indebted to Dickran Tashjian (Skyscraper Primitives) for much of what I have to say about Picabia and Duchamp and their relationship to American art. I have relied heavily on the thoroughness of his scholarship but more important is his sense that the experience of America metamorphosed the art of these two Europeans (p. 43), turned them toward realism. Their return to the object is the basis, I think, for a major re-reading of American art in the first half of this century, for it would allow us to regard the realist tendencies of artists like Marin, Sheeler, Demuth, Weber, and Hartley as a necessary extension, rather than a dilution, of European discoveries. A recent article by Abraham A. Davidson is typical of current opinion. He argues that these painters were "unable to reconcile themselves to or even understand the ambiguities which were at the heart of European Cubism. . . . What emerges . . . is an uncertain mélange of Cubist passages which are never completely digested or integrated . . . a style marked by severe simplifications" ("John Marin: A Dynamism Codified," Artforum, 9 [April 1971], p. 37). The return to the object which America inspired in Picabia and Duchamp is the place to begin attacking this theory that Davidson shares with many other art historians.

⁶ Pierre Cabanne, Dialogues With Marcel Duchamp, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 45.

⁷ For the most comprehensive analysis of elements which compose The Large Glass see Arturo Schwartz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp (New York: Abrams, 1969).

⁸ Le Bot, Picabia, pp. 130-132.

⁹ William A. Camfield, "The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia," The Art Bulletin, 48 (December 1966), 314.

¹⁰ Paul Haviland, Untitled Statement, 291, 7-8 (Sept.-Oct. 1915), n.p.

¹¹ Peter Minuit, "291 Fifth Avenue," The Seven Arts, 1 (November 6, 1916), 61.

- 12 Tashjian, Skyscraper Primitives, p. 38.
- 13 Camfield, "The Machinist Style," 317.
- 14 Marius De Zayas, "Femme!" 291, 9 (November 1915), n.p.
- 15 William Carlos Williams, Letter to the Editors, The Little Review, 9 (Autumn 1922), pp. 59-60.
- 16 The Egoist, 4 (August 1917), 110-111. Mike Weaver has outlined the Marsden/Williams "debate" in William Carlos Williams, pp. 17-29.
- 17 "American Art," The Soil, 1 (December 1916), 3.
- 18 "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," The Poetry Journal, 8 (November 1917), 33-34.
- 19 H.-P. Roché, "The Blind Man," The Blindman (April 10, 1917), pp. 3-6. The magazine's name was, in fact, The Blind Man, two words. The second, and also the last, issue of the review corrected what apparently, in the first issue, was a printer's error.
- 20 "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," 34.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 "The Richard Mutt Case," The Blind Man, 2 (May 1917), p. 5.
- 24 "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," 29-31.
- 25 Paul Strand, "Photography," Camera Work, 49/50 (June 1917), 3-4.
- 26 Contact, 3 (Spring 1921), 15.
- 27 "Belly Music," Others, 5 (July 1919), Supplement, p. 30.
- 28 Contact, 2 (January 1921), n.p., and The Dial, 68 (June 1938), 687.
- 29 Quoted in Dijkstra, Hieroglyphics of a New Speech, pp. 102-103.
- 30 "Sermon with a Camera," New Republic, 96 (October 12, 1938), 282-283.
- 31 Letter dated February 5, 1924, to Alfred Stieglitz, quoted in Tashjian, Skyscraper Primitives, p. 209.
- 32 There is a passage in Paterson II (p. 45), which was written just as Etant Donnés was begun, that may well be a record of a conversation

between Duchamp and Williams (or a conversation reported to Williams). If so, it is a broad hint that Etant Donnés had been started. The passage is discussed in the subsequent chapter.

33 Octavio Paz, "water writes always in plural," in d'Harnoncourt and McShire, eds., Marcel Duchamp, p. 145.

34 Anne d'Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, "Etant Donnés: 1^o--la chute d'eau, 2^o--le gaz d'éclairage: Reflections on a New Work by Marcel Duchamp," Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin, 64 (April-June 1969 and July-September 1969), 16. I have relied heavily on d'Harnoncourt's and Hopps' analysis throughout.

35 Quoted in Jean Schuster, "Marcel Duchamp, vite," le Surréalisme, même, 2 (Spring 1957), p. 144 (Translation by d'Harnoncourt and Hopps in "Reflections on a New Work").

36 My translation of the original manuscript page reproduced in d'Harnoncourt and Hopps, "Reflections on a New Work," p. 18. Williams was probably acquainted with this text. It appeared, in a special Surrealist number, edited by André Breton and translated by J. Bronowski, of This Quarter, 5 (September 1932), pp. 189-192, two years before the Green Box itself appeared. Williams himself was a contributor to This Quarter.

37 Marcel Duchamp, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, a typographical version by Richard Hamilton of Duchamp's Green Box, trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York: Wittenborn, 1960), n.p.

38 Marcel Duchamp, A l'Infinitif [the White Box], notes from 1912 to 1920] (New York: Cordier and Ekstrom, 1966), p. 5.

39 Seitz, The Art of Assemblage, pp. 73-74.

40 Quoted in John C. Thirlwall, "William Carlos Williams' Paterson: The Search for a Redeeming Language--A Personal Epic in Five Parts," in New Directions 17 (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 263.

41 William Carlos Williams, "The Art of Poetry," Interview conducted by Stanley Koehler in April 1962, The Paris Review, 32 (Summer-Fall, 1964), pp. 110-151.

42 What I am arguing here is essentially a radicalization (or extreme simplification) of what Northrop Frye, in the Introduction to the Fourth Essay of the Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), calls the "radical of presentation," that is, the way in which a text formally announces how it is to be taken. Frye argues that this "radical of presentation" is the basis of generic distinctions between drama, epic and lyric modes, and "announces the conditions established between the poet and his public." Refusing to assume "poetry" as a given, Williams goes one step further and points to the "radical of presentation" which makes poetry possible in the first place. He is announcing the conditions which distinguish poetry from speech.

43 Reprinted as the Appendix to Linda Welshimer Wagner, The Poems of William Carlos Williams (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 145-147.

44 Neil Myers, "Williams' 'Two Pendants: For the Ears,'" Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (May 1971), 477-492.

45 "Preface," Quarterly Review of Literature, 2 (1946), 349.

46 The frustrations inherent in any attempt to discover traditional metric patterns in Williams' poetry can best be seen in the section devoted to Williams in Harvey Gross's Sound and Form in Modern Poetry: A Study of Prosody from Thomas Hardy to Robert Lowell (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968). Gross begins by noting that "nothing, and certainly nothing in the way of a deliberate metric, seems to intervene between us and the sensibility of this extraordinary man" (p. 117). Gross, however, is so determined to discover some semblance of traditional prosody in Williams' work that he finally analyzes "The Yachts" (CEP, 106-107) at length. Discovering "a more conventional line" in this poem, he claims that it "ranks with the best poems of our age" largely, perhaps exclusively, because it possesses "a passionately well-ordered metric" (pp. 121-122). "The Yachts" is among the most atypical of Williams' efforts. It in fact misrepresents him. It cannot be over-emphasized that while Williams' metric is not traditional, it is nonetheless deliberate and well-ordered.

47 "The Art of Poetry," The Paris Review, p. 120.

48 "Poet's Corner," New Republic, 93 (November 17, 1937), 50.

Chapter IV: The Achievement of Paterson

¹ "The American Spirit in Art," Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (Second Series), 2 (1952), 51-52.

² Ibid., 57.

³ Ibid., 58.

⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁶ Irving Sandler, The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 203.

⁷ Robert Motherwell, "Beyond the Aesthetic," Design, 47 (April 1946), pp. 14-15.

⁸ Eugene C. Goosen, "Robert Motherwell and the Seriousness of Subject," Art International, 3 (1959), 34.

⁹ Quoted in Thirlwall, "Williams' Paterson," 254.

¹⁰ Paul L. Mariani, William Carlos Williams: The Poet and his Critics (Chicago: American Library Association, 1975), p. 77.

¹¹ Randall Jarrell, "The Poet and His Public," Partisan Review, 13 (Sept.-Oct. 1946), 493. Margaret Lloyd Bollard has recently called the pattern of repetition which Jarrell describes an "interlace structure," drawing useful analogies between the structure of Williams' poem and the structure of medieval literary works and tapestries; see "The Interlace Element in Paterson," Twentieth Century Literature, 21 (October 1975), 288-304.

¹² Quoted in Bollard, "The Interlace Element," 291.

¹³ Cited in Benjamin Sankey, A Companion to William Carlos Williams' "Paterson" (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 76.

¹⁴ Octavio Paz, Marcel Duchamp, or The Castle of Purity, trans. Donald Gardner (London: Cape Colliard, 1970).

¹⁵ Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 10.

¹⁶ Joseph N. Riddel, The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 255-262, passim. Riddel's argument is needlessly encumbered, I think,

by the reliance on the thought of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Heidegger. But I find that the conclusions Riddel comes to are close to my own, and his book has provoked an interesting debate with J. Hillis Miller; see J. Hillis Miller, "Deconstructing the Deconstructers," rev. of Riddel, The Inverted Bell, Diacritics, 5 (Summer 1975), pp. 24-31; and Joseph N. Riddel, "Response: A Miller's Tale," Diacritics, 5 (Fall 1975), pp. 56-65. Although the discussion focuses primarily on Riddel's correct or incorrect use of contemporary European thought, the "radiant gist" of the debate is whether or not Williams was "thinker" enough to justify Riddel's approaching him in such high-minded fashion. I stand with Riddel maintaining that Williams was "thinker" enough indeed.

17 Riddel, The Inverted Bell, p. 241.

18 I am grateful to Sankey for pointing this connection out, see A Companion to "Paterson", pp. 51, 121-122.

19 Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, pp. 134, 136.

20 See page above.

21 I have limited my quotation from "Projective Verse" to only those portions which Williams incorporates into the Autobiography. For the complete text see, Charles Olson, Selected Writings, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 15-26. It should be noted perhaps that Olson connects breath to inspiration, p. 22.

22 Martin Duberman, Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community (New York: Dutton, 1972), pp. 436-437.

23 Duberman, p. 329.

24 Robert Creeley, "On the Road: Notes on Artists and Poets 1950 to 1965," in Poets of the Cities: New York and San Francisco 1950-1965, catalogue of an exhibition organized by the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts and Southern Methodist University (New York: Dutton, 1974), pp. 59-60. See also Creeley's introduction to Charles Olson, Selected Writings and his collection of critical writings, A Sense of Measure (London: Calder and Boyers, 1973). When Creeley visited the University of Washington campus in the fall of 1975, I asked him why he organized his own writings--both prose and poetry--around the notion of numerical length and pattern. His reply--"It's like choosing the size of a canvas, defining the field"--helped me in understanding the rationale behind Williams' triadic variable foot.

25 Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," Possibilities, 1 (Winter 1947/48), p. 79.

26 Untitled statement (1951), in New York School The First Generation: Paintings of the 1940s and 1950s, ed. Maruice Tuchman (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1965), p. 141.

- 27 Art Lecture at Pratt Institute (1958), rpt. in *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 28 Frank O'Hara, Art Chronicles 1954-1966 (New York: George Braziller, 1975), p. 71.
- 29 Quoted in Thirlwall, "Williams' Paterson," p. 289.
- 30 Walter Sutton, "A Visit with William Carlos Williams," Minnesota Review, 1 (Spring 1961), 321-322.
- 31 See Paul L. Mariani, "The Eighth Day of Creation: William Carlos Williams' Late Poems," Twentieth Century Literature, 21 (October 1975), where he notes that "in the action painting of the poem . . . the lines are . . . jagged, hesitant, coiling back on themselves, for the most part purposely flat" (p. 311). See also Mariani, "The Satyr's Defense: Williams' 'Asphodel,'" Contemporary Literature, 14 (Winter 1973), 1; and Thomas W. Lombardi, "William Carlos Williams: The Leech-Gatherer of Paterson," Midwest Quarterly, 9 (Summer 1968), 335-336.
- 32 Christine Rabin, "Williams' Autobiographeme: The Inscriptional 'I' in 'Asphodel,'" Modern Poetry Studies, 6 (Autumn 1975), 159.
- 33 B. H. Friedman, Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).
- 34 Sandler, The Triumph of American Art, p. 183.
- 35 Harriet and Sidney Janis, "Marcel Duchamp: Anti-Artist," View, 5 (21 March 1945), 17-18; rpt. in Motherwell, The Dada Painters and Poets, pp. 313-314.
- 36 Marcel Duchamp, Salt-Seller, p. 49.
- 37 Quoted in Weaver, William Carlos Williams, p. 155.
- 38 For good discussions of Pollock's shift back to representational forms, see Friedman, Jackson Pollock and Sandler, The Triumph of American Art. Harold Rosenberg treats de Kooning's return to the human figure at length in de Kooning (New York: Abrams, 1973), but an especially good discussion of de Kooning's shift in style can be found in Thomas B. Hess, Willem de Kooning (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968). Hess does a fine job of pointing out and explaining the place of anti-Hegelian dialectic in de Kooning's aesthetic.
- 39 In the manuscript notes for Book Four, Williams links these lines-- which are ostensibly about Curie's discovery of radium--to his own poetics: "the splitting of the atom . . . has a literary meaning . . . in the splitting of the foot. . . . These discoveries here [in Book Four]: 1. radium. 2. poet's discovery of modern idiom. 3. political scientist's discovery of cure for economic ills." Cited in Thirlwall, "Williams' Paterson," p. 273.

40 Cited in Thirlwall, "Williams' Paterson," p. 264.

41 John Addington Symonds, Studies of the Greek Poets, 3rd ed. (1893; rpt. London: A. and C. Black, 1920), p. 172. I refer to a different edition of Symonds' book than Williams, but all subsequent references to Symonds' study refer to the same chapter on satire from which Williams excerpted the "limping iambs" quotation.

42 Ibid., 170.

43 Ibid., 171-172.

44 The confusion over the etymology of the word satire, common in Renaissance dramatic theory, is discussed with full references in Madeleine Doran, Endeavors of Art: A Study in Elizabethan Drama (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 201-203.

45 Symonds incidentally calls the satyr plays, "Phallic plays," Greek Poets, passim.

46 Juan Gris, "Possibilities of Painting," p. 200.

47 In "The Art of Poetry," Williams says that the formal pattern of these lines was meant to represent a set of wings (128).

48 Ibid., 130-131.

List of Abbreviations

Since the original editions of Gertrude Stein's work are relatively rare, and since even later editions are sometimes hard to find, I have made every effort to refer to the most widely available editions of her writings. Except in a few instances, I have cross-checked all references to her work with the original editions. The editions of Williams' work listed below are the definitive texts.

I. Gertrude Stein

- AABT - The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. In Selected Writings (see below).
- GHA - The Geographical History of America, or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind. New York: Vintage, 1973.
- HWIW - How Writing is Written. Vol. 2 of The Previously Uncollected Writings of Gertrude Stein. Ed. Robert Bartlett Haas. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow, 1974.
- LA - Lectures in America. Boston: Beacon Press, 1935.
- MA - The Making of Americans. New York: Something Else Press, 1967.
- GMP - Matisse Picasso and Gertrude Stein. New York: Something Else Press, 1972.
- P - Picasso. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.
- RAB - Reflections on the Atomic Bomb. Vol. 1 of The Previously Uncollected Writings of Gertrude Stein. Ed. Robert Bartlett Haas. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow, 1973.
- SW - Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein. Ed. Carl Van Vechten. New York: Vintage, 1972.
- TL - Three Lives. New York: Vintage, 1936.
- WAM - What Are Masterpieces. New York: Pitman, 1970.

II. William Carlos Williams

- A - The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams. New York: New Directions, 1967.
- CEP - The Collected Earlier Poems. New York: New Directions, 1966.

- CLP - The Collected Later Poems. Rev. ed. New York: New Directions, 1963.
- EK - The Embodiment of Knowledge. Ed. Ron Loewinsohn. New York: New Directions, 1974.
- IWWP - I Wanted to Write a Poem. Ed. Edith Heal. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.
- I - Imaginations: Kora in Hell, Spring and All, The Great American Novel, The Descent of Winter, A Novelette and Other Prose. New York: New Directions, 1970.
- IAG - In the American Grain. New York: New Directions, 1956.
- P - Paterson. New York: New Directions, 1963.
- PB - Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems. New York: New Directions, 1962.
- SE - Selected Essays. New York: New Directions, 1969.
- SL - Selected Letters. Ed. John C. Thirlwall. New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957.

Bibliography of Art Works Discussed

With some regret I have not included reproductions of the art works discussed in this study with the text. Considerations both financial and legal simply prohibited it. What follows is a list, arranged alphabetically by painter, of reproductions in reasonably available publications.

Braque, Georges. Grand Nu. Reproduced in Francis Ponge, Pierre Descargues, and André Malraux, G. Braque, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Abrams, 1971), p. 91.

_____. Soda. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 110.

_____. Le Violin. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 109.

Cézanne, Paul. Portrait d'une Femme. Reproduced in Cézanne (Vienna and New York: Phaidon Press and Oxford Univ. Press, 1938), plate 72.

_____. Millstone in the Park of Château Noir. Reproduced, with a photograph of the scene from which Cézanne painted his picture, in Allen Leepa, The Challenge of Modern Art (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1957), facing page 36.

Delaunay, Robert. Circular Rhythms [Forms]. Reproduced in Gustav Vriesan and Max Imdahl, Robert Delaunay: Light and Color, trans. Maria Peilkan (New York: Abrams, 1967), colorplate 12.

_____. Simultaneous Disc. Reproduced in Ibid., black-and-white plate 23.

Demuth, Charles. Aucassin and Nicolette. Reproduced in Mahoni Sharp Young, Early American Moderns: Painters of the Steiglitz Group (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1974), p. 58.

_____. I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold. Reproduced in David Gedhard and Phyllis Plous, Charles Demuth: The Mechanical Encrusted on the Living, Exhibition at the Art Galleries of the University of California, Santa Barbara (Goleta, California: Triple R Press, 1971), p. 70.

_____. Love, Love, Love. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 69.

Duchamp, Marcel. Bottlerack. Reproduced in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShire, Marcel Duchamp (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), p. 275.

_____. The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even. Reproduced in Ibid., pp. 64-65.

_____. Chocolate Grinder. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 272.

Duchamp, Marcel. Etant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage.
Reproduced in *Ibid.*, p. 144.

_____. Fountain (Urinal). Reproduced in *Ibid.*, p. 282.

_____. In Advance of a Broken Arm. Reproduced in *Ibid.*, p. 277.

_____. L.H.O.O.Q. Reproduced in *Ibid.*, p. 128.

_____. Precision Optics. Reproduced in *Ibid.*, p. 293.

_____. 3 stoppages étalon. Reproduced in *Ibid.*, p. 273.

Gris, Juan. Dish of Pears. Reproduced in Four Americans in Paris: The Collections of Gertrude Stein and her Family [Exhibition Catalogue], (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1790), plate 25.

_____. Guitar, Verre et Bouteille. Reproduced in Juan Gris, Catalogue for an exhibition at the Orangerie des Tuileries (Paris: Editions des musées nationaux, 1974), p. 32.

_____. The Open Window. Reproduced in *Ibid.*, p. 56.

_____. Violin et Damier. Reproduced in D.-H. Kahnweiler, Juan Gris: His Life and Work, trans. Douglas Cooper, 2nd ed., rev. (New York: Abrams, 1969), p. 252.

Kandinsky, Wassily. Various Abstractions, Improvisations and Compositions. Reproduced in Will Grohmann, Wassily Kandinsky: Life and Work (New York: Abrams, n.d.), passim.

_____. Composition No. VI. No reproduction of this painting is in print.

Kupka, Franz. Fugue in Red and Blue. Reproduced in Ludmilà Vachtova, Frank Kupka: Pioneer of Abstract Art (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), plate V.

_____. Newton Discs. Reproduced in *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Malevich, Casimir. Black Square. Drawing reproduced in Malevich's Essays on Art 1915-1933, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin, ed. Troels Anderson (New York: Wittenborn, 1968), p. 131.

Matisse, Henri. Bonheur de Vivre. Reproduced in Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Matisse: His Art and His Public (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1957), p. 320.

_____. Femme au Chapeau. Reproduced in *Ibid.*, frontispiece.

Motherwell, Robert. Elegy to the Spanish Republic XXXIV. Reproduced in Irving Sandler, The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 208.

_____. The Voyage. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 206.

O'Keeffe, Georgia. Black Iris. Reproduced in Mahoni Sharp Young, Early American Moderns: Painters of the Stieglitz Group (New York: Watson-Guption, 1974), p. 142.

Picabia, Francis. Américaine. Reproduced in Michel Sanouillet, ed., 391 (Reédition integrale, Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1960), n.p.

_____. Caoutchouc. Reproduced in William A. Camfield, Francis Picabia (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1970), p. 18.

_____. Catch as Catch Can. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 79.

_____. Chanson Negre. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 76.

_____. Culture physique. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 80.

_____. Danse à la Source. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 66.

_____. Etaosnisl. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 78.

_____. Fantaisie. Reproduced in William A. Camfield, "The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia," Art Bulletin, 48 (December 1966), plate 9.

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