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LITERARY COLLAGE: METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES  
IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

by

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Department of English

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies  
The University of Kent at Canterbury  
Canterbury, Kent

June, 1975

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The thesis by  
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entitled  
Literary Collage: Methodological Procedures  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

The organization of William Carlos Williams' longer works, culminating in the poem-city Paterson, is dependent upon the presence of apparently unassimilated, non-"poetic" materials. Such materials, varying considerably in length, tone and function, have similar aesthetic implications. Primarily, they disturb the insistent chronologies of the traditional Epic Poem, drawing the reader into a more active confrontation with the information of the poem. Their larger purpose, however, is to remind both poet and reader of that "real" world, inexhaustible and abundant, which both share. The significance of the continuing presence of this "real" world in Williams' works has been little understood by his critics who have, in the main, concerned themselves with exegetical evaluations of the poem's meaning. Williams himself believed that meaning was inextricable from form, that a poem's revelation of method was the only possible expression of its "news". In examining the methodological procedures by which he constructed his buildings, I examine the implications of this relationship and of other relationships arising from it--form and formlessness, art and society, the Doctor and the Poet.

To understand the process whereby Fact was gradually dynamized into Art by the imagination, I have located Williams'

method within the context of collage which I recognize as a specific response to certain irresolvable poetic problems. Whilst his critics have revealed how Williams' interest in painting lead him to experimentation in the short poem, acknowledging the active collaboration between Williams and Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth, they have failed to recognize and evaluate the structure of the longer works within the same painterly context. My concern is to examine the collage impulse established by the Cubist painters, where the resolution of purely formal problems lead to the "opening" of spatial organizations, a desperate ventilation of the closed arena of Fine Art. Williams' own experiments in literary form, particularly as they emerge in the parodic structures of the 'twenties and 'thirties, lead him to similar temporal elasticities.

I explore the roots of Williams' experimentation in the short speaking poems of Al Que Quiere (1917) and its stem in several important works--Kora in Hell (1920), Spring and All (1923), The Great American Novel (1923), and In the American Grain (1925). The final chapter is devoted to the flowering of collage aesthetic and technique in Paterson and investigates the work of the German collage-artist Kurt Schwitters to illuminate the procedures of the long poem, its deliberate lack of finish and the problems arising when the collage-artist rejects the total assimilation of his materials into the composition.

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INTRODUCTION:

"Self-Defeat"



(i)

The works of William Carlos Williams reveal the poet's consistent determination to defeat himself. By seeking to undermine the artist's traditional role, posture and tone, Williams attempted to confirm himself within the public world, deliberately choosing normalcy to speak more directly to his townspeople. "My furious wish," Williams indicated in his Autobiography "was to be normal, undrunk, balanced in everything." He continued:

I would marry . . . have children and still write, in fact, therefore to write. I would not court disease, live in the slums for the sake of art, give lice a holiday. I would not 'die for art,' but live for it, grimly! and work, work, work (like Pop), beat the game and be free (like Mom, poor soul!) to write, write as I should write, for the sheer drunkenness of it. . . . (51)<sup>1</sup>

This conscious cultivation of a public stance locates the poet and his voice solidly within a community characterized by its inability to articulate dimly-realized feelings.<sup>2</sup>

Williams' personae and voice are thus simple extensions of a desire never to be "separated from my fellow mortals by acting like an artist" and his consummate image of art as a city evolves out of a strong need to share with them a common physical and emotional space.

To create such an inhabitable space Williams explored ways of opening his poetic organizations so that "roughness"



and lack of finish would awaken what Robert Duncan would later call "intimations of human being."<sup>3</sup> The condition of openness was thus for the poet an artistic expression of his disgust with all closed forms where "vain curlicues"<sup>4</sup> obscured contexts and locales common to both poet and public. Closed Art--the popular art of New York's literary boiler-makers--represented to Williams the arbitrary containment of human energy and potential within glib forms effected by "artifice"<sup>6</sup> or "clever drawing"<sup>7</sup> and resulting in that "legend"<sup>8</sup> or "sentimental overlay"<sup>9</sup> which obscured human reality. Williams sought to replace such covert forms of self-expression--metaphorically identified with the incursions of his Puritan ancestors into the body of the New World--with an openness created out of his speaking voice and consequently charged with idiomatic American energies. The virtue of the colloquial lay for Williams in its relevance to the roots of the vox populi and in its release of a coarse, non-literary energy.

Described by Maxwell Josephson as "amateur pride" and recognized by him as part of Williams' determination to avoid the "low shifts of the commercial writer,"<sup>10</sup> Williams' stress on the "roughness"<sup>11</sup> of the speaking voice--a roughness which retained the most immediate expression of the artist's contact with his world--lead inevitably to a lack of finish in his works. Incompleteness, however, represented for Williams the only organizational means whereby art and the reality upon which it drew could maintain their separate

identities without the one subsuming the other. This interplay between an unyielding literal reality and the imagination's intense dance provided his work with both its structure and its content, releasing a persistent tension of opposites whose "impossible"<sup>12</sup> reconciliation organized each work without recourse to stereotypes of literary form.<sup>13</sup>

The two contending opposites take the form of separate voices, inextricably interrelated but struggling for individuation.<sup>14</sup> The first voice is simply that of the conscious, selective mind as it works to make poetry out of things and to effect some "progress" in defining<sup>15</sup> the world. The second voice, however, serves to undermine that implicit assurance by mocking absolutes and parodying those "literary" efforts which in any way separate Art and Man. Working in counterpoint to the voice of the literary artist, the second voice speaks of a less rational, less assured human being whose uncertainty is a vital part of the creative process and the final poem. Uncertainty thus ensures self-defeat but in their struggle--as that struggle moves between public and private levels--the voices open up a world whose possibilities are limitless, a world dynamized by their confrontation. Struggle--"Rigor of beauty is the quest"<sup>16</sup>--and meaning were thus aspects of a fundamental need in Williams to write and to remain "normal."<sup>17</sup>

The confrontation takes most noticeable form in the

relationship between prose and poetry in Williams' works. Conceived as a means of interrupting the narrative line of conventional Histories, Novels and Epics, the prose extracts polarize those public forces Williams had consistently felt obligated to incorporate into his organizational rhythms as a reminder of a looser, less-organized world he inhabited as Doctor. The prose voices speak also for a world that demands to be taken into account whenever the poetic voice begins its imaginative probings. This latter, evolving out of consideration of that public world, is the poet's personal voice which is, of necessity, hesitant and uncertain. Poetry becomes a tentative probe and its strength rests in Williams' discovery of a way to make his uncertainty--a deep anxiety emanating from his doubts about the creative process itself--into the substance and thus meaning of his poem. What Williams offers his reader is the slow unravelling of that probe as it faces and defeats, or is defeated by, the obstacles placed in its way by literal reality.

Williams' work, thus polarized between extremes of public and private worlds, achieves a kind of dimensionality<sup>18</sup> where the two vital levels of poetic experience co-exist within a common poetic space. A symptom of the poet's obsession to create works of varying densities, temporal and spatial, is expressed in Williams' Autobiography where, in process of re-shaping the lean details of his past, the poet



constantly feels compelled to remind us of his present activity.<sup>19</sup> In the American Grain reflects a similar compulsion to make a lost time and space personally accessible and relevant, its organization dependent upon the poet's desire to make physical pioneering in the American wilderness one with poetic pioneering. The clear roots of such dimensionality are in the need to locate the self within a context that can be detailed and confirmed. In Paterson the location of the self is effected by the powerfully literal presence of city documents whereby personal and public pasts are simultaneously evoked and activated. Williams believed, however, that the urge toward the simultaneous presentation of levels of experience was most capably achieved by The Desert Music whose strength lies in the way each fragment of the poet's outward journey to El Paso and Juarez is metamorphosed--without distortion--into an essential part of his inward journey to write a poem.

Williams' development as poet is inextricably related to his struggle to collect and organize without total assimilation larger and larger pieces of his public world. What begins in the short poems of Al Que Quiere as an attempt to make the colloquial American speaking voice the central thrust of the poems culminates in the large-scale methodological procedures whereby Paterson's five books are collected, shaped and re-shaped. Whereas in the shorter

poems Williams is able to make maximum use of the paper to isolate and individuate each word in the poetic structure, in Paterson he is eager to include into his work any undigested element of his culture, including the jagged rhythms of a recipe and the long, slow moan of a fellow poet contained in the six pages of a letter. How to remind both himself and his readers of a world of social fact existing outside the relatively cloistered limits of art occupied Williams throughout his career and provides an important way of isolating a central progression in Williams' movement as poet.

It is an important part of my purpose in my thesis to isolate this tendency in Williams' work paying particular attention to its expression in Paterson, whose city-world is the consummate image of Williams' conception of a popular art. I examine in addition those earlier works which, in their methodological procedures, point inevitably toward Paterson. In Kora in Hell: Improvisations (1920) and In the American Grain (1925) I intend to explore the textures created in a work when poetry and prose are brought into conflict and to see, in the anecdotes of the earlier work and in the historical documents of the later work, the ways in which all forms of writing can be used in making a poem. I propose to investigate those organizational procedures common to such diverse works as The Great American Novel

(1923), Spring and All (1923), and A Novelette and Other Prose (1932), to make clear Williams' commitment to writing and his own sense of what separated its two traditional strands--poetry and prose.

(ii)

Williams' obsession with the "actual," his continuing concern for a quality of "thingness" in his poems, has become something of a critical cliché. Sister Bernetta Quinn has documented the use of actual names and places in Paterson to "ground the experiment in actuality"<sup>20</sup> and James Breslin has argued that such literal details, in context, "reverberate into mythic significance."<sup>21</sup> J. Hillis Miller has also attempted to come to terms with Williams' acceptance of "words as things," pointing particularly to those words that are taken as objets trouvés. "Non-verbal things," Miller argued, "cannot be put into poetry, since poems are after all made of words, but words also are ready-made and may be taken out of their contexts and put into a poem just as they are found."<sup>22</sup> "Words as things" thus establish a common ground for critical agreement over Williams' constant need to incorporate the literal presence of reality into his art, and to create works whose dynamic tension was the simple result of a collision between the two dimensions of poetic experience.

Williams' critics have also understood that the poet's concern with prose is a simple extension of the word-world relationship, and a direct method of "ventilating"

the closed area designated by literature.<sup>23</sup> Williams himself particularly appreciated Ralph Nash's efforts to understand the functions and variety of prose experience in Paterson<sup>24</sup> and Linda Wagner has argued for a "unity" in the poet's work wherein prose and poetry inhabit with varying differences the single realm of writing.<sup>25</sup> Many critics, including Barriss Mills,<sup>26</sup> A. Kingsley Weatherhead,<sup>27</sup> Sister Bernetta Quinn,<sup>28</sup> and Alan Holder,<sup>29</sup> have argued the aesthetic implications of prose-poetry whilst the more pedantic have committed themselves to pedestrian exegesis of the prose meaning, ignoring, by so doing, its rhythmic function in organizing and "rolling up"<sup>30</sup> the poem's process. The more recent critics of Williams, most notably Michael Weaver in William Carlos Williams: The American Background<sup>31</sup> and Linda Wagner in The Prose of William Carlos Williams, have begun to come to terms with both the place of the prose in the poem and the kind and variety of information--"news"--it gives the reader. They point, in their arguments, toward Williams' conception of art as newspaper and to his consistent obsession to "connect up"<sup>32</sup> the documents and knowledge he had accumulated. It is ultimately the agony of correlation that informs Paterson, a correlation which plunged the poet into that larger agony of self-realization informing The Desert Music. "You know all about these things," Williams challenged in one draft of Paterson, "did you ever try to connect / them up. . . . Or do you really /



care anything about writing?"<sup>33</sup>

What is revealed by such a question is Williams' conception of what writing involved. Writing was for Williams a complete openness to all kinds of experience, assembling both a metamorphic and a literal collection of data. Documents, specimens of American spoken idiom, letters, and extracts from historical treatises mingle in Williams' poems with the trivial signs and slogans of his commercial culture and establish a context where the banal and the rare cohabit. Bombarded by the increasing number of fragments, the problem of writing involved specifically the active correlation of apparently inert materials. I say "active" because the public world brought into the poem initially was not allowed to remain as mere factual presence. It had to be "activated" or "dynamized" by a movement of the imagination, and the difficulties of dynamization, explored in Chapter 4, provide that agony whose very intensity remains the emotional backbone to the work.

Thus, whilst Williams' critics have sensed the significance of the poet's interweaving of prose and poetry and whilst they have attempted to assess its validity within the specific arguments of works such as In the American Grain and Paterson, they have for the most part ignored the aesthetic implications of his methodological procedures. My primary thesis is that these procedures, particularly as

they inform the very substance of his longer structures, must be understood in the context of painting and, more especially, in the gradual evolution of collage as aesthetic and technique central to the development of all art in this century. What in general I seek to establish is an understanding of how and why Williams worked, the basic direction his work took, and the inevitable expansion of his poetics as they came to terms with a greater and greater awareness of materials and their inexhaustibility. Collage, in particular, expresses the immediacy of Williams' contact with literal reality and explains the psychological need to incorporate that literalness into his poems. It further explains the building methods whereby works such as Paterson are gradually organized. Whether the central image of such works be a city or a National Past, the means of assembly remains consistent. Most importantly, however, collage activity generates knowledge of certain primary emphases in Williams' work--the relationship of form to content, of the poet to his materials and of the poet to his "fellow mortals."

It has, however, become another critical commonplace to talk of Williams in a context of painting. In a perceptive inquiry into his early work, Bram Dijkstra, in The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech, has explored Williams' friendship with Demuth and Sheeler, with Cubism in the

figure of Juan Gris, and with the photographic eye of Alfred Stieglitz and the coterie who gathered at his 291 Gallery in New York. Helped by Williams' own statements on painting and painters, Dijkstra has opened a way to see the structure of Williams' shorter poems in light of more general painterly experimentation, to see, for example, an interesting relationship between word and space in the context of cubistic individuation of an object's characteristics.

Rather than restricting my remarks, however, to either the early poems or his affinities with Cézanne, Demuth and Sheeler--an area also explored by Ruth Grogan<sup>34</sup>--I propose to look closely at the ways in which the shape and organization of the shorter poems extend inevitably into the rhythms and procedures of Williams' longer works. To locate this primary relationship within the context of modern art, I intend to examine the development of Cubism whose painters evolved collage as a means of regaining a vital literal contact with their environment they believed they had lost in the very act of oil-painting. I thus recognize in the move from Analytic to Synthetic stages of Cubism a progression similar to that undertaken by Williams as the poet gradually enlarged his conception of poetry, moving from the miniature of the single poem to the large canvases of In the American Grain, Kora in Hell and Paterson. Against this background of "modernism" in the arts I shall explore the individual structures of Williams' important works, and

in the case of Paterson, relate my remarks to the work of an artist which manifests comparable compulsions and comparable results in methodological procedures. By looking in detail at the work and aesthetics of the German collage-artist Kurt Schwitters, I hope to reveal an aesthetic context for Williams' own organizations, a context which will counter the cries of formlessness that even the most fervid admirer of Williams has, by implication, made.

The term collage has indeed been utilized by Williams' critics to define the openness of the poet's structures. Linda Wagner, for example, calls Spring and All a "collage of prose commentary, typographical jokes, untitled poems,"<sup>35</sup> as though collage were a convenient catch-all to make general and thus obscure Williams' very specific intentions. Jerome Mazzaro, in William Carlos Williams: The Later Poems, begins tentatively to unravel the complications of collage activity but does not recognize it as the single, most unifying impulse in all Williams' work.<sup>36</sup> Collage, as a term used in this particularly loose if generous manner, denigrates the peculiar inclusiveness of the poet's compositions whilst not providing an adequate response to the argument of A. Kingsley Weatherhead who had in The Edge of the Image argued that:

To have a form, however, which is not a "finished form" seems to me to be tantamount to having no structural form at all. That which is not finished must be said, without undue asperity, to lack a structural form.<sup>37</sup>

Such remarks, despite later qualifications by Weatherhead, fail to understand that structures which are "actual movements of the meditating mind"<sup>38</sup> cannot be terminated within the arbitrary limits conventional conceptions of form seek to impose, that their lack of finish provides the emotional continuity of the individual structure. This emotional, alogical continuity is sustained by the desperate voice of the poet himself, as he recognizes in the course of his meditations the impossibility of fulfilling his demands for the final integration of his materials. Final integration, an integration whereby every fragment of external reality could be placed within a composition like a relevant jigsaw piece in a puzzle whose complete picture it will never see, is indeed *ana thema* to Williams. Collage activity expresses exactly the concept of poem as "Quest" in its emphasis on assembly and juxtaposition of materials and in the consistency of attitude which underlies all open structures. The poet can only seek, collect and begin to reconcile a reality whose obvious diversity makes every poem "the impossible poem."

(iii)

Chapter One begins, paradoxically, with the "culmination" of Williams' poetic experiments, The Desert Music. As final apologia for his methodological procedures, the long poem substantiates a context in which personal and public levels of experience meet, in which actual fragments--remembered fact and feeling--are incorporated into an organizational rhythm and transformed into metaphoric elements within the creative process. It is by a close analysis of its structure that I hope to make manifest the strength of Williams in his formal arrangements and show the ways in which varying dimensions of a single experience can be made simultaneously present. Such dimensionality, I have argued, is the inevitable extension of a continuous collage activity.

Chapter Two explores the influence of Paris on Williams by establishing a context in which Cubism, as a movement relevant to both painting and literature, can be recognized. My stress in this chapter remains on the development of Cubism as an evolving aesthetic and technique and on the gradual progression of such painters as Picasso, Braque and Gris toward collage. By looking carefully at the specific reasons for this direction, I hope to provide a pertinent parallel to the poetic career of Williams whose



own "birth" took place in 1913 when the Cubist impulse generated public outrage in the Armory Show in New York. If Williams was not directly influenced by the theorists of Cubism, its practitioners filtered slowly and powerfully into his writings by way of his close contact with the artists, Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth, the American "Cubists" or "Immaculates," an examination of whose works opens the third Chapter. It is an important fact of my thesis that Williams constantly modified "alien" influences to fit the American landscape and the third chapter articulates the means by which collage emphases, whilst ostensibly a French and imported activity, were also part of a familiar folk-art background. Linked to the specific details of America, collage provided for Williams a means by which his country's irreducible energy (space) could be adequately represented.

The final section of Chapter Three begins to unravel the initial implications of the collage impulse in Al Que Quiere (1917), a new book for Williams after Keatsian imitations. My stress remains on the short poem, on the primary relationship between form and content, on the ways in which energy is released by the speaking voice and controlled by its visual placement. The reflection of this early experimentation is expressed in Chapter Four which examines in detail two works of Williams during his first

attempts to come to terms with the concept of a book rather than a collection of individual poems. By analyzing Kora in Hell and In the American Grain, I wish to show the collage aesthetic working within specific structures. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an examination of three elements in Williams' poetic which begin to make an appearance in the 'twenties but which, in their extreme form, control the development of Paterson. The first section deals with the collision between prose and poetry; the second with fact or knowledge or news and with its dynamization by the intelligence; the third with the inevitability of open structures in the poetics of Williams. The three sections are related to their location in Spring and All, The Great American Novel and A Novelette and Other Prose.

Chapter Five shows the gradual evolution of Paterson and looks in depth at Book One as a means of understanding Williams' epic without recourse to exegesis. My important analogy is with the work of Kurt Schwitters whose own development from painting to merzing is strikingly analagous to that of Williams. In attitude to materials, in response to their respective assemblies, in size and conception of their individual structures, both artists manifest similar compulsions. The purpose of this chapter is not simply to make explicit a relationship or indebtedness but to understand more intelligently the workings of Williams in such poems



as In the American Grain, Kora in Hell, and Paterson and to attempt an understanding of what constitutes literary collage.

## NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York, 1951), p. 51. All references to the works of William Carlos Williams will be to the following editions, designated by specific abbreviation:

- Kora: Kora in Hell: Improvisations (City Lights, 1957). Originally published in 1920 by The Four Seas Company, Boston.
- SA: Spring and All, reprinted in Imaginations (New Directions, 1970). Originally published in 1923 by Contact Publishing Co., Paris.
- GAN: The Great American Novel, reprinted in Imaginations. Originally published in 1923 by Three Mountains Press, Paris.
- IAG: In the American Grain (New Directions, 1966). Originally published in 1925 by Albert and Charles Boni, New York.
- VP: Voyage to Pagany (Macaulay, 1928).
- NOP: A Novelette and Other Prose, reprinted in Imaginations. Originally published in 1932 by To Publishers, France.
- CEP: The Collected Earlier Poems (New Directions, 1951).
- CLP: The Collected Later Poems (New Directions, 1950).
- SE: Selected Essays (Random House, 1954).
- SL: Selected Letters (McDowell, Obolonsky, 1957).
- PB: Pictures from Breughel (New Directions, 1962).
- P: Paterson (New Directions, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>Williams' purpose in constructing Paterson was to articulate the sources of his community for those

Who because they  
neither know their sources nor the sills of their  
disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly  
for the most part,  
locked and forgot in their desires--unroused. (14)

It is also interesting to recognize the theorizing of Walter Lippmann in Williams' view of community. Implicit in democracy, and particularly apparent in its educational procedures, was the private citizen's loss of contact with public affairs. Lippmann argued:

As a private citizen he does not know for certain what is going on or who is doing it or where he is being carried. . . . Contemplating himself and his actual accomplishment in public affairs, contrasting the influence he exerts with the influence he is supposed according to democratic theory to exert, he must say of his sovereignty what Bismarck said of Napoleon . . . "At a distance it is something, but close to it is nothing at all. . . ." In consequence . . . there is not the least reason for thinking, as mystical democracies have thought, that the compounding of individual ignorances in masses of people can produce a continuous directing force in public affairs. Quoted in "Education and Total Effort," Grierson On Documentary, 274.

The central thrust of Williams' work, however, is also toward providing his readers with news of their environment and with the technical means--implicit in his poetic procedures--to connect up such news.

<sup>3</sup>"Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's Maximus Poems," The Black Mountain Review, VI, 1956, 36.

<sup>4</sup>SE, 129.

<sup>5</sup>IAG, 105.

<sup>6</sup>SA, 117.

<sup>7</sup>SE, 232.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 231.

<sup>10</sup>Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), 73. Josephson argues that Williams' decision was a violent rejection of "corporate prose that is 'processed' in Madison Avenue skyscrapers and distributed by mass publications."

<sup>11</sup>Goodrich and Baur, in American Art in the Twentieth Century, argue that such roughness has always been a characteristic of American painting.

<sup>12</sup>Williams' own conception of Paterson. See, in particular, his letter to Louis Martz detailing his problems with the organization of his materials. SL, 230.

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, his parodies of such stereotypes in IAG, GAN, Kora and SA.

<sup>14</sup>A confrontation expressed by Williams in Paterson as:

Sappho vs Elektra! (211)

<sup>15</sup>GAN is a specific attack upon the concept of "progress"--literary and social. See Imaginations, 161.

<sup>16</sup>P, 11.

<sup>17</sup>Williams declares in P his intention to activate that dull cliché "La Vertue est toute dans l'effort." He translates:

Virtue is wholly  
in the effort to be virtuous .  
This takes connivance,  
takes convoluted forms, takes  
time! (221)

<sup>18</sup>This term was coined by Jerome Mazzaro in "Dimensionality in Williams' Paterson," Profile of William Carlos Williams, ed. Mazzaro. This essay was later expanded and used as the second chapter of William Carlos Williams: The Later Poems, Cornell University Press, 1973.

<sup>19</sup>See in particular pages 134, 175, 194, 235, 282 and 306-7 where the present invades the writing of a past.

<sup>20</sup>Quinn, The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup>William Carlos Williams, New York, 1970, p. 78.

<sup>22</sup>Poets of Reality, 293.

<sup>23</sup>Williams attacks Literature and its traditional separation from life in Novel where he violently exclaims:

To hell with art. To hell with  
literature. (Imaginations, 170)

<sup>24</sup>"The Use of Prose in Paterson," Perspective, VI, 4 (Autumn-Winter 1953), 191-199. Williams' response is detailed in his letter to Nash. See SL, 323.

<sup>25</sup>The Prose of William Carlos Williams, Wesleyan University Press, 1970.

<sup>26</sup>"The Method of Paterson," Approach, No. 38 (Winter 1961), 24.

<sup>27</sup>The Edge of the Image, University of Washington Press, 1967.

<sup>28</sup>The Metamorphic Tradition, 1955.

<sup>29</sup>"In the American Grain: William Carlos Williams on the American Past," American Quarterly, XIX, No. 3 (Fall 1967), 499-515.

<sup>30</sup>Williams' own phrase to describe the methodological procedures of Paterson. See preface to poem, 11-13.

<sup>31</sup>I wish here to acknowledge my great indebtedness to the work of Michael Weaver in detailing the specific social and artistic context within which Williams worked. His research has enabled me to concentrate more on the aesthetic implications of collage's building procedures. I am particularly indebted to Weaver's work on David Lyle and to his examination of the meaning of news in Williams' poems.

<sup>32</sup>Wagner, Prose, 155.

<sup>33</sup>Unpublished manuscript in the Yale Collection.

<sup>34</sup>"The influence of Painting on William Carlos Williams," reprinted in William Carlos Williams: A Critical Anthology, ed. Charles Tomlinson, Penguin Books, 1972, 265-298.

<sup>35</sup>Prose, 32.

<sup>36</sup>"Paterson, The Dream Extended," from Williams:  
The Later Poems, 44.

<sup>37</sup>The Edge of the Image, 130.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 165.



CHAPTER ONE

"The Journey Back"

(i)

In the penultimate chapter of his Autobiography, William Carlos Williams describes briefly a journey he made in the autumn of 1950 from Los Angeles to El Paso, Texas:

At dawn I saw the sign Tucson on a station platform and the same day at three, after crossing the desert miles near the Mexican border, left the beautiful train (if anything is beautiful) to meet Bob McAlmon coming grinning up the platform at El Paso where the Hubbards had lived in the old days.

Juarez, across the bridge. Three cents the trip. Sur le pont d'Avignon--is all I could think of. The sparrows at night in the park--Bob and his brothers, George and Alec and their wives--tequilla at five cents a glass, a quail dinner and the Mexicans, the poor Indians--one huddled into a lump against the iron-work of the bridge at night--safe perhaps from both sides, incredibly compressed into a shapeless obstruction--asleep. (A, 388-389)

The journey to El Paso marked the beginning of the poet's return to the East following a successful reading tour of the West Coast and the belated recognition of his poetic status. Immediately upon his return Williams began the writing of his Autobiography. The period from December, 1950 to March, 1951 was one of intense and painful activity, originating in a crisis of "achievement and reputation,"<sup>1</sup> continuing as a clarification of his personal and poetic life and terminating in a severe apoplectic stroke.<sup>2</sup>

Williams, close to death and having temporarily lost the power of speech, was confronted in the resulting period



of enforced convalescence by the possibility of permanent incapacity. Removed abruptly from contact<sup>3</sup> with the materials of his poems--that primary relationship with American reality he had consistently argued for--and deprived of the power of articulation, Williams' physical condition manifested a grimly ironic inversion of his poetic position. Of necessity he shared the national fear of contact he had derided as the dominant characteristic of American culture, a culture which:

holds off from embraces, from impacts, gaining, by fear, safety and time in which to fortify its prolific carcass--while the spirit, with tongue hanging out, bites at its bars--its object out of reach. (IAG, 175)

Now, in the March of 1951, Williams confronted a similar loss, a terrifying deprivation in this period of vindication.

His letters of this period, to Frank L. Moore and Louis Martz, suggest both an awareness of the centrality of death to his personal life<sup>4</sup> and a strengthened determination to complete that justification of his poetic life he had begun in the Autobiography. In his letter to Martz he explains:

As a result of the enforced idleness and opportunity for thought, it may be, I have brought down on the facts of a situation which can no longer be delayed in the bringing of it to a final summary. I must now, in other words, make myself clear. I must gather together the stray ends of what I have been thinking and make my full statement as to their meaning or quit. (SL, 298)

The result of Williams' attempt to "bring myself into focus"--  
"to gather up a meaning from my piecemeal and often rambling

work"<sup>5</sup>--was his long poem The Desert Music.

Essentially, therefore, The Desert Music is a recapitulation of Williams' expectations for the poem and an unyielding expression of its formal organization. Whilst, however, the initial stimulus came from an invitation to read at Harvard for the Phi Beta Kappa ceremonial at Saunders Theatre, a greater pressure came from Williams himself who used the occasion to defend his public position and to bring his incapacitated self into sharper poetic focus. "Whether rightly or wrongly," as he disclosed in his letter to Martz, "I feel that many of my culminating ideas as to form have entered into this poem" (SL, 300).

The new "15-minute" poem (SL, 301) grew slowly and with extreme difficulty out of the few but vivid memories of his journey to El Paso and the subsequent trip across the border with Mexico to Juarez. Its painful evolution was the immediate result of Williams' determination, in his period of crisis, to investigate and revalue those beliefs he had championed for so many years. This process of active self-investigation involved him in that "agony of self-realization" (PB, 109) which gives essential unity to the poem and leads to the final triumphant reaffirmation of his poetic commitment. In his letter to Martz, Williams recognizes that his recently acquired respectability as poet marks a radical shift of emphasis in his poems. Arguing

now from an "established" position of authority, he desists in his open war with the poets of the "Academies" to pursue his questioning into that evaluation of his poetic position his illness had thrust upon him. "The approach," as Williams argued, "must be more an inversion upon ourselves, we must now forget the external enemy, we must more question ourselves--a thing we didn't have time for formerly" (SL, 299).

The Desert Music is thus an explicit clarification of Williams' poetics, a successful reconciliation of the personal and metaphoric levels of his journey's details and the culmination of his work with the formal organization of poems. In my examination and interpretation of the poem I shall explore in depth this structural procedure, hoping to establish certain principles applicable to the concept of Collage which I later argue is the essential methodology underlying all Williams' longer works.

During his residence as visiting lecturer in English, Williams noted with distaste the cultural and poetic situation along the West Coast. Refusing to acknowledge the peculiarly American quality of their immediate context, the people "hang onto the past" (A, 382). In the face of a geographical confrontation with the Orient--"their opportunity; to embrace that 'new'"--their minds inevitably "cling to worn out Europe as though the feudal were their king" (A, 383). The students who came to hear Williams



propound his "new" (A, 385) theory of the poem were similarly disabled by this dependence upon the past. As Williams argued:

What should be new is intent upon one thing, the metaphor--the metaphor is the poem. There is for them only one metaphor: Europe--the past. All metaphor for them, inevitably so, is the past: that is the poem. That is what they think a poem is: metaphor. (A, 385)

His advice to his students, given their addiction and the mentality it bred, was simple:

. . . Go to your museums. The North Coast Indians who made all their livelihood fishing. They were induced by the British to put all their resources into it. Then their market was denied them. They starved. (A, 386)

He thus encouraged them in their pursuit of personal and national roots, in their attempts to comprehend their immediate environment and the specific terms upon which it had been created, establishing also an immediate, local mythology to displace alien Greek and Roman Forms. Juxtaposed to his exhortations, and without that which was "disturbingly unequivocal in its statement," (A, 383)

Williams illustrated his counsel:

Across the road in the small public park were two pomegranate trees, some of the fruit split open with a late ripeness, though it was cold in the park. The caretaker must have picked up any fallen fruit earlier. Seeing no one about, I gave the small tree a vigorous shake or two, but nothing came down. Further along there was a white star-jasmine in bloom. Indian labor had no doubt been the sole thing that had made such things possible. (A, 385)

In defiance of mere generalization--that instinct to face Europe--Williams here looks intently and intimately at his

own locale, seeing both its present natural condition and those economic elements which give it a larger, metaphoric relevance in the poet's mind.

It is this implicit statement of method Williams places before the details of his desert journey. And, even more pointedly, what follows the description of that journey is the final chapter, "The Poem Paterson."<sup>6</sup> In this conclusion to his Autobiography, Williams talks enthusiastically of "the poet's business," (A, 391) restating, in vindication of the poem, his major preoccupation in his earlier statements on poetics--the relationship between a poem's form and its content. He repeats his belief that there are "no ideas but in things"<sup>7</sup> here stressing the need for such ideas to be grounded in "the details of my life" (A, 391). Without roots in external reality ideas remain gross generalizations, unsubstantiated and therefore irrelevant to man in a vividly present urban environment.

"The Poet," Williams argues, "thinks with his poem, in that lies his thought, and that in itself is the profundity."<sup>8</sup> The result is a poem which expresses an act of the mind, an open structure recording the poet in process of arranging his materials. The emphasis in such a poem lies in the very enactment it delineates rather than in the generalized statement it may lead to. A structure like the sonnet, Williams argues, suppresses the creative activity

of the poet, ensnares it within a "net to put his thoughts into" (A, 391). What evolves from the imposition of an unnatural form upon those natural, creative forces implicit in the energy of the poet, is inevitable rigidity and distortion. When Williams cries out against those poets who try "to make a pigeon roar" he is attacking just such an imposition whereby the perpetually changing world is coerced within a mechanism quite alien to it. The poet's business, Williams' consistently declared, is neither to attempt so futile an imposition nor to talk in "vague categories" evoking hollow generalizations. It is rather to write as the physician works upon a patient--"particularly . . . upon the things before him, in the particular to discover the universal" (A, 391).

If the first part of the final chapter in the Autobiography is thus a general statement of Williams' poetics, the second part tries to relate it to a specific incident in his life.

During this incident, Williams, exploring the terrain of Paterson, engages in conversation with his guest John Husband and his grandson Paul. The conversation points at a personal level to the necessity of knowing<sup>9</sup> that locale out of which a poem grows. Knowledge, as Williams implies, is not dependent upon chance or superficial observation but upon difficult research into all facets of the local environment



--its history, the movement of its Falls through the seasons, the composition of its inhabitants and the development of its commercial interests. Williams makes his suggestions not by explicit statement but by that which the reader draws from the conversation itself as it follows on closely from the poet's more general observations in the first section of the chapter. Such a juxtaposition encourages the reader to view as active and pertinent metaphor the simple exchanges between the men:

"Shall we go down the back way, Paul?"  
 "Yes. Is it dangerous?" The roadway was covered with melting ice but someone had put ashes on it.  
 "Look at that little house," pointed out John. It was on the very peak of the adjacent rocks outside the park area.  
 "Some artist," I said. "It's always an artist that does such intelligent things. Probably an Italian--they love the hilltops."  
 "Oh, it might be a writer, though," said John.  
 "Is this dangerous?" asked Paul, as we came to a sharp icy turn on a steep turn of the road.  
 "Look," I said, "it's not very dangerous, but don't always wish for something dangerous," I warned him. "Some day you might get it when you don't want it." (A, 393-394)

Williams, in the final chapter of his Autobiography and in the arrangement of The Desert Music, thus attempts to establish a poetic context wherein all factual details can be viewed metaphorically as literal elements moving the poet's aesthetic struggle to a more public dimension. If William's urge to give form to the chaotic details of his immediate, daily life--The Desert Music's "shapeless obstruction"--relates the works closely to one another, their

essential point of differentiation lies in the poem's closing statement of affirmation and identity and the poet's concluding sense of clarity and humility which has evolved out of his insistent self-questioning:

I am a poet! I  
am. I am. I am a poet, I reaffirmed, ashamed (PB, 120)

The final chapters of the Autobiography record his public vindication but The Desert Music expresses Williams' own justification of those formal concerns he had so uncompromisingly championed.

(ii)

The Desert Music records two essential journeys made by the poet. The first journey is the one Williams made in the autumn of 1950 between California and El Paso, its bare details recorded in the Autobiography. It provides the poem with its unifying structure and grounds the metaphorical investigations Williams undertakes in the second journey in the details of a specific reality for the poet. The external journey is thus an important vehicle for the second journey which traces the poet through the difficulties of poetic composition. In The Desert Music Williams views metaphorically his external journey by using its details and its roots in reality as an important way of making the journey of descent into self<sup>10</sup>--specifically here the descent into the chaos of memory--and the gradual reawakening of the poet's self-knowledge. Establishing order out of such confusion, Williams once more defines himself. It is a necessary moment of reaffirmation<sup>11</sup> for a poet temporarily disabled by a stroke and cut off from immediate sensual contact with his environment.

The poem is in three movements. The first movement, beginning at the end of the El Paso journey with the discovery of a form on the bridge between El Paso and Juarez,

involves Williams in a re-statement of his commitment to the formal organization of the poem. It is a general recapitulation of belief and intent. The second movement begins the process of inquiry, created out of the specific details of the original journey, which leads both to the shaping of a poetic structure for those details and a renewed sense of purpose for the poet. In the third movement Williams moves out from a consideration of these local particulars and into the metaphorical importance of such a journey. The poem concludes with a sense of the poet's extreme relief in having compelled himself to undergo the "agony of self-realization" and having successfully achieved his ends.

The poem opens then at the close of the external journey with the dominant memory of the Mexican "huddled into a lump against the ironwork of the bridge at night--safe perhaps from both sides, incredibly compressed into a shapeless obstruction--asleep" (A, 389). In the months that have elapsed since this solitary glimpse, the shapeless Mexican has undergone a process of transformation, and is, at the poem's opening, synonymous in the poet's mind with that chaos of world and self the poet must take responsibility for in his poems. The poet's quest in The Desert Music is how to create a poem which will record the imagination in the act of utilizing its powers of transformation. And it is with the movement of the imagination over "a form /



propped motionless"<sup>12</sup> that "the dance begins" (PB, 108).

The first part of The Desert Music is thus an exploration of the irrational energy of the imagination in its dance and an explanation of the kind of poetic form such an energy necessitates. In this opening section the imagination and that shapeless humanity which rouses it to activity are inseparable in their dance together. Indeed in the image of the dance itself<sup>13</sup>--his fundamental image for the poetic process--Williams asserts the need for an organic poetic form which in no way coerces its material into a pre-conceived "net" but which sustains in its duration a movement similar to the movement of the original confrontation, thus allowing the raw experience of the poem to intrude without distortion into its very making. The imagination and that aspect of reality it commences to transform remain independent of one another but dance together in the poem.

Williams, arguing his point in this opening section, suggests in the image of the dance a movement or process which he opposes to the traditional confinement of poetic form:

The law gives us nothing  
but a corpse, wrapped in a dirty mantle.  
The law is based on murder and confinement,  
long delayed,  
but this, following the insensate music,  
is based on the dance: (PB, 109)

His essential purpose in The Desert Music is not a similar containment and mutilation of the "form / propped motionless"

but an organization to the poem which allows that form its undistorted individuality in the movement of the poet's imagination. The poem's organization approaches:

. . . a dance! to dance  
two and two with him --  
                    sequestered there asleep,  
                                    right end up! (PB, 109)

In the making of the poem, the controlling feature of the dance is measure and, in particular, that "exact measure" (PB, 109) which allows the form's intrinsic truth to be expressed. Sherman Paul argues that this truth is "a truth of the natural world that the imagination, by building the poem carefully, transfers to the world of art, to an object separate from nature yet by means of this common property true to it."<sup>14</sup> Williams' difficulty remains, however, in uncovering the "exact measure" by which the "reality" of the object can be incorporated into the poem's movement without distortion. The search for a "redeeming language" detailed by Denis Donoghue<sup>15</sup> reveals the difficulty, if not impossibility, of so delicate and accurate an articulation. Constantly in The Desert Music, particularly in his efforts to realize linguistically the stripper and the candy culture in which she is immersed, Williams begins his quest only to discover a flatness and boredom in his words which refuses to express his essential enthusiasms. The fundamental problem rests with the linguistic realization of Williams' experience, in his determined efforts to organize such experience within an open structure which maintains a delicate tension between



literal and metaphoric levels without recourse to explicit commentary. The excellence of The Desert Music lies finally in its expression of just such a tension and the ordering procedures whereby differing realities, or rather differing poetic responses to diverse aspects of a single reality, are structurally reconciled. What The Desert Music essentially records is the process of reconciliation itself.

The opening movement thus erects, in its preliminary and seemingly unsubstantiated statements, the conditions under which the poem is written and by which it must be understood. Its explication of purpose suggests Williams' need to submit himself once again to the arduous demands of the creative process and his responsibilities as poet. And it is a self-inflicted "agony of self-realization" which unifies this opening movement.

The process begins with the discovery of the "form / propped motionless" (PB, 108) and the poet's immediately awakened need to give such shapeless human life an expressive poetic form. It is, at first glimpse, "unrecognizable / in the semi'dark" but the poet's command to "Wait!" signals not only to his fellow tourists but to the reader Williams' rejection of the cursory glance and the instigation of that vital "inspection" which marks the beginnings of poetic perception. The questions with which the inspection opens are in direct contrast to the rigid behaviour of the police

who, clearing their bridge of its human debris, "probably inspect the place / and will cart it away later" (PB, 110). The police, enforcers of an inflexible legal code, have already become equated in the poet's imagination with those poets who apply a fixed poetic law to immeasurably varying fragments of reality. Both share a complete disregard for an individual's specific humanity, confining him within their traditional laws. Williams, even as he commences to ask himself his probing questions, is at once aware of the potential for growth such seemingly shapeless humanity possesses:

Is it alive?

-- neither a head,

legs nor arms!

It isn't a sack of rags someone  
has abandoned here                      torpid against  
the flange of the supporting girder      .      ?

an inhuman shapelessness,  
knees hugged tight up into the belly

Egg-shaped! (PB, 108)

The inquiry releases both determination and frustration. The poet recognizes in his confrontation the very material, as yet chaotic and unformed, out of which the poem will be created and which only the poem can adequately express. In reply to his own question: "How shall we get said what must be said?" : Williams determinedly answers: "Only the poem." But such determination demands also the assumption of those

responsibilities as a poet which constantly torment him and from which he cannot escape. The difficulty of giving life and shape to what appears mere "inhuman shapelessness" involves the poet in his "agony of self-realization" and it is this agonized self-questioning which is externalized by the journey in the second movement of the poem.

What preoccupied Williams then in this opening section of the poem are the demands he imposes upon himself and from which only the writing of the poem will release him. His most insistent and most clearly articulated fear is that in retracing the steps of the original journey he may lapse into a mechanical "copying" of its reality. A violent denial of such purely descriptive possibilities leads Williams to exclaim:

:to imitate, not to copy nature, not  
to copy nature

NOT, prostrate, to copy nature (PB, 109)

"To copy nature," as Williams argued in a letter written during the period of The Desert Music's composition, "is a spineless activity; it gives us a sense of our mere existence but hardly more than that" (SL, 297). It is thus the poet's intention to attempt an imitation of nature in his poem, organizing a structure which will express the external journey as a metaphorical journey into the agonies of the creative process itself. Williams stated in his Autobiography that "it is NOT to hold the mirror up to nature that the

artist performs his work" (A, 241). Such duplication denies the vital function of the imagination in its ability to transform and create "something not at all a copy of nature, but something quite different, a new thing, unlike anything else in nature, a thing advanced and apart from it" (A, 241).

"To imitate nature," as Williams argued, "involves the verb to do" (A, 241) which makes of the poem a continuing process of exploration in which the reader partakes and through which he is reawakened to nature. Imitation demands verbal activity by which "we enlarge nature itself, we become nature or we discover in ourselves nature's active part."<sup>16</sup> Such a process of involvement points once more to the relevance of the image of dance to define the function of the imagination in the poetic composition. The essential movement of The Desert Music is towards that triumphant moment in the poem when Williams, the retracing of his journey completed, can finally declare:

The dance! The verb detaches itself  
seeking to become articulate . (PB, 120)

It is in the vital activity of the verb that Williams organizes his poetic materials and if "to copy is merely to reflect something already there, inertly" (A, 241) it is the verb's function to stimulate the reader to a new awareness of his world. What the verbal activity reflects for Williams is the poet in the act of sifting through the fragments of his environment and discovering in them correspondences

concealed from the eye. It is essential for a poem which is not to be a mere copy of external reality that the fragments, the correspondences and the poet's search are all incorporated into the poem.

Williams is thus fully cognizant of the dangers of unequivocal statement, of limiting the abundance of reality within his single point-of-view. By insisting on the inclusion of both the fragments and the imagination's movement through them, he stresses that his reconciliation of the individual fragments occurs only for the duration of the poem. The fragments, however, removed from their original context in external reality, are re-ordered by the poet within the new context of the poem. Here they assume a metaphorical importance in the internal reality of the poem whilst retaining, in that aura of reality which clings to them from their former context, essential contact with the external environment. The first movement of The Desert Music prepares the reader for this metaphorical transformation of the journey's details, asking him to view them in their new context of a journey into the demands of the creative process upon the poet. In such an imaginative transformation, for example, human law suggests poetic law, "the others" who waited for Williams on the bridge are at once his fellow-tourists and his fellow-poets who both equally fail in their inspection of locale, and "the form / propped motionless" suggests both human and poetic form.



The opening section of The Desert Music thus describes the poet attempting explicitly the organization of his fragmented experiences within a new poetic form. The search for form is the activity which structures it and the ensuing "agony of self-realization" prepares us for the frustrated interruptions as the poet's abundant energy refuses the formal conditions he imposes upon it. At the same time as he recognizes the need to allow such energy adequate expression, he remembers his poetic commitments which thrust themselves into the body of the poem and constantly intrude into its very making. It is this dilemma which creates the tense pressure under which The Desert Music is written and which, in the opening section of the poem, overwhelms him. In his present incapacity he decides painfully to retrace the steps of that original journey which led to the discovery of the Mexican's shapeless bulk on the bridge.

The second section of The Desert Music begins the descent into memory, into a proliferation of personal detail. The search within for a poetic organization to such seemingly numberless stimuli is externalized by the visit to El Paso. Essentially, however, the poem records a journey through the geography of the mind which finds its roots and confirmation in this natural landscape. Thus the three simple stages of his original visit--the crossing of the desert miles, the reunion in El Paso and the trip to Juarez across



the International boundary--become transformed by Williams' imagination into the essential stages of poetic composition. Consequently, the search for form commences in the barren areas of self to which the poet must bring fertility by hearing and recording that music necessary for their survival. The music, everywhere present, imposes upon him an insistent pressure which he constantly seeks to evade, but which, despite his efforts to the contrary, slowly brings him into a painfully essential contact with his environment out of which the poem is created. Just as the external journey terminates in the discovery of a huddled Mexican on the bridge between El Paso and Juarez, so the internal quest closes in the discovery of a form for the poem which maintains a careful balance between the poem and the reality which sustains it. It is this image of the poem as "bridge" which Williams sought to justify in the poem's opening section.

The formal movement of the poem is thus an immediate extension of the poet's mind during the period of composition. It is an intimate revelation of the details of his memory and the ways in which the imagination attempts to exploit such details metaphorically. The second section begins, for example, in a visual approximation of the soporific effect of the train on the poet's mind:

Leaving California to return east, the fertile desert,  
                                (were it to get water)  
surrounded us, a music of survival, subdued, distant, half  
                                heard; we were engulfed  
by it as in the early evening, seeing the wind life  
                                and drive the sand, we  
passed Yuma. All night long, heading for El Paso to  
                                meet our friend,  
we slept fitfully. Thinking of Paris, I waked to the tick  
                                of the rails. (PB, 110)

The visual symmetry suggests a mind luxuriating in the rhythmic monotony of the train and the desert through which it passes. It is roughly roused from its sloth between sleep and waking by the recollection of Paris and the jarring memories of what he had demanded for his poems during his residence there. The guilt which aroused him on the train to an awareness of the intellectual decay into which he had descended compels him later in the composition of the poem to interject violently what he still demands of himself:

--to tell  
 what subsequently I saw and what heard  
  
 -to place myself (in  
 my nature) beside nature  
  
 -to imitate  
 nature ( for to copy nature would be a  
 shameful thing) (PB, 110)

The violent anger of the interjection, however, does not lead to mere formlessness as the diagonal movement of the three statements down across the page immediately attests. In the shape of the interruptions on the page, Williams suggests a form for his thoughts created not out of that regularity of movement the train exemplified but out of a movement of the poet's intelligence as it makes its initial

statement and then probes its implications.

In contrast to the rapid and superficial inspection of the desert by train, Williams enters upon a thorough investigation of the environment. He begins with those detailed observations which collect in the mind and ground the flights of the imagination in actuality:

tequila's only  
a nickel a slug in these side streets.  
Keep out though. Oh, it's all right at  
this time of day but I saw H. terribly  
beaten up in one of those joints. He  
asked for it. I thought he was going to  
be killed. I do  
my drinking on the main drag . (PB, 111)

Such details, seemingly perverse in their irrelevance, begin the creation of that atmosphere of suppressed violence which is the inevitable result of the Texans' "candy culture." These fragments of a half-remembered conversation, extracted from their original context, are thus involved in the new context of the poem. The catalogue of the Indian goods at the Old Market marks an extreme antithesis to the relentlessly destructive energy of the Americans:

-paper flowers (para los santos)  
baked red-clay utensils, daubed  
with blue, silverware,  
dried peppers, onions, print goods, children's  
clothing . the place deserted all but  
for a few Indians squatted in the  
booths, unnoticing (don't you think it)  
as though they slept there . (PB, 111)

Through the quiet accuracy of his writings on the Indians, Williams imbues them with a calm and dignity without recourse to explicit statement, and by juxtaposing their

satisfaction with self and place to his seemingly intense interest in the Texan woman, he achieves a gentle irony:

What makes Texans so tall?  
We saw a woman this morning in a mink cape  
six feet if she was an inch. What a woman!

Probably a Broadway figure. (PB, 111)

But the sense of wonderment is gently undermined when Williams observes in true astonishment the natural grace and beauty of the Indian woman:

Look at the way,  
slung from her neck with a shawl, that young  
Indian woman carries her baby!

-- a stream of Spanish,  
as she brushes by, intense, wide-  
eyed in eager talk with her boy husband (PB, 113)

By careful juxtaposition Williams makes his reader thus aware of the elemental opposition he establishes in the poem. It is inevitably a manifestation at the public level of that poetic conflict which Williams recorded in the opening section of the poem. The Indian, in what Williams has elsewhere recorded as "primary and continuous identity with the ground," (IAG, 33) is "the flower of his world" (IAG, 137). Rooted intimately in its locale and thus in essential contact with the ground, the Indian's culture expresses the inevitable blossoming of the relationship between himself and his immediate reality.<sup>17</sup> His culture in this way erects a bridge similar to that which Williams seeks in his poem. The American on the other hand, rootless and here pointedly a tourist, and the Poet whose qualities the American embodies,

prefer to confine their energy within artificial forms, sacrificing spirituality for material gain. Williams notes this in:

. . . the serious tourist,  
man and wife, middle-aged, middle-western,  
their arms loaded with loot, whispering  
together - still looking for bargains . (PB, 113)

Williams thus polarizes at the public level the forces which manifest that poetic opposition in which he was personally involved. Rejecting the way of the American, he was nevertheless no Indian and The Desert Music records his movements in and out of both cultures, seeking for himself what he believed Daniel Boone sought: "Not for himself surely to be an Indian . . . but the reverse: to be HIMSELF in a new world, Indian-like" (IAG, 137).

Despite his immediate empathy with the Indians, Williams tries to evade the necessary contact with their environment. What were the fingers of small children, begging for pennies, become in the new context of the poem, the tokens of an imploring culture<sup>18</sup> reaching up to the poet and demanding expression in a poem:

Penny please! Give me penny please, mister.

Don't give them anything.

. . . instinctively  
one has already drawn one's naked  
wrist away from those obscene fingers  
as in the mind a vague apprehension speaks  
and the music rouses . (PB, 112)

The contact, however, has been established and the music has

been roused in the poet's mind. But the music places upon him the responsibility for its articulation and it is from its insistent pressure that he attempts to escape. In the external journey he slips quickly into the small bars around the Old Market, trying to drown the music of this local culture in the blaring noise of his contemporaries:

Let's get in here.  
a music! cut off as  
the bar door closes behind us. (PB, 112)

Returning to the street, however, the music is "no less insistent," and there follows inevitably a celebration of his sensual awareness of this reality in the face of his ambivalent attitude toward it. Here the plundering tourists, "loaded with loot," are placed in direct contrast to:

--three half-grown girls, one of them eating a  
pomegranate. Laughing. (PB, 113)

The girls' exuberance, their total response to life, Williams juxtaposes to the repressed fear of the tourists, "serious" and "whispering / together."

Williams' technique of juxtaposing, without overt connectives, seemingly fragmented experiences, is the essential method by which he accumulates meaning in his poem. This process of accumulation--what he refers to in Paterson as a "rolling up out of chaos,"<sup>19</sup> is perhaps best illustrated by the poet's second attempt to avoid the insistent music. In revisiting the bar, Williams begins with what appears to be an interesting but irrelevant detail:



They had the mayor  
up last month for taking \$3000 a week from  
the whorehouses of the city. Not much left  
for the girls. There's a show on. (PB, 113)

The atmosphere, however, of persistent economic exploitation which this single detail evokes permeates the remaining fragments and provides an implicit factual framework in which the strip tease act can be viewed. It establishes an ironic view on local exploitation. The dominant theme of artistic prostitution, created consequently out of fact, continues in the poet's description of the club and its inept turns:

Only a few tables  
occupied. A conventional orchestra--this

place livens up later--playing the usual local  
jing-a-jing--a boy and girl team, she  
confidential with someone  
off stage. Laughing: just finishing the act. (PB, 114)

Visually the lines echo the desultory performance, the whiteness of the page used to suggest both the artistes' lack of involvement in what they are merely paid to do and Williams' lack of interest and consequently involvement in the music they make. He suggests in the space between "this" and "place" both the boredom of his response and the "conventional" quality of the resulting poem. Seen in the context of the opening section, "the conventional orchestra" marks a further attack on those poets who refuse or are unable to commit themselves to their local ground. It is an incapacity Williams momentarily shares.

His interest quickens, however, with the stripper and although his immediate response is the conventional: "You'd have to be / pretty drunk to get any kick out of that," he is instinctively drawn to her, and the possibility for redemption he sees in her. "Some worn-out trouper from / the States" exemplifies the fallen condition of that America it is his responsibility as poet to renew. This instinctual recognition finds manifestation in the fabric the imagination weaves about her and the visual form of this section of the poem which suggests that the poet has indeed begun to make order out of the material he has collected:

There is a fascination  
seeing her shake  
the beaded sequins from  
a string about her hips

She gyrates but it's  
not what you think,  
one does not laugh  
to watch her belly.

One is moved but not  
at the dull show. The  
guitarist yawns. She  
cannot even sing. She  
has about her painted  
hardihood a screen  
of pretty doves which  
flutter their wings.

Her cold eyes perfunctorily moan but do not smile. Yet they bill and coo by grace of a certain candor. She

is heavy on her feet.  
That's good. She  
bends forward learning  
on the table of the

balding man sitting  
upright, alone, so that  
everything hangs forward.  
(PB, 114-115)

Essentially, the lines celebrate the dancer's "candor" as she accepts her exploited position, dances to her "lying music" and simultaneously maintains an ironic distance between herself and her customers. As Williams later states:

She  
at least knows she's  
part of another tune,  
knows her customers,  
has the same  
opinion of them as I  
have. (PB, 115)

It is her candor in having come to terms with her fallen position which stimulates the poet and results in a poetic form of a deceptive visual conformity. The four-line stanzas recreate the crippling monotony of the music she dances to, whilst, within the regularity of its visual appearance, the short sentences point to the boredom she herself experiences. There is no attempt by Williams, as he is at pains to make clear, to portray the stripper cynically or sentimentally. What Williams celebrates is the implicit human dignity he sees in her despite a decadent environment. And it is her dignity which animates the "screen of pretty doves" in the poet's imagination, causing them to "flutter their wings" and "bill and coo." In marked contrast, the poet's companions hear only the "lying music" she dances to. Unable to penetrate her superficial, tired gaudiness, they are thus unable to understand his exuberant response:

What the hell  
are you grinning  
to yourself about? Not  
at her?

The music!  
I like her. She fits

the music . (PB, 115)

His exuberance is the immediate result of his recognition of her intrinsic human value and his creation of a poetic form which expresses that intrinsic truth and thus re-awakens a seemingly irredeemable aspect of contemporary American culture.

The created structure, however, reconciles the stripper, the poet and the "lying music" they transform in their dance together, whilst the poet's imagination seizes upon the implications of the process of transformation:

There is another music. The bright-colored candy  
of her nakedness lifts her unexpectedly  
to partake of its tune .

the virgin of her mind . Andromeda of those rocks,  
greens and reds . those unearthly

in her mockery of virtue  
she becomes unaccountably virtuous .  
though she in no  
way pretends it . (PB, 116)

The lines define the explicit function of the imagination in the process of accumulation. It is the imagination which performs its dance over the innumerable fragments the poet's memory holds and which must seek out correspondences between the otherwise irreconcilable material. The



imagination must also create out of its fragments a new image which attempts to re-define them. Here the poet's imagination transforms the stripper into the mythical Andromeda and himself into that Perseus who rescued her from the sea-monster. But, in her renewal by the imagination, Williams demands that the process as well as the final results of the transformation be revealed.

The process begins as he watches the stripper dully removing her clothes. His initial comparison of her nakedness to "bright-colored candy" reminds the reader of the poet's earlier tour of the Old Market:

and the aniline  
red and green candy at the little booth  
tended by the old Indian woman.

Do you suppose anyone actually  
buys - and eats the stuff? (PB, 113)

And grounds "those unearthly / greens and reds" (PB, 116) in the actual experience of the poet. By such a method both reality and the art which it sustains co-exist within the single poem.

Here we are. They'll be along any minute.  
The bar is at the right of the entrance,  
a few tables opposite which you have to pass  
to get to the dining room, beyond.

A foursome, two oversize Americans, no  
longer young, got up as cowboys,  
hats and all, are drunk and carrying on  
with their gals, drunk also,

especially one inciting her man, the  
biggest, YIP EE! to dance in  
the narrow space, oblivious to everything  
- she is insatiable and he is trying

stumblingly to keep up with her.  
 Give it the gun, pardner! YIP EE! We  
 pushed by them to our table, seven  
 of us. Seated about the room

were quiet family groups, some with  
 children, eating. Rather a better  
 class than you notice  
 on the streets. So here we are. You

can see through into the kitchen  
 where one of the cooks, his shirt sleeves  
 rolled up, an apron over  
 the well-pressed pants of a street

suit, black hair neatly parted,  
 a tall  
 good-looking man, is working  
 absorbed, before a chopping block (PB, 116-117)

His selection of detail and incident, whilst conveying a sense of the vigour and the haphazard quality of the original experience, serves to polarize at a public level the poetic conflict engaging his mind. Once again Williams sets in juxtaposition the raw and undisciplined energy of the Americans and the Indians' self-control and the stability of their relationships. As "the agony of self-realization" suggests in the accompanying interjections of doubt and emphasis, the poet shares the American's burden of a superfluity of energy. Whilst they grope towards an inadequate means of expressing their innate energy in a dance which is a grotesque parody of that dance the imagination participates in, the poet recognizes that their dance is based on limitation and desperate fear. The terminology is overtly sexual:



to dance in  
the narrow space, oblivious to everything  
- she is insatiable and he is trying

stumblingly to keep up with her.  
Give it the gun, pardner! YIP EE! (PB, 116-117)

The cowboys' YIP EE is their sole means of articulating their response, roughly hewn and roused, to their immediate situation. The poet's dilemma centres on the creation of a poetic organization which can incorporate such energy without degenerating into formlessness.

The Indians by contrast demonstrate a reserve and formality as inimical to the poet as the explosive frenzy of the cowboys. The quiet care with which they are drawn by the poet points to their inability to accommodate the Americans' raw vitality. Although Williams pays respect to their essential dignity, he also recognizes his greater responsibility to the cowboys in their implicit search for articulation. The immediate contrast is between a frenetic poet and the calm artisan who understands his function and works to fulfilling it:

You

can see through into the kitchen  
where one of the cooks, his shirt sleeves  
rolled up, an apron over  
the well-pressed pants of a street

suit, black hair neatly parted,  
a tall  
good-looking man, is working  
absorbed, before a chopping block (PB, 117)

And taken in conjunction with the "Old Fashioneds all

around" which follows, the "chopping block" points ironically once more to that method of hewing experience to fit within a preconceived form which characterizes traditional poetry for Williams.

In the re-ordering of his companions' questions Williams demonstrates the method by which events at a public level can become part of that crisis of identity in which the poetic process has involved him. His careful suppression of personalities transforms the conversation into an internal debate and fuses in the period of composition the public and poetic levels of experience. After the elemental opposition established in the section immediately preceding, the questions reinforce the poet's inability to find relief from the insistent pressure of his responsibilities. They are also at this time of crisis a simple and emphatic statement of determination:

So this is William  
Carlos Williams, the poet .

Floss and I had half consumed  
our quartered hearts of lettuce before  
we noticed the others hadn't touched theirs .  
You seem quite normal. Can you tell me? Why  
does one want to write a poem?

Because it's there to be written.

Oh. A matter of inspiration then?

Of necessity.

Oh. But what sets it off?

I am that he whose brains  
are scattered  
                    aimlessly (PB, 117-118)

The answers, as the spacing suggests, are not intended as comprehensive replies to specific questions. Rather they serve to reinforce the poet's rejection of conventional response and his constantly articulated demands for the poem. Their "matter of inspiration then" becomes a grimly ironic platitude in the poet's own "agony of self-realization," and suggests the possibility that the poet "whose brains / are scattered / aimlessly" is referring pointedly to his companions to whom he must restore order and direction.

Leaving the bar, the third movement begins with "those insistent fingers" of the local environment which reach out again to the poet:

Penny please. Give me penny.                      Penny please, mister.

Here! now go away. (PB, 118)

But such financial recompense in no way mitigates the difficulties of poetic response:

-but the music, the music has reawakened  
as we leave the busier parts of the street  
and come again to the bridge in the semi-dark,  
pay our fee and begin again to cross  
seeing the lights along the mountain back of El  
Paso and pause to watch the boys calling out  
to us to throw more coins to them standing  
in the shallow water . so that's  
where the incentive lay, with the annoyance  
of those surprising fingers. (PB, 118)

The flash of recognition with which the passage closes calls to mind the conventional "But what sets it off?" of his companions and points to an immediate and sensual contact with the locale as the essential stimulus for poetic composition. Williams, traversing the bridge between Juarez and El Paso, has unconsciously begun to cross from this local ground into the world of art. It is also at this point in the journey that he makes his discovery of the form "in the projecting angle of the bridge flange" (PB, 119) although no explicit statement is made. What follows is a series of fragmented and disorganized thoughts which in the dramatic unity of the poem provides a suitable lowering of tension before the climactic moment at the instant of recognition.

The fragments are the final slivers of doubt and guilt which have beset the poet throughout his journey but they are by no means extraneous to the continuity of experience the poem records. His cynical "So you're a poet? / a good thing to be got rid of - half drunk . . ." accumulates significance with its associations, in the opening section of the poem, of that "inhuman shapelessness" the poet begins to inspect. The latter comment reveals that it is his own mental shapelessness, prior to the making of the poem, which confronts him. His immediate response to his predicament was "Heave it into the river. A good thing" but such self-pity has been replaced by a difficult process



of self-investigation and self-discovery. And even the painful cry for "relief from that changeless, endless / inescapable and insistent music" is tempered by the reader's growing recognition of the poet's sense of responsibility to his art.

His final interjection is an angry denunciation of the culture which has subjected him to his agony. The "expressionless ding dong" the Latins "dish up / to us" (PB, 119) brings to mind the earlier attack made abruptly by the poet during the stripper's act.

Why don't these Indians get over this nauseating prattle about their souls and their loves and sing us something else for a change? (PB, 115)

But the violence of the denunciation is an implicit comment on the limitations Williams sees in American familial relationships, the loss of faith and the depravity of love. Williams instinctively turns to confront his specifically American reality, angry that his stimulus for the confrontation has been contact with an older and more stable environment. What follows is the poet's growing consciousness of the possibilities for the form which he has discovered and at which he has been dully staring. The slow, groping quality of the recognition is suggested by the spacing of the lines:

What's that?

Oh, come on.

But what's THAT?



the music! the

music! as when Casals struck  
and held a deep cello tone  
and I am speechless .

The internal movement of The Desert Music is the search for a way out of this state of speechlessness and the form discovered upon the bridge points to the difficulty of making such a search. Williams sees in the figure of the huddled Mexican the amorphous state of self and world out of which he must create form but what accompanies this instant of recognition is an overpowering sense of horror as the poet instinctively understands the agonies of composition through which he must pass:

There it sat  
in the projecting angle of the bridge flange  
as I stood aghast and looked at it-  
in the half-light: shapeless or rather returned  
to its original shape, armless, legless,  
headless, packed like the pit of a fruit into  
that obscure corner - or  
a fish to swim against the stream - or  
a child in the womb prepared to imitate life,  
warding its life against  
a birth of awful promise. (PN, 119-120)

Despite the seemingly impenetrable confusion in a reality of which it is a mere fragment, Williams has discovered in his Mexican a recognizable image which will allow the poem to take root and grow in his mind. The music of this environment, however, which initially stimulated him to a new awareness of his poetic self, now appears to impede his quest for form as it imposes upon him continuous demands for expression:

The music  
 guards it, a mucus, a film that surrounds it,  
 a benumbing ink that stains the  
 sea of our minds -to hold us off- shed  
 of a shape close as it can get to no shape,  
 a music! a protecting music . (PB, 120)

The poet's ability, however, to articulate the difficulty of approaching reality and of creating a poem which is a natural projection of that reality, renews his sense of poetic purpose and leads to the triumphant reaffirmation of his usefulness:

I AM a poet! I  
 am. I am. I am a poet, I reaffirmed, ashamed (PB, 120)

And the moment of self-recognition leads inevitably to an acceptance of his responsibilities and a joyful liberation from the doubts the music had roused. Instead of recoiling from the confrontation, Williams responds exuberantly to its abundance, able at this moment to accept confusion and fragmentation as necessary preliminaries to the making of the poem:

Now the music volleys through as in  
 a lonely moment I hear it. Now it is all  
 about me. The dance! The verb detaches itself  
 seeking to become articulate . (PB, 120)

The Desert Music is essentially the record of this verb "seeking to become articulate," and the note of relief on which it closes attests that the search has successfully begun and, the poem itself in mind, been successfully concluded:

And I could not help thinking  
 of the wonders of the brain that  
 hears that music and of our  
 skill sometimes to record it. (PB, 120)

(iii)

The excellence of The Desert Music is manifest in the subtle fusion of public and aesthetic levels of experience. Williams has created a dimensionality in his poetic structure by which every detail of his outward journey embodies without explicit connective the gradations of his inward journey to write a poem. Each sliver of experiential data thus resonates at two distinct levels simultaneously, moving the poem between its polarities in reality and art and evolving a structure in which fact, redeemed from the desert-memory, is dynamized into an element of the creative process. What results, visually and tonally, from so inseparable an intertwining is a structure of varying densities or textures more immediately consonant with the topographical variations of an urban context. And what is revealed to the reader is the process of transformation whereby fact is transformed from an inert presence in the poem into metaphor. Williams seeks to stress by such a methodology that all fact is capable of a similar redemption despite the apparent diversity of the assembled fragments. The stripper is thus sublimated by the imagination into ironic relations with Andromeda; the serious tourists become grotesque tokens of American culture; the Indians assume those qualities Williams sees as prerequisite to the writing of a poem.

All details of human experience, Williams appears to say, have the potential to activate the intensely dense private world of the human unconscious and to ground that world in a known and felt environment.

The modulations of tone expressed in the process The Desert Music records also creates a sense of the difficulties implicit in the collage-poem. The texture of interjection, despair, frustration, and the moments of intense clarity establish a poetry in which statement is displaced by Williams' need to incorporate change into his work. In the poem, the change necessary on such a journey from one culture to another speaks for the change vital to the poet's movement from one stage of inertia and passivity to the state of probing and acclamation as the poem begins to take form in his mind. The strength of Williams' poem rests in his willingness to allow the reader direct participation in the creative process and to share not simply the final moment of triumph but also the failures in, for example, the roughly-shaped passages where the poet sees and begins to realize the Stripper's fallen America.

The energy with which Williams raises and resolves the organizational difficulties of The Desert Music informs his entire work. It is basically an energy created out of an irresolvable inner conflict, out of a fine tension between the artistic conditions he had imposed upon himself and his



persistent need to demonstrate their relevance to his poems. In The Desert Music, the result of the struggle is the "agony of self-realization" which releases the poet's search for form and it is a similar agony which accompanies the gathering up of fragments in his longer works. Poetically manifested as a "quest," each work expresses this attempt to give shape to impossibly diverse fragments of the poet's experience. Like other quests, its achievement rests rather in the effort to establish a temporary reconciliation between fragments than in their restraint within a carefully finished poetic structure. What accompanies each attempt is Williams' exuberant energy which constantly overflows the literary moulds with which he is experimenting and his sense of frustration as he enlarges the moulds and finds them consistently inadequate for his purposes. For Williams is aware of the fundamental paradox in his search for form. The fragments of his experience are extensions of that reality which constantly intrudes into the making of the poem, at once demanding articulation and at the same time rejecting the conventions of traditional art. Rejecting the inevitable movement of the fragments back towards that formlessness from which they have only with difficulty emerged from the poet's mind, Williams similarly refuses to coerce his experiences into a preconceived "net" which distorts their individual significance. The organization for the poem he slowly evolved during his career was created by



the juxtaposition of the fragments one to another, a technique which also allowed the reader to make connectives between them beyond the immediate demands of the poem.

The art of juxtaposition involves simply "setting one thing beside the other without connective,"<sup>20</sup> and is the basic means whereby Williams accumulates meaning in his work. It denies in its seeming impersonality the restrictive point-of-view of the poet and creates an autonomous structure in which art is never divorced from the reality which sustains it. The unshaped fragments and the poet's determination to include their untreated rawness in his work, points to Williams' need to maintain intimate contact with reality. It points also to his equally urgent need to make the reader aware of the actual conditions in which the poem has been created and to make him understand the poem's findings by letting him share the mental process which has led to those conclusions. The art of juxtaposition is ultimately for Williams a rejection of art's traditional sophistication and a means by which the poem can approach more closely the knowable environment of the reader.<sup>21</sup> The roughly hewn fragments suggest both an acceptance and a celebration of the world immediately accessible to the senses, inveigling the reader to confront once again its destructive energy in the creative process of the poem.

This method of organizing his materials fulfills

that poetic commitment explicitly articulated as I have shown in the opening section of The Desert Music and incorporated, in justification of his methodology, into all his longer works. I propose to call such an organization a "Collage," attempting in the course of my study a literary definition of what is a painterly aesthetic and technique. I shall examine in their chronological sequence the longer works of William Carlos Williams, demonstrating his growing sophistication with a folk-art<sup>22</sup> technique, his increasing awareness of the possibilities for expression it offered, and his most important use of it to structure the environment which sustains Paterson.

Collage is a term which Williams, in his numerous critical statements and letters to artists and publishers, never made use of but whose technical implications he must surely have understood through his long association with such practising artists as Charles Sheeler, Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley and his informed interest in and acknowledged debt to French painting.<sup>23</sup> Collage too is the necessary context in which to view Williams' formal experimentation and in which to clarify a little the critical controversy his longer works have aroused.<sup>24</sup> Unable to respond to seemingly unassimilated material, his critics have attempted to "evaluate" his works, Paterson in particular, as continuations of a European poetic tradition Williams consistently considered irrelevant and inadequate

to the expression of a vitally American environment.

In this opening chapter, I have pointed to Williams' poetic commitment as it influenced the construction of the poem and its fundamental form. The Desert Music, written during the April of 1951 and read on June 18th of that same year, manifests a search for a poetic organization--Williams himself believed it to be the culmination of his search--which dominates his entire work. In the second chapter I begin to trace the origins of this search in his association with the artistic coterie of New York and the results of that association in the improvisations of Kora in Hell and the mingling of poetry and prose in Spring and All. I shall also discuss at some length the development of the painterly aesthetic of Collage by the Cubists as the inevitable extension of their experiments into pictorial language. Later chapters will consider In the American Grain, Williams' Autobiography and the five books of Paterson. In the chapter devoted to a study of Paterson I intend to examine the important relationship between the poetry and prose, suggesting linguistic conditions for the development of Collage as Williams' technical means of organizing his material. In general I wish to suggest the proper context in which to view Williams' formal experimentation and to consider the books themselves, pointing to the inextricable interdependence of materials and method.



## NOTES

### CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>Sherman Paul, The Music of Survival, 40. I am greatly indebted to Sherman Paul's research into the biographical background to The Desert Music and to his perceptive and lucid introductory material. I disagree, however, with his interpretation of the poem itself which fails to express the essential conflict in the mind of the poet and to reconcile public and poetic levels of experience.

<sup>2</sup>In his letter to Marianne Moore, June 23, 1951, Williams states:

Yes, when we are overactive, we suffer. I am glad you have learned that lesson even if it cost you a bad time. It was from overwork on my Autobiography that I went under. I might have died.

<sup>3</sup>For the surprise of the attack, see his letter to Wallace Stevens, SL, 295.

<sup>4</sup>In his letter to F. L. Moore, he states:

Death dominates our world. I am amazed at the way my friends go about acting as if they were not doomed. (SL, 297)

<sup>5</sup>SL, 298.

<sup>6</sup>Paterson will be discussed at greater length in a later chapter.

<sup>7</sup>See his elucidation of this remark in "A Sort of a Song," CLP, 7.

<sup>8</sup>A, 391. See also the foreword to his Autobiography where Williams declares that "Thought was never an isolated thing with me; it was a game of tests and balances, to be proven by the written word."

<sup>9</sup>My emphasis.

<sup>10</sup>Descent, as Williams articulates in "The Descent," PB, 73-74, is the essential prerequisite to Ascent:

The descent beckons  
as the ascent beckoned.  
Memory is a kind  
of accomplishment,  
a sort of renewal  
even

an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places  
inhabited by hordes  
heretofore unrealized,  
of new kinds-  
since their movements  
are toward new objectives  
(even though formerly they were abandoned).

<sup>11</sup>The results of the reaffirmation of poetic intent recorded in The Desert Music are discussed by James Breslin in William Carlos Williams--An American Artist. Particularly relevant is his final chapter, "A Celebration of the Light."

<sup>12</sup>The formlessness suggests also the poet himself during his period of convalescence, adding grim irony to that "agony" which informs the poem.

<sup>13</sup>See the discussion of the image of the dance by Sherman Paul, Music of Survival, 71-77.

<sup>14</sup>Paul, Music of Survival, 75.

<sup>15</sup>See Denis Donoghue's "For a Redeeming Language," The Twentieth Century, CLXIII (June 1958), 532-542.

<sup>16</sup>See also Williams' letter to Frank L. Moore, SL, 296-298, where he argues that ". . . to imitate nature involves the verb: we then ourselves become nature, and so invent an object which is an extension of the process."

<sup>17</sup>Williams had been aware of the primal relationship between Indian and Locale in creating In the American Grain where the continuous identification of Man and local ground was set in active opposition to the Puritan's preference for more heavenly contexts. The American Tourists of The Desert Music are unfortunate heirs to that latter heritage, abundant in energy and poor in directing it to enrich their



immediate environment. Williams' awareness of the Indian is very similar to that expressed by D. H. Lawrence in "The Hopi Snake Dance," where in their "mystic, dark-sacred concentration," Indian dancers renew their commitment to the earth, whilst around them the tourists "recoiled." See, in particular, Lawrence's Mornings in Mexico and Etruscan Places, Penguin Books, 1967, 71-90. Williams' own dance in The Desert Music owes a great deal to the sense of dance as vital ritualistic renewal Lawrence expresses.

<sup>18</sup>See Music of Survival, 84.

<sup>19</sup>See, in particular, the preface to Book 1 where the phrase "rolling up"--the method of accumulation--is used seven times to suggest the poet's "verbal activity."

<sup>20</sup>Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, 332. I shall examine at greater length the implications of juxtaposition in a later chapter but I wish to acknowledge here my debt to Shattuck's perceptive comments in the penultimate chapter to his work, "The Art of Stillness."

<sup>21</sup>See A, 391 where Williams talks of his early impulse to "find an image large enough to embody the whole knowable world about me."

<sup>22</sup>Collage, as Janis and Blesch have pointed out, has its origins in the folk-art obsession to save things in pasted designs of long assembled materials. They talk of "the seeming impertinence and incongruity of this folk art device in serious art," Collage, 3.

<sup>23</sup>I shall amplify these comments in my second chapter.

<sup>24</sup>James Breslin briefly summarizes the critical approaches to Paterson, for example, in his William Carlos Williams, 169.

## CHAPTER TWO

"Thinking of Paris, I waked to the tick  
of the rails."

(i)

The thoughts of Paris which roused Williams from mental inactivity in 1950 as he crossed his desert miles, had stimulated him equally during the 1920's as a result of two visits he had made to the city in 1924 and 1927. There, briefly immersed in "the Paris of the expatriate artist" (A, 190), he had talked enthusiastically with James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, Louis Aragon, George Antheil, Marcel Duchamp and others of that artistic coterie whose dedication and energy Williams greatly admired.<sup>1</sup> He responded eagerly to their experimentation in the pursuit of new forms, acknowledging a "slowly shaping drive" (A, 174) to their research which, Williams believed, had been erased in his own country by the publication of The Waste Land.<sup>2</sup> But, whilst he applauded the creative activity of its artists, Williams found the massive restraint of the city's people and architecture hostile to his own abundant energy.<sup>3</sup> He returned, inevitably, to his medical practice in Rutherford, New Jersey, persistent in his efforts to ground the liberating creativity of Paris in the minutiae of his immediate American environment. Rooted in the familiar locale of Rutherford, Williams committed himself to "finding a local assertion" (A, 138) for his poems, vigorously arguing against the rootless existence of expatriates in Paris.

There was, as Williams declared in his Autobiography, "heat in us, a core and a drive that was gathering headway upon the theme of a rediscovery of a primary impetus, the elementary principle of all art, in the local conditions" (146).

His very commitment, however, to "contact with an immediate objective world of actual experience" (SE, 33-34) in Rutherford is directly attributable to the influence upon his work of the new forms evolving in Paris. "Foreign work" (SE, 28) provided the vital stimulus for Williams in his early groping toward a poetic organization adequate to express the fragmented space of America. Most importantly, however, it liberated Williams from his Keatsian imitations and encouraged him to initiate that "break with banality, the continual hardening which habit enforces" Williams demanded in 1918 as he wrote his prologue to Kora in Hell. The primary literary manifestation of innovation was James Joyce, in whose work Williams instinctually recognized the beginnings of a resuscitation in form and language. In a "Comment," published in the first issue of Contact (1921), his immediate response was to Joyce's destruction of those conventions, such as sentence-structure and punctuation, which sought to bind individual words into definitive positions. "He is following," as Williams argued, "some unapparent sequence quite apart from the usual syntactical one." The effect, for Williams, was to release each word



from binding relationships within the sequence--"to separate the words from the printed page"--and thus to express, as sharply and concretely as possible, the specific integrity of the object or experience. The final result of such an insistence is that the reader is compelled to take each word "up into a world where the imagination is at play and where the words are no more than titles under the illustrations," into a world, created by the imagination, where the word and the object it denoted could dance inseparably together. Specifically, Williams responded to Joyce's attempts to liberate words from pure syntactical function where they are invariably subsumed by their sentence's larger statement. In the "sentence" poems of Williams, such as "The Red Wheelbarrow," a clear spatial arrangement constantly breaks the headlong rush of meaning into smaller, more intensely realized units of composition.

Joyce's work was thus an example and reaffirmation of "the forever-sought freedom of truth from usage," expressing both the invention and courage he associated with art's "modern world" (SE, 28). In general, however, the influence of Paris confirmed the maturing Williams in his determination to break with "the genteel tradition" of poetry and to begin his messianic work on the reconstruction of the poem which he later recognized was "one of the major occupations of the intelligence in our day" (A, 332). Most important of all was its emphasis on new ways of



looking at and ordering external reality. At this fundamental level, Paris initiated within the poet a search for formal organizations capable of simultaneously releasing and containing the apparently irreducible energy of America.

Paris, however, had exerted its influence on William Carlos Williams prior to his two visits there. Williams, on the periphery of New York's avant-garde immediately before and during the First World War, understood that the initial impact of the work in Paris had been derived from the plastic arts.<sup>4</sup> Stimulated in general by what he later referred to as the "great surge of interest in the arts generally before the First World War" (A, 134), he acknowledged his particular indebtedness to the French painters:

As I look back it was the French painters rather than the writers who influenced us and their influence was very great. They created an atmosphere of release, color release, release from stereotyped forms, trite subjects. There was a lot of humor in French painting, and a kind of loose carelessness. Morals were down and so were a lot of other things. For which everyone was very happy, relieved.<sup>5</sup>

The exuberance and expectation instigated by so important "an atmosphere of release" came to a head, Williams recalled, "in the famous 'Armory Show' of 1913" (A, 134) which Constance Rourke describes as "the great punctuating force of this period."<sup>6</sup> The atmosphere in which the exhibition took place is described by Meyer Shapiro in his essay, "Rebellion in Art":

About 1913 painters, writers, musicians, and architects felt themselves to be at an epochal turning-point

corresponding to an equally decisive transition in philosophic thought and social life. This sentiment of imminent change inspired a general insurgence, a readiness for great events. The years just before the First World War were rich in new associations of artists, vast projects, and daring manifestoes. The world of art had never known so keen an appetite for action, a kind of militancy that gave to cultural life the quality of a revolutionary movement or the beginnings of a new religion.<sup>7</sup>

In 1913, the Armory Show became the provocative symbol of artistic militancy and revolution.

In essence, the exhibition "meant a plain acknowledgment that American art was indebted to French art, and set out to provide that influence in full force and let it have its way."<sup>8</sup> The Parisian imports included paintings by representatives of all the major artistic movements with the exception of the Futurists who, denied a booth of their own, refused to participate. Williams thus saw again<sup>9</sup> the work of Cézanne and the Post-Impressionists, Gauguin and Van Gogh, the Neo-Impressionists, Seurat, Signac and Cross and the Fauves, including canvases by Derain, Manguin, Marquet, Villon, Friesz, Dufy and their leader Matisse. The Cubists were represented by the paintings of Picasso, Braque, Léger, de la Fresnaye, Gleizes, Picabia and Marcel Duchamp. In retrospect, Williams remembered particularly gaping "with the rest at a 'picture' in which an electric bulb kept going on and off; at Duchamp's sculpture (by "Mott and Co."), a magnificent cast-iron urinal, glistening of its white enamel."<sup>10</sup> He recollected also Marcel Duchamp's "Nude

Descending a Staircase" and his immediate response to it which was to laugh "out loud when first I saw it, happily, with relief" (A, 134). Williams' recognition of the irreverent humour of the exhibits, his vivid memories of Duchamp's "objets-trouvés" and the resulting sense of liberation he experienced foreshadow his own sudden experiments in structures, immediately perceptible in the frustrated energies of Kora in Hell (1920) and in the later re-ordering of conventional artistic perspective in Spring and All (1923) and The Great American Novel (1923). "We were restless and constrained," Williams remembered, "closely allied with the painters. Impressionism, dadaism, surrealism applied both to painting and the poem" (A, 148).

Contemporary American artists also exhibited at the Armory Show and if the Parisian paintings emphasized the importance of form for Williams, it was the local "Ash-Can" school which stressed the need for "a local assertion" of the specifically American cityscape. This school "brought into the forefront unsentimentalized versions of the ugly vitality of American city life," in a violent reaction against academic realism and the vague softness of the American variety of Impressionism. These "apostles of ugliness"<sup>11</sup> evolved a style based on direct observation of the American scene, substantiating for the American artist his right to paint what he liked. But the "Ash-Can" school, confronted by contemporary French painting, realized its own



lack of structure. Ben Benn recalls that when he saw the modern masters, they "opened my eyes to the necessity for something of more permanent value--interdependence of parts (called organization), pattern (the just disposition of masses), and rhythm to unite these other elements."<sup>12</sup> His awakening was shared by Williams who had earlier begun his explorations of the contemporary scene and had been similarly obstructed by formal difficulties. John Brinnin recognizes that in scores of poems:

Williams catches the same hitherto neglected fragments of observation as those with which the painters were dealing, letting his figures and his city-scapes speak for themselves, unencumbered by academic notions of design or the rehearsed pathos of the genre painter or poet.<sup>13</sup>

His subsequent search, however, initiated by French painting with its stress on construction rather than representation, was for ways of expressing the intrinsic truth of these figures and cityscapes without recourse to alien and restrictive poetic moulds.

The impact of the Armory Show upon America, and its many reverberations throughout American Art, greatly excited Williams:

Here was my chance, that was all I knew. There had been a break somewhere, we were streaming through, each thinking his own thoughts, driving his own designs toward his self's objectives. Whether the Armory Show in painting did it or whether that was no more than a facet--the poetic line, the way the image was to lie on the page was our immediate concern. For myself all that implied, in the materials, respecting the place I knew best, was finding a local assertion--to my everlasting relief. I had never in my life before felt that way. I was tremendously stirred. (A, 138)

If, however, the immediate effect of the atmosphere evoked by the Armory Show was "the way the image was to lie on the page," the relationship between visual manifestation and poetic "meaning" marked the beginnings of a series of experiments in poetic structures which was inevitably indebted to the work of the Cubists in Paris, impelling the poet to similar painterly conclusions. In particular, the Cubists' stress on Form, which Barbara Rose described as the single aesthetic message of the exhibition,<sup>14</sup> led to Williams' revaluation of "the poetic line and our hopes for its recovery from stodginess." Using recovery "in the sense that one recovers a salt from solution by chemical action," Williams expresses that violence and irreverence implicit in Cubist methodology. "We were destroyers, vulgarians, obscurantists to most who read," Williams argued, "though occasionally a witty line, an unusual reference, or a wrench of the simile to force it into approximation with experience rather than reading--bringing a whole proximate 'material' into view--found some response from the alert" (A, 148).

"The alert" included members of that artistic coterie with whom Williams became deeply involved. If the atmosphere of frantic, creative liberation had been "symbolized" by the Armory Exhibition, it had been carefully established, organized and nurtured by Alfred Stieglitz at his New York Gallery "291." Moving later to Walter Arensberg's apartment,



the coterie's founding spirits were Stieglitz himself, Alfred Kreymbourg, Orrick Johns, Peggy Johns, Malcolm Cowley, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. Frequent visitors from Paris, including Crôti, Francis Picabia, Gleizes and Madame Gleizes, talked enthusiastically of Cubism and Dada. Of special importance was his meeting there with the Precisionist, Charles Sheeler, whose important and influential friendship dominates Williams' Autobiography. "Our parties," Williams records, "were cheap--a few drinks, a sandwich or so, coffee--but the yeast of new work in the realm of the poem was tremendously stirring" (136).

"291" and the Arensberg apartment together articulated a "little isle of grace"<sup>15</sup> in a New York characterized by its "stupidity."<sup>16</sup> The atmosphere of artistic experimentation it encouraged stirred Williams "tremendously" (A, 138), an atmosphere which sustained what Buffet-Picabia remembered as "an exceptional revolutionary activity."<sup>17</sup> Williams' most obvious contribution to the new spirit was a 24-hour party, given in the spring of 1916, to which came Arensberg, Gleizes, Kreymbourg, Bodenheim, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. The context of continuous discussion and formal experimentation, of both controversial theory and irreverent practise, established a literary climate in which Williams released himself from stereotyped poetic response. The immediate effect was to stimulate him to "improvise,"<sup>18</sup> thus minimizing the possibility of the

"managed" poem.<sup>19</sup> The larger effect, however, manifested itself in Williams' attitude to his art, in his displays of ironic anger toward the Novel, the History, the Poem, and in his energetic revitalization of antique moulds.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, such an attitude was particularly encouraged by Duchamp and Picabia, the coterie's acknowledged leaders. Working in conjunction, the two artists had effected the transformation of Alfred Stieglitz's Camera Work into 291, a change which radicalized not merely the title but the corrosive quality of the spirit behind the magazine. In addition, they edited the only two issues of The Blind Man (April-May, 1917), and the single issues of Rongwrong (1917) and New York Dada (April, 1921), disseminating the seeds of playful destructiveness which took root immediately in William Carlos Williams.<sup>21</sup>

The general progress of the arts over the thirty years preceding the Armory Show which that exhibition had released with great suddenness upon New York's community of artists, was recorded also on the walls of the Arensberg apartment, hung as they were with canvases by revolutionary French and American artists. Charles Sheeler referred to the collection indeed as a "biography,"<sup>22</sup> presumably in its manifestation of several important sources for Sheeler's own development. The apartment exhibited several Cézannes and Picassos, and single paintings by Matisse, Derain, Rousseau and Duchamp. Inevitably, Duchamp's contribution

was his notorious "Nude." In this apartment, in the atmosphere of intense excitement appropriate to so innovative a collection, Williams engaged in "arguments over cubism which would fill an afternoon." And Cubism emerged from the arguments not as a simple, painterly explosion of fragmented and discontinuous planes, but as a series of experiments in artistic form which could, with equal validity, be applied to the structure of the poem. Williams, looking back on this time, recalled that "it seemed daring to omit capitals at the head of each poetic line. Rhyme went by the board. We were, in short, 'rebels,' and we were so treated" (A, 148). Orrick Johns--one of Williams' closest friends during this active period--wrote that in 1915 Kreymbourg had told him "that people all over the country, and in London and Paris, were writing a new, strange, vital kind of poetry. They were taking the substance for the form, but were working out new forms too." Johns described the phenomenon as "a spontaneous uprising, a rebellion against the trite old rhymes, images and expressions of English verse."<sup>23</sup> It was a rebellion to which Williams irretrievably committed himself. If, as Bram Dijkstra warns, the "shock of the Armory Show and the feverish activity of the years that followed created such a wealth of sources for Williams that it is impossible--and unnecessary--to try to determine precisely which artists or which paintings were originally decisive,"<sup>24</sup> it is equally



important to see Williams' development during this period within the specific context of the plastic arts. If particular paintings and painters were not individually decisive in their influence upon the poet, clearly the context of ebullient artistic experimentation was. The context, recollected by Williams, constituted an arbitrary affiliation with the work of the Dadaists, the Futurists, and the Cubists. Despite, however, later reaction by Duchamp and Picabia against the cerebral integration of Cubist Art, the initial gesture of "modernism" manifested itself in the work of the Cubists. The Futurists, for example, given the ideological foundations of their art, utilized the canvas' fragmentation of Mass to express their concern with dynamic movement and the celebration of the present. As Rosenblum argues:

For those masters who followed it . . . the assimilation of Cubism was the critical point at which they began to participate in the mainstream of contemporary art. . . . Cubism provided the pictorial techniques as well as the imaginative freedom to generate the rich diversity of artistic expression that characterizes the art of our time.<sup>25</sup>

It is within the limitations of such an assumption that I wish to evaluate the work of Williams Carlos Williams. By looking at the basic aesthetic theory which underlies Cubist pictorial expression, I hope to reveal certain significant directions in which their experiments inevitably led them, primarily that Cubism's insistence on the object or locale it articulated moved its painters toward the



literal inclusion of that object or locale in their works. Once I have established the collage technique, and argued its aesthetic ramifications, I shall, in later chapters, attempt to see a complementary urge in the organizations of Williams, a tendency of sufficient impulse to disrupt the conventions of the long, narrative poem, and to create a surface which exudes apparently unassimilated documentation of the poet's environment.

(ii)

Cubism was essentially an art of realism in which the objective world was reappraised and revitalized. Rejecting that "copying" of Nature which traditionally had sustained a descriptive art, the Cubist painters were immediately confronted by "the problem of describing visual reality without resort to illusionism"<sup>26</sup>--an illusionism dependent upon geometric space and linear perspective. They recognized that painting based simply on external perception was inadequate. Marcel Raynard, in an article published in 1912, argued that:

If art is required to be not merely a means of flattering the mind and sense but more the means of augmenting knowledge, its function will only be served by painting forms as they are conceived in the mind. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Raynard thus argues for an art of "conception" in which the visible world, as Gleizes and Metzinger confirm, "only becomes the real world by the operation of thought."<sup>28</sup> Cubism, therefore, moved quickly beyond purely representational art, seeking a "completely new way of looking at the outside world, a clearly-defined aesthetic."<sup>29</sup>

In their conceptual art, the Cubists restructured visible reality and organized in their paintings a new reality in which familiar details of that world the artist had originally confronted were analyzed and transformed.

Thus traces of the visible world and the new reality of the painting co-existed on a single canvas, related basically by the creative process of transformation itself. Consequently, in its purest form, Cubism is a study of "the very techniques of representation--painting about the methods of painting, a report on the reality of art."<sup>30</sup>

The tableau-tableau--the painter's painting--investigates "both the object and the means of painting this object."

John Golding argues that:

the Cubists saw their paintings as constructed objects, having their own independent existence, as small, self-contained worlds, not reflecting the outside world but recreating it in a completely new form.<sup>31</sup>

In the new world of the art-object, the Cubists pursued their investigations into ways of articulating external reality.

They sought to represent on canvas the essential qualities of the object they painted, purging it of idiosyncratic elements to realize its "significant" form. Unlike the Impressionists who appeared satisfied by the fortuities of a single visual impression of the object, the Cubists "endeavoured to penetrate to the very essence of an object by representing it, not as it appeared on a given day at a given time, but as it exists ultimately composed in the memory."<sup>32</sup> Seeking only what was permanent and essential to the object's form, the Cubists rejected the fleeting and spontaneous compositional elements of the

Impressionists. They distrusted the effects of light and sought to separate an object's accidental discoloration from its "local colour." They rejected ornamentation too, in their search for significant form, stressing outline and volume in their suppression of a sensual surface to their paintings. Their fundamental problem remained the representation on a two-dimensional canvas of a solid with three dimensions.

Cubism, therefore, continued the re-ordering of the object initiated by Cézanne whose thinking, as Werner Haftmann points out, was "exclusively pictorial." Haftmann argues that like the Impressionists:

Cézanne stuck close to his motif: his sole purpose was to bring his motif home to the senses, to "realize" it in the human language of art; everything else--emotions, religious ideas, expressive deformation--was eliminated.<sup>33</sup>

The systematic realization of the object involved for the Cubists its geometric crystallization and a denial of subjective coloring similar to Cezanne's. The severe economy of line which resulted and the obvious emphasis on the compositional aspects of the object suggest both a scornful refusal of "anything easily appealing"<sup>34</sup> and an approach to the objects of the artists' world which imbues them with an implicit dignity. Rejecting the linear perspective developed by Alberti, they deliberately flattened the spatial proportions of the painting and transformed the canvas into an arena of activity in which objects exuded a rough and



elemental energy closely related to the crude forms in primitive art and their ritualistic re-alignment in oriental art. Furthermore, the Cubists were greatly influenced by the work of primitive and oriental artists, expressed in the negro figures of the French Sudan,<sup>35</sup> the influx of cheap Japanese prints<sup>36</sup> and their acquaintance with the work of the Douanier Rousseau.<sup>37</sup>

John Golding has recorded the "stimulation" which Negro sculpture provided for Picasso and its results in his Demoiselles (Appendix 1, Fig. 1). Golding suggests that:

The Negro sculptor tends to depict what he knows about his subject rather than what he sees. Or, to put it differently, he tends to express his idea of it. This leads inevitably to great simplification or stylization, and, at the same time, to a clarification and accentuation of what are felt to be the significant features or details of the objects depicted.<sup>38</sup>

Much less conditioned by visual appearance than Western artists, the sculptures exuded a crude and powerful energy which the Cubists applauded in contrast to the stasis which characterized traditional painting in their own culture. Under the influence of the figures, the canvases record the artist's intellectual activity in the conceptualizing of his object, suggesting to the eye of the spectator a nervous energy in the form itself. Picasso himself said to Gomez de la Serna, "I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them."<sup>39</sup> And, as Golding points out, it was this conceptual element in their painting that enabled the Cubists to

"detach themselves from visual appearances without losing touch with the material world around them."<sup>40</sup>

The deliberate intention of the Cubists was to shock the jaded sensibilities of the public into a greater perception and awareness of the immediate objective world. For this purpose they utilized familiar elements of their own bohemian cafe-world as subject matter. Newspapers, guitars, tubes of paint and bottles of wine were themselves overt attacks on public taste, in particular the stylized concept of "beauty" perpetuated by the academicians. Picasso and Braque reached in their work towards the secular and mechanized world for material and in a fulsome celebration of their conceptual powers treated the human form itself as an object subject to the same intense analysis and dislocation as a newspaper or bowl of fruit.<sup>41</sup> In this way the cult of the object replaces the traditional subject-matter of an art created on faith and certitude. Deprived by his rational analysis of the objective world of a sustaining belief to unify his work, the Cubist artist developed a new mythology based on objective reality. The object, carefully taken up out of its original context, and isolated within the composition, assumes mystical proportions. Here the Cubists appear closely allied with the Oriental artist who, as Jacques Maritain suggests, "is primarily concerned with the universe of objects involved in rite." Such an art, Maritain continues, "turns away from Man to look for

the sacred things meant by THINGS and the sacred faces mirrored in the world--a mythical universe which is extraneous to Man, suprahuman, sometimes ferociously antihuman." In Oriental art the artist "would be ashamed of thinking of his ego and intending to manifest his own subjectivity in his work." His first duty is "to forget himself."<sup>42</sup> The restrained tones of Cubist paintings suggests a similar denial of subjective coloring in the affirmation of the object. The artist observes his world with detachment, "without taking sides, without judging, rather with the eyes of a photographer."<sup>43</sup> Such a struggle for objectivity, for the difficult withdrawal of the artist from his work, suggests the artist's conviction that the objects of the immediate world have themselves sufficient qualities to dominate the canvas.

In general, however, the importance of primitive art to the Cubists is best reflected in their admiration for the work of Rousseau (Appendix 1, Figs. 2-4) in which they found a similar "directness of vision and formal simplicity, unperverted by the over-refinement and sophistication with which so much traditional art had become overlaid." Golding writes that although Rousseau dealt with elaborate literary and allegorical themes of the most hackneyed kind, "the freshness and uncompromising realism of his vision gave the impression of an artist who was seeing the world for the first time and revealing in his work only its most



essential formal and human qualities." Golding continues:

In other words, the naïveté of his approach had the effect of deflating these subjects of their pretensions. Then with his painstaking approach and his refusal, or inability, to conceal technical difficulties and problems, he seemed to be "redoing" painting from the beginning.<sup>44</sup>

The paintings of Rousseau suggested to the Cubists a remarkable contrast to the sophistication and technical facility of traditional paintings. In his suppression of perspective, they found confirmation of their own reluctance to "relinquish any object worth painting to the obliteration of distance." He sought, as Shattuck points out, "no more from perspective than a bare minimum of order in space; space in itself as an independent construct did not interest him."<sup>45</sup>

The Cubists also shared with Rousseau a desire to represent the object in its total existence, liberating it from those artificial values which had accrued to it in its original context in the objective world. The importance the object assumed within the painting depended solely upon its function in vital interplay with other elements of composition and not upon any literary, social, or ethical value attached to it. In consequence, Cubism refused any "melodramatic stress, the literary subject, the 'big' anecdote; it was not interested in the isolated episode, or the climax"<sup>46</sup> but in the solid establishment of a pictorial fact, seeking to organize within a new reality the



confused features of the object as those features existed in the visible world.

The main preoccupation of the Cubist painters remained, however, "the representation on a canvas with only two dimensions of solid bodies which have three."<sup>47</sup> To satisfy their demand for the full expression of the object, they gradually evolved the principle of simultaneity which completed the break with representational art. Simultanism denies that a single point-of-view is adequate to define a solid body and disengaged the object from three-dimensional space in which it had assumed a static reality. Basically, the principle involves the juxtaposition of several views of the same object intended to be seen simultaneously and "to compose together a single object in the eyes of the spectator."<sup>48</sup> In essence, the Cubists, by representing the several faces of things simultaneously, were attempting to liberate objects from their traditional categorization in art by implying a mobility in the "oscillation of appearances" which resulted. The faces were nevertheless immobilized in the architectonics of their new reality and "offered to us in their calm being, their plural aspects conceived together."<sup>49</sup>

The immediate effects of the principle were the disruption of the painting's surface organization and the establishment in art of a new kind of coherence, "a new

unity of experience."<sup>50</sup> This unity, based on the simultaneous manifestation of elements, informs also the poetic organizations of William Carlos Williams and erects the appropriate context in which to consider them. Like Paterson, the Cubist analyses of objects have no beginning, middle and end, and no singleness of time and place. Their art marks the disappearance of causality and the emergence of a belief common to many modern artists that "all things exist simultaneously in one realm, and though they may interact they are not related causally." The result of the disappearance of causal progression is that, as Roger Shattuck informs us, "everything is middle." In "The Art of Stillness," the penultimate chapter of The Banquet Years, Shattuck perceptively explores that "universal middle" where all things:

exist in the rudimentary order (apparent disorder) of conflict, an order we conceive only when we experience its parts as simultaneous. Unity becomes not progression but intensification by standing still, a continuous present in which everything is taken together and always.<sup>52</sup>

The result is an "art of stillness" whose artists strive to "reveal the entire universe in its potential unity at a moment of time."<sup>53</sup> Believing that only by achieving rest--arrest--"can we perceive what is happening outside ourselves," they attempted to transfix the inconstancy of objects in the visible world within a single instant. Such arrest, as Shattuck points out, was not achieved by an absence of power but rather by an "equilibrium of forces,"

in particular the tension created in the work by the object, its multiple aspects and the formal difficulties involved in their pictorial reconciliation. Shattuck suggests that like a gyroscope, a familiar image of modernism in art, it sustains itself "by a concentration of forces in self-reflexiveness, art turning upon itself." "This inwardness," he continues, "reveals itself in a posture of total arrest--the juxtaposition of parts around a moment of profound awareness."<sup>54</sup>

This "static action" of Cubist painting was achieved by the technique of juxtaposition. Its simplest definition is "setting one thing beside the other without connective"<sup>55</sup> which accurately conveys a repudiation of traditional paintings organized by transition in which linear perspective related objects one to another "along imaginary lines representing space"<sup>56</sup> in an explicit articulation of the relationship between the elements of composition. The art of juxtaposition rejects elaborate procedures whereby the elements are totally subsumed in the structure of the painting and substitutes an art of abruptness and fragmentation which allows them individual existence whilst expressing them in hitherto unrealized relationships. The emphasis in juxtaposition remains on the temporary nature of that relationship and of the art which attempts to sustain it--an art in which the elements constantly struggle against their place in the order the artist has sought to

impose. Juxtaposed elements, denied logical sequences of time and space, constantly collide and in their collision create disturbing correspondences within the visible world of the spectator. D. H. Kahnweiler, the close friend and biographer of Juan Gris, demonstrates the new possibilities the art of juxtaposition suggests in his explication of the artist's "The Bay of Bandol" (Appendix 1, Fig. 5):

"Le Journal" is written across the mountains and the form of the table is carried on in outline across the waters of the bay. The hills and the sky have penetrated into the room and are depicted on the walls. The sailing-boat is resting on the table. The picture surface has become a sort of unperforated 'lyrical plane' on which are assembled the objects of the painter's inspiration.<sup>57</sup>

The inevitable contradiction between what an object "means" in the visible world and the compositional "meaning" it assumes erects a tension which structures the painting. It remains an unresolved tension which destroys the traditional concept of a finished form in art in which objects are coerced within the single and arbitrary point-of-view of the artist. The painting based on juxtaposed elements exudes a roughness, a crude energy which stands against the traditional decorum of a painting's surface and endows those elements with a primitive mobility. In particular, the technique expresses the artist's own creative energy as he moves around his object or group of objects trying to resolve the formal difficulties they present. What the technique thus produces is an art of process in which the artist's investigations into the objective world are



incorporated into the painting as one of the elements of composition. Juxtaposition thus attempts to break down the traditional separation between art and reality, between artist and spectator. In refusing to finish and polish their work, the Cubists were reacting against illusionistic practices and producing fragmented works which for completion demanded the viewer's active participation in pursuing associations. To "finish" in the sense of "removing all traces of sketch and struggle and uncertainty" became, as Shattuck reminds us, "the surest way of destroying the authenticity of their work."<sup>58</sup>

In summary, the technique of juxtaposition rejects the transitions and symmetry of traditional painting. It sets down without priorities totally disparate elements and by this method "retains an openness more typical of life than art."<sup>59</sup> The elements of composition are not coerced within a preconceived structure but express the creative process of the artist himself. The kind of coherence that results can never be entirely predicted, for, as William Seitz argues, "an assembled work grows by testing, rejection, and acceptance. The artist must cede a measure of his control, and hence of his ego, to the materials and what transpires between them. . . ."<sup>60</sup> In other words, the artist allows for the possibility of relationships between the materials beyond the immediate implications of the painting's new reality. In deliberately suppressing his seeming

omniscience, he draws the viewer into his work to continue the interplay whose possibilities he has suggested.

The principle of simultanism and the technique of juxtaposition were important means by which the Cubist painters, during the Analytical phase of Cubism, dismembered the object in protest against its shabby representation in the Academies. They point to an especial disregard for geometric space and linear perspective as examples of that stability traditionally afforded the viewer of a painting, and suggest that their primary purpose was the disruption of the painting's surface and the disturbing of the viewer. Indeed, as Anton Ehrenzweig points out, the first impact of Cubism was an attack upon conscious sensibilities and the gestalt principle ruling them. Whereas the gestalt psychologists maintained that art recorded the mind in process of striving towards the stable organization of the "good" gestalt, Ehrenzweig argues that:

Cubism went out of its way to deny the eye stable focusing points round which the rest of the composition could be organized. Instead the eye was sent on a fool's errand. When it fastened on one feature the cubistic fragments fell into a new pattern, which was shattered again as soon as the eye wandered on and was caught by another feature. The picture kept heaving in and out as the eye tried to infuse some measure of stability into the pattern.<sup>61</sup>

The initial effect of this optical disturbance was to compel the viewer to re-examine objective reality and to make him aware also of the innumerable possibilities for artistic expression existing within any mundane object or group of

objects.

Herein, however, lies the fundamental paradox of the Analytical phase of Cubism. Reacting vehemently against "illusion, fame, artifice, copy or plagiarism"<sup>62</sup> in their urgent desire for a more intimate articulation of the visible world, the Cubists appeared more concerned with the annihilation of that world than its eventual reconstitution. They had sought to stimulate in the viewer's eye a fresh awareness of external reality and yet, ironically, had approached perilously close to its virtual abolition. Far from relating art more closely to life, as they had originally claimed, by removing deceptive techniques which perpetuated an artfulness, the Cubists were in process of destroying any possible relationship between viewer and his world, freshly conceived on canvas. By the close of 1912 Picasso and Braque were confronted by this severe limitation in their pictorial investigations:

they had taken cubist analysis so far and their pictorial constructions were now so elaborate, that the figure or still-life they were painting had become almost totally unrecognizable. This was the so-called "hermetic" phase of Cubism.

At this stage of their work two courses of action only were open to them:

They had either to give up the pretence of something seen, and construct their pictures out of the abstract elements they had evolved to represent a figure or a still-life; or they had to find some new link with the real world and introduce it into their pictures.<sup>63</sup>

It was the result of their determination to make contact with reality and of their refusal to accept subterfuge in art that led to the literal inclusion of that reality in their paintings and the eventual development of Collage as a technique and aesthetic.



(iii)

Collage was the natural extension of earlier pictorial investigations by Picasso and Braque. In its employment of "live" fragments--non-art materials--it continues the realism of Cubism and develops it into an art of "extreme actualism."<sup>64</sup> The development of Collage as a technique and as an aesthetic response to the objective world suggest the artists' urgent assertion that they had no wish to lose contact with reality. As early as 1908, in the Analytical phase of Cubism, Picasso had painted shadows of nails in his "Still-Life with Violin and Pitcher" (Appendix 1, Fig. 6) which heralded what Janis and Blesch call "the long convulsive effort of artists to bring a primitive reality back to art."<sup>65</sup> Braque had incorporated illusionistic elements such as imitation wood or imitation marble using the techniques of house painters and had used stencilled letters in the composition of "Le Portugais" (Appendix 1, Fig. 7). Picasso had simulated human hair in "The Poet" (Appendix 1, Fig. 8) and had painted immediately legible coat buttons and moustaches to make what D. H. Kahnweiler termed "a sudden evocation of reality, in the midst of their bold departure from material appearances."<sup>66</sup>

The unexpected appearance of such fragmentary

elements of reality also shocked the viewer as he discovered a realistic passage in an otherwise non-naturalistic picture. "He was reminded," Werner Haftmann argues, "of the world of appearances and at the same time made to realize that natural appearance was ephemeral, acquiring permanent reality only by being in the picture."<sup>67</sup> Their discovery, however, also had a secondary effect of drawing the viewer into a new relationship with the art-object. The realistic fragment helped the spectator identify the object in the painting by provoking a chain of associations which induced him to reconstruct it in its entirety. Werner Haftmann argues that:

The illusionistic fragment thus served as a kind of emblem, as a clue which helped the viewer to identify the object. Such fragments of reality used simultaneously enable us to reconstruct a complete real object in our minds, even if in the picture it appears only as a fragment or emblem. The organism eliminates all the dross of natural appearances which cannot be transmuted into form, retaining only essential, representative elements, which evoke as it were the names of things.<sup>68</sup>

Collage thus allows, as Haftmann implies, the incorporation of those elements of reality which in the artist's eye refused to undergo pictorial distortion.

The desire to retain contact with reality led inevitably to the inclusion of real fragments into the composition. Early in 1912 Picasso painted "Still Life with Chair-Caning" (Appendix 1, Fig. 9) into which he incorporated a piece of oil cloth, overprinted to imitate chair-caning. Recognized

by Kahnweiler and Picasso as the first collage--"the first painting in which extraneous objects or materials are applied to the picture surface"<sup>69</sup>--it led Picasso to introduce into his compositions by 1913 thin strips of cloth, bits of paper and small pieces of tin and zinc foil. In September, 1912, Braque's "Compotier et Verre" (Appendix 1, Fig. 10) revealed three pieces of wallpaper, printed to imitate wooden panelling. The early collages, however, represent no radical point of departure for the two artists but a natural conclusion to their earlier investigations. It was not a fortuitous discovery that altered their view of the world around them but rather, as John Golding suggests, "a technical invention that conditioned the appearance of their paintings."<sup>70</sup>

Collage, in its incorporation of real fragments into the composition, marks a final reaction against traditional painting, in particular the idealized and romanticized conception of "the work of art." The pasted papers suggest an antithesis to technical facility manifested in the slickness of brushwork and against oil paint itself as a symbol of art's separation from the textures of reality. They point rather to an emphasis on "honesty" in art, craftsmanship and the subsequent obliteration of the aesthetic distance between art-object and spectator. For Juan Gris, whose work was greatly admired by William Carlos Williams, Collage was only a means of getting real details into the composition





and of abolishing "tricks of brushwork and of replacing the 'hand-painted' surface by the 'ready-made'."<sup>71</sup> In its emphasis on craftsmanship, in its rejection of a sophisticated and deceptive technique, Collage is closely associated with Folk-Art and shares its "naive" quality. This characteristic which applies equally to the work of Williams implies an ignorance of artistic credos, tenets, and theories but an ignorance which results in "an aesthetically productive freedom of expression"<sup>72</sup> as the artist remains unhampered by preconceptions.

The Collage technique granted Picasso and Braque unlimited freedom in their selection of materials, liberating them especially from the monotonous texture of oil paint and the inevitable immobility of the painting's surface. All materials were suitable for inclusion into a work of art as Apollinaire, chief apologist for the Cubists, exclaimed:

Mosaicists paint with marble or coloured wood. There is mention of an Italian artist who painted with excrement; during the French revolution blood served somebody as paint. You may paint with whatever material you please, with pipes, postage stamps, postcards or playing cards, candelabra, pieces of oil-cloth, collars, wallpaper or newspaper. . . .<sup>73</sup>

Kurt Schwitters' more pointed "The waste of the world becomes my art"<sup>74</sup> suggests too a final dissolution of the categorization of artistic material. All matter serves as fit material for art and the technique of juxtaposition transforms its banality into disturbing and incongruous effects. Indeed



the very isolation of the object, removed from its sustaining context, expresses a disquieting dignity which points forward to the ready-mades of Duchamp where "robbed of its natural qualities, idolized and at the same time ridiculed, the mechanical thing can also acquire the character of a magical fetish without the mediation of 'art,' solely by being isolated from its environment."<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, Collage is the natural result of the Cubists' concept of the painting as an independent organism, a constructed object with a life of its own rather than a traditional "work of art." The real fragments--strips of paper or canvas for example--emphasize the weight and solidity of the compositions as material objects, creating what John Golding has described as "small self-contained worlds, not reflecting the outside world but recreating it in a completely new form."<sup>76</sup> The independence of the constructed art-object, existing in its own laws of time and space, is emphasized by the gradual reintroduction of colour into the compositions. Colour had been suppressed during the monochrome period of Cubism when the discipline involved in the creation of a new style had compelled the Cubists to discard the more immediately appealing aspects of painting. As it was reintroduced it assumed an "independent pictorial entity."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, as Edward Fry argues, "one of the greatest contributions of papier colle was that it taught the cubists that color could be liberated

from a solely localized, descriptive function and could be given a second, independent, compositional life of its own."<sup>78</sup> Colour, or any formal element, is assigned arbitrary significance, suggesting a quality in an object or the object's literal self or "it may arbitrarily indicate an opposed quality, and it may even be used in the same work to signify a different quality altogether."<sup>79</sup> Such deliberate confusions mark the beginnings of open form in painting, violating the separateness of the work of art and thrusting it into the objective world of the viewer. The resulting construction is a canvas where objects and their qualities retain separate identities, fluctuating violently between occasional reconciliation and rejection. Collage thus overruns the traditional frame and "art set itself up as continuous with life,"<sup>80</sup> unified by what Apollinaire conceived of as an internal frame:

The equivalent of Picabia's written title, of Picasso's and Braque's real objects, letters, and molded numbers is to be found in Mlle. Laurencin's paintings in the form of pictorial arabesques in depth; in Gleizes' paintings in the form of right angles which catch the light; in Fernand Leger in the form of bubble-shaped forms; in Metzinger in the form of vertical lines parallel to the sides of the frame and cut by occasional transversals. The equivalent will be found in all great painters.<sup>81</sup>

The internal frame serves not to "delimit one realm from the other"<sup>82</sup> but rather to fuse art and its sustaining reality.

The Cubist painters evolved through their use of

Collage a means of creating an order in art without distorting the individual significance of the objects they pasted into their compositions. They discovered an order not in things but with the help of things, searching in their juxtaposition of disparate material for correspondences which would reconcile the inviolable separateness each object assumed. "Now begins," Haftmann argues, "an exciting play with fragments of reality, with isolated things which only by dint of a slow constructive process are made to combine into a living organism, in which they lose their absurdity and become part of an order. They enter into communication with one another and with the mind that arranged them."<sup>83</sup> The Collage surface is a reflection of this exciting interplay between materials and artist, the rough casualness of the technique suggesting a creative energy in the act of establishing temporary order with its objects. The development of Collage is in fact a history of the growing sophistication with which artists have utilized the technique of juxtaposition, recognizing the paradox and ambiguity, the wit and shock that result from the collision of two entities. In 1913, in his "Still-Life with Violin and Fruit" (Appendix 1, Fig. 11), Picasso indicated the presence of fruit in a dish by pasting printed illustrations of apples and pears above a segment of newspaper and thus severely restricting the sensual characteristics of the fruit in his composition. Whilst they relate



formally to the internal structure of the Collage, they retain in their very separateness an individuality which refuses to be totally subsumed in the organization. The resulting creation fluctuates between art and reality, its elements at times suggesting an order and at times pointing to the impossibility of its establishment. The objects of Collage are thus in a constant tension which, as Janis and Blesch point out, "expresses the paradox between the true and the false in a way that pure painting cannot, and this extends expression to fit the vast complexities of the modern world."<sup>84</sup>

It is at this point that gross rationalization of the Collage aesthetic commences and, whilst it certainly may be understood in terms of the artists' response to the dynamism and space of a modern world, I prefer at this stage of my study only to justify its development in terms of purely pictorial problems. The technique and aesthetic of Collage arise inevitably out of the artists' realization that "ordinary easel painting was no longer adequate to all legitimate creative needs"<sup>85</sup> and out of an equally important desire for liberation in the organization of their paintings and the materials they made use of. Collage manifests a playful casualness which ridicules the fineness of Fine Art, dispels the notion of the "noble means" and attempts to relate art more closely to the public world by refusing to resolve disparate elements and thus retaining an openness more



typical of life than of art. The technical innovations introduced into painting by the Cubists to solve compositional difficulties were seized upon by the Dadaists and the Surrealists and by later assemblers of three-dimensional constructions. Max Ernst, for example, seeing in Collage "the fortuitous encounter upon a non-suitable plane of two mutually distant realities"<sup>86</sup> exploited the technique of juxtaposition and created disquieting transformations of banal materials (Appendix 1, Figs. 12-14). Ernst manipulated the immediate accessibility of the Collage surface to shock the viewer:

Everyone can see what a Collage is made of, can recognize its elements, can ascertain that they are borrowed from some old book or well-known manual. And yet the hallucinatory element, far from disappearing, becomes still more intense.<sup>87</sup>

The Dadaists also responded to the surface disruption the technique created, stressing political actionism in their polemical use of documentary photomontage<sup>88</sup> or the absurdity of moral and social conventions. They carried to an extreme the ironic incongruity and ambiguity of juxtaposed materials uncovered by the Cubists. Hulsenbeck, in his Dadaist Manifesto, proclaimed that:

With Dada a new reality comes into its own. Life appears as a simultaneous muddle of noises, colours, and spiritual rhythms, which is taken unmodified into Dadaist art, with all the sensational screams and fevers of its reckless everyday psyche and with all its brutal reality . . . Dadaism for the first time has ceased to take an aesthetic attitude towards life, and this it accomplished by tearing all the slogans of ethics, culture, and inwardness, which are merely cloaks for weak muscles, into their components.<sup>89</sup>

The means chosen to effect the dismantling of established values was Collage, itself a disreputable companion to canvases, revealing in the absence of brushwork little manifestation of the creative commitment of the artist. Tristan Tzara's own conception of Dada as a "virginal microbe which, with the insistence of air, penetrates into all places that reason cannot fill up with words or conventions,"<sup>90</sup> leads him to the construction of a collage-poem:

To make a dadaist 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  
 in the order in which they left the bag.  
 Copy conscientiously.  
 The poem will be like you . . .<sup>91</sup>

In such a construction Tzara exploits the apparent casualness of Cubist Collage to reflect the illogicality and absurdity he sees in his environment. The Cubists, however, manipulated their fragments for their compositional qualities, seeking characteristics which would reconcile disparate materials.

The development of Collage thus provoked further experimentation by later schools of painters into the possibilities for expression existing in banal materials. They sought to construct objects with fragments they rescued from obscurity or from the wasteful vacuum of a technological

society. Collage, as it disturbed the surface of the painting and released or appeared to release the individual fragments into some kind of mobility, led naturally to constructions in three-dimensions and to a greater variety and confusion of materials. This modern tradition of assemblage--a term which replaces collage in modern art criticism and which suggests more accurately the junk culture of later works--is essentially urban in emphasis and the fabric of the city is used as a basis for constructions. Lawrence Alloway argues that:

Junk culture is a city art. Its source is obsolescence, the throwaway material of cities, as it collects in drawers, cupboards, attics, dustbins, gutters, waste lots and city dumps. Objects have a history: first they are possessions, accessible to few, subjected, often, to intimate and repeated use; then, as waste, they are scarred by use but available again. . . . Assemblages of such material come at the spectator as bits of life, bits of the environment. The urban environment is present, then, as the source of objects, whether transfigured or left alone.<sup>92</sup>

The scarred materials suggest a history to the city recorded in terms of the personal lives of the people and form an interesting parallel to William Carlos Williams' individual restructuring of the history of Paterson, utilizing details of local history which had need of reappraisal. Assemblage, however, also points to the continuing determination of the artist to remain in vital contact with his environment, whether that environment be a studio or cafe, city or junkyard. In this it manifests the basic psychological drive of assembled art--"the urge to save things."<sup>93</sup>



The technique allows the artist to reconstruct memories of the past and to create an order with the aid of his materials. It is a primary impulse to make meaningful at a personal or social level a world which appears to offer only confusion and absurdity. "We live in a world," William Seitz exclaims, "in which a million differing realities collide, far too many for us to digest. Sheer quantity, diversity, and contradiction make a carefully partitioned impression impossible," and demand a canvas which retains both order and chaos. The artist "is forced to choose between parochialism, sweeping renunciations, or an apprehension of reality in fragments from which truth, or some semblance of it, may arise."<sup>94</sup>

Collage is thus a technique flexible enough to sustain infinite variations and to be adapted to the personal needs of artists. Its aesthetic implications are, however, extremely broad, underlying as they do all aspects of modern art in their emphasis on the discontinuity of experience. For this reason I have chosen to restrict my study to the work of the Cubists and to the development of Collage as a natural extension of their earlier formal experiments. I propose in the following chapter to trace the poetic development of William Carlos Williams, suggesting a context in which the organization of such early works as Kora in Hell, Spring and All and In the American Grain can be understood. I title such works "collages," not in the loose



sense by which critics of Williams have sought to conceal a basic ignorance of his intentions and of the implications of his association with painters, but in the specific sense by which the Cubists understood their constructions. I hope to show that the establishment of a literary collage completed for Williams the liberation he had anxiously sought in poetic form whilst in no way bringing to a halt his experiments with that technique. The next chapter considers then the early problems of structure Williams had to confront and solve in his shorter poems and the gradual movement in his work towards the more flexible organization of the longer works--a movement which parallels that of the Cubists through the Analytical to the Synthetic phases of Cubism.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup>Within the organization of In the American Grain the members of that artistic coterie are aligned with those specifically American pioneers--Daniel Boone, for example--who had also moved out to explore new, uninhabited space. See, in particular, IAG, 105.

<sup>2</sup>In Chapter 25 of his Autobiography Williams refers to the publication of Eliot's poem as "the great catastrophe to our letters" (146).

<sup>3</sup>Consider, for example, his reaction to the medieval Place François Ier "of that French austerity of design, gray stone cleanly cut and put together in complementary masses, like the Alexandrines of Racine" (A, 195) in front of which his own abundant energy appeared clumsy and obscene. His admiration for Paris was constantly tempered by his realization that its environment was hostile to his own artistic development.

<sup>4</sup>See, in particular, Michael Weaver's The American Background and Bram Dijkstra's The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech for a fuller exploration of this background and Williams' understanding of it.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted by Constance Rourke, Charles Sheeler: Artist in the American Tradition (New York, 1938), 49.

<sup>6</sup>Sheeler, 41.

<sup>7</sup>"Rebellion in Art," America in Crisis (New York, 1952), 205-206.

<sup>8</sup>Rourke, Sheeler, 41.

<sup>9</sup>Williams had seen individual canvases by Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Picasso and Braque at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 Gallery prior to the Armory Show.

<sup>10</sup>Arguing his case for ready-mades in "The Blind Man," a little magazine financed by Arensberg and Roche, Duchamp stated that:

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 though for that object.

Later he added that "the only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges." Interestingly, Williams may have had this latter comment in mind when, in an article which completely misunderstands Duchamp's irony, he states that "it has been by paying 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" (SE, 35).

<sup>11</sup>John Brinnin, Seven Modern American Poets (London, 1967), 95.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted by Barbara Rose, American Art Since 1900: A Critical History (New York, 1967), 80.

<sup>13</sup>Seven Poets, 95.

<sup>14</sup>American Art, 80.

<sup>15</sup>Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, The Dada Painters and Poets, ed. Robert Motherwell, 260.

<sup>16</sup>Williams' frequent term of abuse to describe the contemporary world of New York, its economic morality and its artistic pandering to Madison Avenue dreams.

<sup>17</sup>The Dada Painters, 260.

<sup>18</sup>Particularly influential in encouraging Williams to experiment with improvisation as a means of unlocking artistic blockages was Kandinsky's essay, "On the Spiritual in Art," published in Camera Work 38 (April, 1912), where the second mode of expression is described as "A largely unconscious, spontaneous expression of inner character, non-material in nature" which Kandinsky called an "Improvisation."

<sup>19</sup>See James Breslin's William Carlos Williams, 75.

<sup>20</sup>More importantly, however, is Williams' growing conception of the Book which accompanies his distrust of conventional forms such as Novel and Poem. His inquiries into organizations where all forms of writing can be simultaneously made present leads to a growing concern with the book's overall structure.

<sup>21</sup>Interestingly New York Dada's single issue contained a large advertisement for the exhibition of Kurt Schwitters and other "Anonymphs" at the Societe Anonyme, Inc. On the same page it printed a poem (upside-down) entitled "Yours With Devotion / trumpets and drums," by Elsa Baroness Von Freytag Loringhoven who later became an unwanted and naked part of Williams' personal life.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted by Rourke, Sheeler, 45.

<sup>23</sup>The Time of Our Lives (N.Y., 1937), 222.

<sup>24</sup>The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech, 79.

<sup>25</sup>Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art, 179.

<sup>26</sup>Edward Fry, Cubism (New York, 1967), 26.

<sup>27</sup>"Conception et Vision," Gil Blas, Paris, 29 August, 1912. Republished in Cubism, 95.

<sup>28</sup>"Cubism," republished by Robert L. Herbert, Modern Artists on Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964), 3.

<sup>29</sup>John Golding, Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907-1914 (Boston, 1968), 17. I wish to acknowledge here my large debt to Golding's extremely perceptive study. As it is not my intention in this study to retrace in detail the developments of Cubism but only to point to certain of the more important ramifications of the work, I shall refer the reader constantly back to Golding's authoritative study.

<sup>30</sup>Wylie Sypher, Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature (New York, 1960), 269.

<sup>31</sup>Cubism, 94.



<sup>32</sup>D. H. Kahnweiler, Juan Gris: His Life and Work (London, 1947), 71.

<sup>33</sup>Painting in the Twentieth Century (London, 1963), 31.

<sup>34</sup>Bernard Dorival, The School of Paris in the Musee d'Art Moderne (London, 1962), 154.

<sup>35</sup>See Golding, Cubism, 59.

<sup>36</sup>Recorded by Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, 14.

<sup>37</sup>Picasso's admiration for the work of Rousseau is recorded by Roger Shattuck in The Banquet Years, 45-112. Shattuck also notes that Rousseau's work was exhibited by Max Weber at the Alfred Stieglitz Gallery in New York in 1910.

<sup>38</sup>Cubism, 59.

<sup>39</sup>Picasso (Turin, 1945), 31.

<sup>40</sup>Cubism, 59.

<sup>41</sup>John Berger writes that:

this austerity of approach in relation to the figure was at least partly the result of a reaction against excessive talk of the spiritual and soulful. By reducing the body to an organization, comparable with that of a city, they assert the unmetaphysical character of man. They infer (though none of them would have put it in these words) that "consciousness is a property of highly organized matter."

Success and Failure of Picasso (Harmondsworth, 1965), 59. I only wish to stress the relevance of the remarks to Williams' own conception of the human mind as a city in Paterson.

<sup>42</sup>Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry (London, 1954), 10-11.

<sup>43</sup>Joseph-Émile Müller, Modern Painting: From Manet to Mondrian (London, 1960), 12.

<sup>44</sup>Cubism, 143.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>46</sup>Sypher, Rococo to Cubism, 270.

<sup>47</sup>Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, 71.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>49</sup>Sypher, 270.

<sup>50</sup>Shattuck, 347.

<sup>51</sup>J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (London, 1966),  
286.

<sup>52</sup>Shattuck, 347.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 350.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 351.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 332.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 333.

<sup>57</sup>Juan Gris, 102.

<sup>58</sup>Shattuck, 340.

<sup>59</sup>William Seitz, The Art of Assemblage (New York, 1961), 21.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>61</sup>The Hidden Order of Art (London, 1967), 67.

<sup>62</sup>Jean Arp, in a catalogue for an exhibition at the Tanner Gallery in Zurich in 1915. Quoted by Seitz, Assemblage, 83.

<sup>63</sup>Alan Bowness, 8.

<sup>64</sup>Seitz, 83. He defines assemblage as "a reconquest, but by different means, of the realism that abstract art replaced."

<sup>65</sup>Collage: Its Techniques and Personalities (New York, 1967), 11.

<sup>66</sup>Quoted by Janis and Blesch, Collage, 10.

<sup>67</sup>Painting in the Twentieth Century, 116.

<sup>68</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>69</sup>Golding, Cubism, 103.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>71</sup>Quoted by Seitz, 23. Collage also has the slang meaning of an illicit love affair with "its inferences of shameful cohabitation between nobly born oil paint and the streetwalker newspaper." Janis and Blesch, Collage, 21.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>73</sup>The Cubist Painters (New York, 1944), 23.

<sup>74</sup>Quoted by Janis and Blesch, 1.

<sup>75</sup>Haftmann, 184.

<sup>76</sup>Golding, 94.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>78</sup>Fry, 131.

<sup>79</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>80</sup>Shattuck, 80.

<sup>81</sup>The Cubist Painters, 9.

<sup>82</sup>Shattuck, 331.

<sup>83</sup>Painting, 116.

<sup>84</sup>Collage, 84.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>86</sup>Quoted by Seitz, 40.

<sup>87</sup>Marcel Jean, The History of Surrealist Painting  
(New York, 1960), 78-79.

<sup>88</sup>I am thinking here of the Berlin Dadaists with whom Schwitters was for a time associated but from whom he broke away in protest against their propagandist use of Collage.

<sup>89</sup>Quoted by Haftmann, 185.

<sup>90</sup>Quoted by Haftmann, 182.

<sup>91</sup>Quoted by Janis and Blesch, 12.

<sup>92</sup>Quoted by Seitz, 73.

<sup>93</sup>Janis and Blesch, 3.

<sup>94</sup>Art of Assemblage, 74.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### "Folk Poems"

(i)

If Williams had been encouraged to experiment with literary structure by gatherings at Alfred Stieglitz's Gallery and at the Arensbergs' apartment, and if his activities had been consolidated by the "symbol" of the Armory Show in 1913, they were given specific painterly orientation through his close friendship with Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth.

Williams first met Demuth as early as 1902 when the two were students together in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> The period in which they began their "lifelong friendship" (A, 52) is described by Williams in his Autobiography as one of great personal indecision. "No sooner did I begin my studies than I wanted to quit and devote myself to writing" (50). Questioning the value of a "career" and sifting, in an apparently conscious way, amongst the arts for one suited to his temperament and abilities,<sup>2</sup> Williams practised his uncertainty in the company of Demuth. Emily Farnham, Demuth's biographer, records that:

During these years Demuth was entertaining thoughts of becoming a writer, while Williams was trying to decide whether or not to become a painter.<sup>3</sup>

Although he would later argue that "To me words explain too much and say too little,"<sup>4</sup> Demuth "never got over trying to

write"<sup>5</sup> just as Williams never got over wanting to paint and to free himself completely from his ambivalent relationship with words and poems.<sup>6</sup> Their common predicament precipitated a relationship of great warmth and "mutual encouragement"<sup>7</sup> in which the excitement of creativity was dominant. "To feel the joy of creating for a single moment seems to repay one for a year's work,"<sup>8</sup> Demuth wrote to Williams in 1907, just before setting sail for his second visit to Paris. And it was Paris that Demuth communicated to Williams. Whatever general principles Williams understood from his later conversations at the Arensbergs' apartment and whatever ideological statements on Cubistic aims he had read, it was the particular results of the influence of Cézanne and Picasso, as those results manifested themselves in the paintings of Charles Demuth, that Williams became familiar with.

Demuth made two important visits to Paris, one of several months' duration in 1907 and the second in 1912 when he began advanced study at Julien's and the Académie Colarossi which lasted two years. The earlier visit resulted in a "few sketches, to be used as source material when he got back to Lancaster"<sup>9</sup> and the implications of his extended stay in Paris did not fully explode in his paintings until his Bermuda visit in the fall and winter of 1916. The importance, however, of Demuth's visits to Paris, both their relevance to the evolution of his personal

painting style and to the development of American painting, cannot be overstated. "Demuth's European visits," Farnham suggests in her biography of Demuth, "spanned a seventeen-year period during which his art became progressively Europeanized, reflecting from 1916 on the most radical continental trends." "In its turn," she argues, "American art was influenced by and benefited from the Europeanization of Charles Demuth."<sup>10</sup>

The Europeanization of Demuth was initiated by Cézanne whose works had been displayed in 1911 at Stieglitz's 291 exhibition, in the Barnes Collection at Merion, in Paris at Gertrude Stein's and at larger exhibitions in Paris and New York. Demuth's early watercolours reflect most clearly what he had learned from the building methods--"the abstract means for structuring a painting"--of Cézanne, such means as "the upward expanding conformation, . . . the split wall, general tectonic composition by means of planes, and the turning of total form about an axis."<sup>11</sup> This concern with interior architecture, raised by the Cubists to a level of obsession, became for Demuth the expression of Cézanne's greatness. His watercolours, however, reveal not only the architectural means whereby space is made visual, tactile and "active"<sup>12</sup> as in Cézanne's still lifes but also the incorporation into the composition of unused paper as an active element. Whiteness became for Demuth, as it had become for Cézanne, a means both "to define space and



volume"<sup>13</sup> and to act as "organic, plastically operating neutral foils to activity present elsewhere in the painting,"<sup>14</sup> thus establishing a pictorial tension between form and that formless space out of which it had briefly and tenuously emerged. This sense of the difficulty of redeeming objects and the ambivalence of the artist's attitude to the interpretive function of art results in a vivid insistence on the identity of the individual object. Demuth's flowers are precisely realized, the artist perceiving in their "individual structure and shape the gestures and features which reveal the personality of a cyclamen, a rose, a poppy or a daisy."<sup>15</sup> Even as Demuth moves from the Fauvist colourings of his 1915 Watercolours and into the harder, more mathematical definitions of Daisies (1918), (Appendix 2, Fig. 1), he manifests a continuing sense of that "personality" in the clearing intensity of his focus, achieved by fading out the edges of the composition.

The increasing clarity of Demuth's vision is especially noticeable in the Bermuda landscapes of 1916-17. His earlier "lack of literalness"<sup>16</sup> which had expressed itself in, for example, his watercolour illustrations of Zola's Nana (Appendix 2, Fig. 2) or Wedekind's Erdgeist and Pandora's Box or James' The Turn of the Screw or Poe's The Masque of the Red Death, had led him toward an active visual recreation of original stories and plays. Frequently ignoring the specifics of literary context, he

sought out that spirit of violence and decadence<sup>17</sup> he most clearly identified with and which permeates even the flowers of his still lifes (Appendix 2, Fig. 3). The Bermuda landscapes (Appendix 2, Fig. 4), however, reveal a deliberate restraint<sup>18</sup> in their formal definition of colonial buildings whose simple mass offered Demuth an immediate antidote to the confused cult of self informing his earlier work. As Farnham points out:

The taut Bermuda landscapes are drastically different from the illustrations and figure pieces of the same period, works crammed with interest in anecdote, humanism and wit, and executed in what was habitually a loosely scribbled calligraphic line combined with amorphous washes.<sup>19</sup>

Farnham suggests that what happened to Demuth in Bermuda was a careful working through and mastery of that painting ideology he had seen and heard in Paris, and his later works, in consequence, reflect a growing dissatisfaction with literary content and chronicle and a growing dehumanization of the composition. Although Demuth continued to be pulled simultaneously in two different directions for a further period of three years, he moved gradually away from his "old concern with naturalistic line, anecdote, humanism, and a Renaissance variety of three dimensionality"<sup>20</sup> toward a clear simplification, influenced by Picasso, Braque, Gris and indirectly through them by Cézanne. Whilst, however, the cubist dislocation is explicit in such works as the Bermuda landscapes, their dangerous fragmentation of external reality in which only an abstracted

pictorial language remains visible is absent. The textures of roofs and boardings, the tension between mathematically realized masses such as windows and sides and fronts and the sensuous unwinding of the tree over the pictorial surface, suggest a determination to retain a vital relationship with that reality reconstructed on canvas.<sup>21</sup>

Demuth's liking for the simple, solid forms of colonial architecture extended into his industrial landscapes of the 'twenties. Here, turning from watercolour to tempera and oils,<sup>22</sup> he finds a massive certainty in the impersonal and rigid contours of factories, a certainty which is treated with curious ambivalence. Like Charles Sheeler, with whose name he is most obviously associated as leaders of a Precisionist or Immaculate style of painting, his approach to industry "has in it something of the intellectual's newly discovered respect for the precise shapes, the clear logic of the factory building and the machine"<sup>23</sup> and something of the aesthete's antipathy toward the manifestations of "progress." Such titles as "My Egypt" (Appendix 2, Fig. 5), ". . . And the Home of the Brave" (Appendix 2, Fig. 6), and "After All. . . ." (Appendix 2, Fig. 7), ironically undermine the certainty of composition. In such landscapes, however, the careful articulation of factory and industrial context manifests the continuation of a "historic tendency of precise realism"<sup>24</sup> in American art, a tendency which roots the essentially abstract



formalism of the cubists in a specifically local ground. As Robert Rosenblum points out, Precisionist painting manifests a characteristically American wedding "of an abstract style with a viewpoint whose particularity of observation is fundamentally realist."<sup>25</sup> Through his relationship with Demuth Williams came to recognize the specific effects of cubistic theories on form and their applied relevance to the "redemption" of a fallen America. And within the context of his wider relations with the Immaculates, Williams began to understand how cubistic severity could be modified to accept a vibrant colour and texture which articulated a more immediate sense of the external world.

Williams met Charles Sheeler at the Josephsons' in 1924 and their enthusiastic greeting generated a relationship which Constance Rourke described as a "symbol" of the period, a symbol of a new intercommunication between artists and writers in which "exchanges of ideas were taking place that might not be reflected directly in either painting or writing but could provide something in the way of a generative force for both."<sup>26</sup> Much later, in his introduction to the catalogue for a 1939 retrospective of Sheeler's work, Williams stated simply that his strength lay in an ability to see "without blur, through the fantastic overlay with which our lives are so vastly concerned, 'the real,' as we say, contrasted with the artist's fabrications" (SE, 231). Williams particularly stressed the realization of the real



in "sharp, dry edges and spare, cold colours." The compositional elements established for the poet a world where anecdote and "clever drawing" had been pared away to reveal things "we can believe in, things for our associations long familiar, or which we have always thought familiar" (SE, 232). What Williams thus appreciates in the work of Sheeler is the artist's ability to make the literal textures of his local world a functioning part of the painting's design. Within the design materials were given their "uniqueness," by which Williams signified that each compositional element was "irreplaceable by a substitute." Retaining an essential relationship with external reality by incorporating actual textures of that reality into the work, Sheeler fulfilled Williams' own demands for the poem where openness specifically implies the ability of a structure to accept all materials. "Not to pull out, transubstantiate, boil, unglue, hammer, melt, digest and psychoanalyze," Williams argued in his Sheeler introduction, "not even to distill but to see and keep what the understanding touches intact--as grapes are round and come in bunches" (SE, 233). Although later qualified by the kind and quality of knowledge "seeing"<sup>27</sup> entailed, by the factual information that created conditions the eye could only view in an immediate arrested state, the need to keep intact what the understanding touches informs the methodological procedures of Williams' longer works.

Williams met Sheeler at a time when the hard clarity of the painter's style was already established. What Williams would later value as "direct association and communication with immediate things"<sup>28</sup> had emerged in paintings that were beginning to reflect more and more the factual, pragmatic approach to real textures expressed in his photographs. In "Pennsylvania Barn" (Appendix 2, Fig. 8) of 1915 Sheeler recorded that concern for the grain and textures of reality that characterizes his later series of Bucks County Barn painting. In "Bucks County Barn" (Appendix 2, Fig. 9) of 1923 the concern is for the individual quality of each compositional element--the roof shingles, barn boarding, field-stone--within an organization where their essentially weathered identity is brought to a point of stillness. The peculiar tension in Sheeler's Barn paintings results from the tension between the "static world"<sup>29</sup> he establishes and the weathered elements which speak for a world in time. Although "safe from the erosion of time and nature,"<sup>30</sup> the Barn paintings (Appendix 2, Figs. 10-12) express a subtle relationship between their essentially arrested forms and the flow from which tentatively they have been taken. The result is a strong, simple architecture whose essential stasis is modified by the quality of individual materials. It is, however, in the hard clarity of their articulation that they are redeemed from complete stillness.

Sheeler's "uncomplicated, factual world view"<sup>31</sup> evolves out of his photographic work with Edward Steichen and Paul Strand and his adaptation of cubistic forms to simplify the architecture of his paintings. In arguing a distinction between the media, Sheeler stated that:

Photography is nature seen from the eyes outward, painting from the eye inward. No matter how objective a painter's work may seem to be, he draws upon a store of images upon which his mind has worked. Photography records unalterably the single image, while painting records a plurality of images wilfully directed by the artist.<sup>32</sup>

But the basic similarities in Sheeler's approach to the object and in his "exquisite placement"<sup>33</sup> of it in both painting and photography point at least to a common aesthetic for both art forms. The peculiar strength of the paintings, for example, is the result of an attempt to document the industrial American landscape in a way that made use of the literalness of the camera lens (Appendix 2, Figs. 13-14). The clear focus and inclusion of literal fragments of reality--particularly the written signs on freight wagons and the patterns of rugs and tablecloths in his Interiors--speak of an aesthetic base shared by both painting and photography in the directness of Sheeler's confrontation with the objects of his world. Whatever architecture structures the relationship between objects in a Sheeler work the quality peculiar to each object is carefully maintained. "All objects," argues Martin Friedman, "are treated with equal gravity and sharp clarity, none is

diminished in importance through placement or indistinct handling."<sup>34</sup> And it is this directness of Sheeler's approach to the objects that formulates his aesthetic base. Constance Rourke defines the means whereby Sheeler employed the simplest technical means in his photography, preferring the silver rather than the platinum base for "the greater facility afforded," avoiding by this means "the various elaborate processes employed by some of the pictorialists which involve extensive manipulation to obtain the final result." Sheeler's use, therefore, of "straight" photography--"the undisturbed record by the camera eye upon the sensitized emulsion and the conversion from negative to positive by the most direct methods"<sup>35</sup>--is consistent with his painterly need to remain faithful to external reality. This painterly objective encouraged Sheeler in his modification of cubistic experiments in form, applying their "exceptional formalism"<sup>36</sup> to the articulation of a literal American context. His choice of subject was in itself a cubistic formulation of reality, embodying in the simple Barn structures of Pennsylvania and the Industrial landscapes of America an inherent abstract quality which was further abstracted by the artist in his elimination of "all disturbing complexities."<sup>37</sup> The closeness of Sheeler's approach to his buildings result in compositions which bulge with the massive simplicity of abstracted forms. Such mass, expressed in strong simple planes, is the central



compositional element in the Barn paintings of 1923 and 1932 and even more obviously in the Skyscraper sequence--for example, New York and Offices--completed in the early 'twenties. Indeed Sheeler's development as an artist is the record of his progression toward a "greater simplification"<sup>38</sup> achieved by the paring away of "unnecessary" elements and the subsequent removal from the pictorial field of any touch of human contact. When Sheeler first met Williams, however, the textures of each compositional element created a sense of the literal inclusion of reality into the picture, a sense strengthened by the deliberate play between strongly realized masses.

Sheeler's interiors particularly reflect this interplay. In a shallow space, in Interior (1926) (Appendix 2, Fig. 15) for example, the bedcovering, linoleum, two rugs and table planking interact as highly individualized forms in a way that suggests very strongly the juxtaposition and subsequent collision of cubist collage. Similarly, the structure of American Interior (1934) (Appendix 2, Fig. 16) is based on the simple relationship between the rug masses. Here the masses are not abstracted into simple, strong volumes but are given an intense individuation. This concern for the literal "garishness" of the objects is modified by the simple structural mass they define within the composition. In Americana and Home Sweet Home the intensity of individuation is so strongly realized that formal clarity

ironically undermines the values implicit in a collection of such "taste." The painted interiors, however, express what is constant in Sheeler's confrontation with external worlds in that, like his photographs, they are "straight, unsentimentalized, sharply focused pictures of urban and industrial life,"<sup>39</sup> part of his continuing adaptation of cubistic simplification to articulate his locale (Appendix 2, Figs. 17-19).

The individuation of the object, the "design" whereby parts were not subordinated to the whole, clearly attracted Williams to Sheeler and both, at the time of their meeting in 1918, were influenced by the structural anonymity manifested in the works of Cubists. Unlike Sheeler, however, objectivity remained only one pole in Williams' work, a pole which stressed consistently the need to ground works in the specifics of one's own landscape and to prefer the "real" to the artist's fabrications. Whilst Sheeler, however, continued to seek the consolation of a perfected form in which all brushmarks, all activity, had been carefully removed (Appendix 2, Figs. 20-21), Williams made that activity into the substance of his poetry, maintaining a social relevance by converting fact and documentation into metaphors of an inner struggle. Whilst there remained little room for experimentation in Sheeler's work and whilst he never relaxed his self-imposed standards of organization and "finish," Williams turned more toward

organizations where "finish" implied refinement and subsequent sterility and where the direct expression of creative energy, as that energy sought to unite the disparate objects of the poet's world, was the meaning of the individual work.

The most obvious effects of Williams' friendship with Sheeler and Demuth are perhaps best illustrated by Williams' poem "To a Solitary Disciple," published in 1917 in Al Que Quiere:

Rather notice, mon cher,  
that the moon is  
tilted above  
the point of the steeple  
than that its color  
is shell-pink.

Rather observe  
that it is early morning  
than that the sky  
is smooth  
as a turquoise.

Rather grasp  
how the dark  
converging lines  
of the steeple  
meet at the pinnacle-  
perceive how  
its little ornament  
tries to stop them-

See how it fails!  
See how the converging lines  
of the hexagonal spire  
escape upward-  
receding, dividing!  
-sepals  
that guard and contain  
the flower!

Observe  
 how motionless  
 the eaten moon  
 lies in the protecting lines.  
 It is true:  
 in the light colors  
 of morning

brown-stone and slate  
 shine orange and dark blue.

But observe  
 the oppressive weight  
 of the squat edifice!  
 Observe  
 the jasmine lightness  
 of the moon. (CEP, 167-168)

The poem, which as Guimond points out, bears a remarkable resemblance to Demuth's "White Architecture" series,<sup>40</sup> appears to concentrate on isolating the formal elements of the church and translating them into design. In this respect Williams seems to be responding to Marcel Duchamp's urinal, submitted to the Armory Show "to stress the idea that form should be considered as form, apart from its uses or from any name which might be attached to it."<sup>41</sup> But Williams, by emphasizing the classic order of the church's lines and by deliberately understating and undervaluing the delicacy of color which persists around it, creates an ironic tension between the two elements of composition.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the "squat edifice" comes to stand as the inflexible antithesis of all that it should represent. The natural world of the moon is presumed "eaten" by the lines of the church, extended in Williams' imagination like jaws from its spire. The final section of the poem establishes that



it is the formality of the church, its insistence perhaps on ritual and its denial of the immediate world of the senses, that is directly responsible for its "oppressive weight." Thus Williams' formal emphasis in the poem is inextricably related to his poetic emphasis--how the stilted refinement of a classic structure can in fact impede the processes of the imagination. Dominating Williams' later work is the vital need to disturb so rigid an architecture and the relentless poetry produced by it. In "To a Solitary Disciple," Williams undermines the church's dogmatism by contrasting its inflexibility with the tolerant persona who directs the readers' awareness of composition.

It is this ability of the individual to see from more than one fixed point-of-view--to "Rather notice," "Rather observe," "Rather grasp"--that Williams encourages in his later works and that informs the procedural method whereby the longer works from Kora in Hell to Paterson are structured. In what Wallace Stevens saw as an unfortunate "fidgeting" with points of view,<sup>43</sup> Williams rejects the implicit sense of statement in the single perspective, beginning in "rather" to suggest the possibility of seeing reality from more than one position. And, as Jerome Mazzaro points out, "rather" immediately cuts the work off from life in a way "similar to that in which a frame cuts off an easel picture from life."<sup>44</sup> Williams thus shares with Demuth and Sheeler a desire to express the fundamental

reality of objects, a reality free from extraneous or chance elements like colour or vibrations in a particular quality of light. Painters and poet shared a subtle ironic humour whereby so intense a reality could be apprehended without recourse to sentimental over-simplification. One specific example of their active intercommunication is Demuth's transformation of Williams' poem "The Great Figure" into a painting, a transformation effected by "translating the verbal images into visual and retaining the multiplicity of broken images, superimposed upon one another at some points, placed against each other at others."<sup>45</sup> The importance of superimposition and juxtaposition to Williams' own poetics has already been discussed but Demuth's painting stresses also the surreal quality of the object's material presence in a world of paint. In both painting and poem it assumes an irrational value as it emerges, without artistic comment, from a fragmented darkness:

Among the rain  
and lights  
I saw the figure 5  
in gold  
on a red  
firetruck  
moving  
tense  
unheeded  
to gong clangs  
siren howls  
and wheels rumbling  
through the dark city. (CEP, 230)

The poem celebrates the co-existence in the poet's mind of confusion and order, of the initial chaos during which a

single sliver of experience persists in articulating arbitrary structure. The incorporation in the poem of both original context and the creative processes which lead from that context in the making of the poem, recalls Cubist efforts to make explicit the means by which nature becomes art, and foreshadows the structure of Williams' longer works. Both The Desert Music and Paterson, for example, take their "meaning" from the poet's difficulties in the transformation of his assembled materials. The resulting organizations manifest both the environment upon which the imagination must initiate its dance and the act of dancing itself.<sup>46</sup> Letters, factual details precisely transposed into the poem, prose extracts, move constantly between the two extremes of Nature and Art, between literal and metaphoric realities. Art and the Reality which nurtures it exist simultaneously within the poem. In essence, the concept rejects the traditional illusion of art, in which the flights of the imagination have no apparent factual foundation. Rather it points once again to that insistent demand in Williams' poetic to make intimate contact with the objective world of the sense. Like the Precisionists, Williams is setting in juxtaposition the very abstract and the very concrete, a position he clarifies in Contact in 1922:

. . . the artist is limited to the range of his contact with the objective world. True, in begetting his poem he takes parts from the imagination but it is simply

that working among stored memories his mind has drawn parallels, completed progressions, transferred units from one category to another, clipped here, modified there. But it is inconceivable that, no matter how circuitously, contact with an immediate objective world of actual experience has not been vigorously maintained. By "artist" is meant nearly this thing alone. (SE, 33-34)

In "The Great Figure," contact with that objective world is expressed in the literal inclusion of the figure 5 and in the painterly juxtaposition of red and gold, whose literary associations suggest a further ambiguity. The very language and structure of the poem, however, manifest a similar impulse. If the Cubist painters had renounced linear perspective to shatter the conventional pictorial means of describing the relationships between particular objects, and had subsequently released the objects from a spatial fixity, Williams' own experimentation led to the renunciation of the sentence. The sentence, traditionally the essential unit of poetic composition, involves the binding and subordination of individual words within a logical syntactical arrangement. By breaking up the sentence, Williams succeeded in destroying the certainty, the "completeness" a sentence implies, and in releasing the individual words to reveal their individual contribution to the poem's "meaning."<sup>47</sup> In "The Great Figure," each line expresses a single element of composition, and the spatial separateness within the sentence allows each element its own particular weight. What Williams demands of his reader is nothing more than the savouring of each formal



element and the realization that, within the poem, there are no inessential parts. "The Great Figure" reveals a reduction to essentials, that striving for fundamental form, that is so consistent a characteristic of Cubist Art.

Williams translates Precisionist irony into a gentle self-deprecating stance whereby he can undermine in mockery those artistic structures the self seeks to create. Such a diminution of artistic endeavour and the manifestation of the artist actively trying to hold in check the wilder reaches of the imagination--Frye's homo ludens<sup>48</sup>--locates Williams within the wider context of Cubist playfulness.<sup>49</sup> As they had gradually broken down art's traditional vocabulary, so the Cubists had thrown into confusion its very nature and function. Collage aggravated the confusion by introducing literal elements into an arena of illusion sustained by oils. Whereas the divorce between canvas and reality had previously been insisted upon, collage playfully obscures the distance, moving spectator and creation in an ironic medium between extremes of the real and the illusory. What was effectively destroyed was thus another incontrovertible principle of Western painting--"namely, that the picture plane was an imaginary transparency through which an illusion was seen."<sup>50</sup> In Picasso's Still Life with Chair Caning (1912) (Appendix 1, Fig. 9), the artist has painted an assembly of objects, including the letters JOU (from Le Journal), a pipe, glass, knife, lemon, and scallop

shell. Onto this pictorial structure, however, Picasso has pasted a strip of oilcloth, and the effect is to aggravate the already problematic paradox between "true" and "false." The oilcloth, as Robert Rosenblum points out, is "demonstrably more 'real' than the illusory Cubist still-life objects,"<sup>51</sup> for it is not created by the artist but merely incorporated by him as a physical manifestation of external reality, the world inhabited by the spectator. Yet the oilcloth itself pretends to a reality it cannot substantiate. It seeks to become chaircaning but remains oilcloth. To enrich this irony, Picasso's painted objects have a greater solidity, a quality of "true depth" which the flatness of the foreign fragment serves to intensify. In such an arena of activity, the spectator's fundamental problem is to see which object has a "reality" applicable to his own world--a problem rendered more difficult by the fact that literal elements of that world become "unreal" in the reality of Art. Consequently, the surface collage offers to its spectators is one of constant fluctuation as the objects move between order and disorder, between assimilation in the pictorial organization and the assertion of their inviolable integrity, between the reality of the external world and the new reality of Art.<sup>52</sup>

The Cubists' ironic playfulness which resulted in an assault upon the very nature of art was turned to parody by Williams, leading the poet to inquire into the continuing

validity of literary genres--the Novel, the History, the Long Poem.<sup>53</sup> The most immediate effects of Williams' gentle irony, first manifested in Al Que Quiere of 1917, express themselves in a subtle undermining of artistic presence and the affected images such a presence struggles to evolve. In "The Young Housewife," the poem's persona gently understates his sexual desire for the young woman, creating a tension between the two figures based on simple juxtaposition:

At ten A.M. the young housewife  
moves about in negligee behind  
the wooden walls of her husband's house.  
I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb  
to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands  
shy, uncorseted, tucking in  
stray ends of hair, and I compare her  
to a fallen leaf.

The noiseless wheels of my car  
rush with a crackling sound over  
dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling. (CEP, 136)

The expected poetic transitions, binding persona and housewife into explicit relationship, are rigorously denied. Instead Williams sets the two principals in ironic juxtaposition, their apparent reconciliation in the structure of the poem undermining her complete inaccessibility in the real world of the doctor's rounds. The consummation of their imaginary closeness expresses itself in his conception of her as "a fallen leaf." Inevitably, however, as the car moves him on and her unattainability is all the more emphasized, reality intrudes to destroy so delicate a working of

the imagination:

The noiseless wheels of my car  
rush with a crackling sound over  
dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

"Smiling" manifests the very playfulness of the imagination, and encourages an interpretation of the persona's final awareness as one in which the intrusion of the real world constantly destroys the illusory fabric the poet creates.

The poem's irony is manifestly implicit in its structure. Within their individual worlds, linguistically recreated as simple sentences, doctor and housewife never meet, touching only as the juxtaposed elements of the poem's composition. Thus, the ironic vision manifests itself in constant understatement, in the deflation of human aspirations and in the juxtaposition of elements to maintain the poetic object or emotion in subtly ambivalent tension.

"Dance Russe" further exemplifies this point:

#### Dance Russe

If when my wife is sleeping  
and the baby and Kathleen  
are sleeping  
and the sun is a flame-white disc  
in silken mists  
above shining trees, -  
if I in my north room  
dance naked, grotesquely  
before my mirror  
waving my shirt round my head  
and singing softly to myself:  
"I am lonely, lonely,  
I was born to be lonely,  
I am best so!"  
If I admire my arms, my face,  
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks  
against the yellow drawn shades, -



Who shall say I am not  
the happy genius of my household? (CEP, 148)

What begins as a spinning off of externals--possessions, family--closes in a moment of self-affirmation and the establishment of a new inventory of self. The lovely energy of the poem, maintained by the simple conjunction "and" and by the denial of the completed sentence, moves the reader through successive personal skins shed willingly by the poet as he spins off the outer self and achieves a state of innocent isolation. Stated thus baldly the poem appears characterized by a Romantic agony of withdrawal from a brutal public reality. But, inevitably, the dangers of narcissism are undermined by gentle irony. The private dance takes place when the public world is quieted, when the revealing windows are properly shaded. Only within the guarded world of his own room, only ultimately in the private, enclosed world of his own poem does the poet's celebration take place.

Cubism, filtered through the "local" consciousness of Sheeler and Demuth, meant essentially the rejection of representation in art to Williams. For the poet "the modern in art" was marked by the "transition that took place, in the world of that time, from the appreciation of a work of art as a copying of nature to the thought of it as the imitation of nature" (A, 240). But it was the difficulties implicit in such a transition which occupied the poet throughout his poetic career. How to make contact with the local ground without recourse to dulling and "stupid

realism"<sup>54</sup> dominates Williams' poetic, including its most obvious declaration of intent in The Desert Music. Whilst the difficulties of such a transition were clearly personal, it was its importance to painting Williams stressed in his Autobiography. Having traced its origins in Cézanne, whom Picasso and Braque acknowledged as their own ancestor, Williams argued that it was with Braque himself that the transition had "basic significance." "Braque," he stated, "is said to have taken his pictures outdoors, on occasion, to see if their invention ranked beside that of nature worthily enough for him to approve of it" (A, 240-241). The concept of the work of art as an object, created out of the artist's contact with the immediate world dominates all Williams' critical statements of the 'twenties and 'thirties and is the inevitable result of his communication with painting and painters. His fundamental analogy of the poem-object was expressed in painterly terminology:

A man makes a picture, it is made of paint upon canvas stretched on a frame. In spite of endless talk, this has never been sufficiently brought out. One doesn't paint an "abstract painting." One makes a painting. If it is a dull painting, an unimaginative painting, if the elements of paint are emptily used, the painting would prove empty even though it represented some powerful dictator or a thesis of Sartre. (A, 241)

The emphasis remains on the act of making the poem rather than on the weight, moralistic or allusory, the poem bears. Such a quality Williams later acknowledged in the work of the abstract expressionist, Jackson Pollock:

Pollock's blobs of paint squeezed out  
 with design!  
 pure from the tube. Nothing else  
 is real . . .<sup>55</sup> (P, 248-249)

The new reality of the poem evokes an immediate vitality and creative energy which implicitly rejects classical refinement where traces of such energy have been carefully erased.<sup>56</sup> Roughness and lack of finish indeed constitute for Williams a necessary element of his final composition, characteristics of every work which seeks to express the very search by the artist within his materials. Like Pollock, who gave up the concept of preliminary sketches,<sup>57</sup> the poet attempts to think with his poem--in that, Williams argued, "lies his thought, and that in itself is the profundity" (A, 391). The poem, as imitation, thus seeks to reveal what Stevens referred to as "The poem of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice." For both men, the new poem "has to be living, to learn the speech of the place":

It has to face the men of the time and to meet  
 The women of the time. It has to think about war  
 And it has to find what will suffice. It has  
 To construct a new stage.<sup>58</sup>

It was thus in the speech of "the men of the time" that Williams uncovered the "roughness" and expressive vitality he acknowledged as an essential element of "modernism," and a direct extension of his efforts to "manifest the necessary appearance of disorder in all immediacy" (SE, 121). His most enthusiastic celebration of such superficial disorder, in a terminology remarkably similar to that of the

theoreticians of the Cubist movement,<sup>59</sup> appears in his essay on Marianne Moore, collected in A Novelette And Other Prose (1932). Here Williams' primary argument is that the disruption of a poem's surface serves to disturb the reader and thus to enforce a "break through all preconception of poetic form and mood and pace, a flaw, a crack in the bowl" (SE, 121). Encouraging the most ruthless rejection of refinement in art, the poet insisted that:

Only the most modern work has attempted to do without ex machina props of all sorts, without rhyme, assonance, the feudal master beat, the excuse of "nature," of the spirit, mysticism, religiosity, 'love,' "humour," 'death.' (SE, 126)

Acknowledging the inevitable consequences of such a rejection in that "the best modern work seems so thoroughly gratuitous, so difficult to explain" (SE, 124), Williams nevertheless insists upon that poem where artifice is totally subordinated to the manifestation of the artist's creative activity.<sup>60</sup> Celebrated in The Desert Music as "the dance" of the imagination, it provides that "unimpeded thrust through the materials" he had consistently opposed to the stasis of a purely descriptive art. He refers throughout his essay to "a swiftness impaling beauty" (SE, 123), "a swiftness that passes without repugnance from thing to thing" (SE, 124), "an essential poetry through the mass" (SE, 121-122), a constant "thrust" (SE, 122) through the materials of the poem which makes it impossible "for the eye to rest long upon the object of the drawing" (SE, 123).<sup>61</sup> Williams argued that such rapidity



of movement<sup>62</sup> was achieved by Moore's deliberate suppression of connectives which immediately freed the word-objects from a distorting conceptual framework. The individual integrity of each object is preserved intact. As Williams suggests:

To Miss Moore an apple remains an apple whether it be in Eden or the fruit bowl where it curls. But that would be hard to prove--

"dazzled by the apple."

The apple is left there suspended. One is not made to feel that as an apple it has anything to do with poetry or that as such it needs special treatment; one goes on. Because of this, the direct object does seem unaffected. It seems as free from the smears of mystery, as pliant, as "natural" as Venus on the wave. Because of this, her work is never indecorous as where nature is concerned. These are great virtues. (SE, 125)

This "hard and unaffected concept of the apple itself as an idea" (SE, 127) provides an interesting parallel to the work of Picasso, Braque and Gris. There too materials are incorporated into compositions as literal elements of reality which refuse containment and synthesis within the pictorial "order." Painters and Poets were, in Williams' view, striving desperately after this "simplicity of design" (SE, 129) in which, as in the work of Ingres, each "perfect part seemed to float free. . . ." (SE, 125). Williams' statement, however, reasserts the problem of object-assimilation in art--an assimilation which had not to deprive the object of its precise individuation.

Simplicity of design was achieved by the object's solid realization and by its "edge-to-edge contact with the

things that surround it" (SE, 127), an interesting observation of the formal juxtaposition central to the evolution of collage. More interesting, however, is that mathematical language in which Williams defends his poetics, a language remarkably similar to that spoken by the theoreticians of the Cubist movement in discussing the intellectual ramifications of their work. Williams, for example, argued that:

A course in mathematics would not be wasted on a poet, or a reader of poetry, if he remember no more from it than the geometric principle of the intersection of loci: from all angles lines converging and crossing establish points. We might carry it further and say in his imagination that apprehension perforates at places, through to understanding--white is at the intersection of blue and green and yellow and red. It is this white light that is the background of all good work. (SE, 122)

This statement, which recalls the later use of mathematical procedures in the preface to Paterson, represents a call for a new unity of literary experience. Just as the Cubists had destroyed familiar Space to present their pictorial elements interacting upon a two-dimensional surface, so Williams sought to destroy familiar Time by disregarding chronological priorities and creating, in each of his longer works, an eternal present where objects and events freely intersect.

The massive simplicity of its organization, the immediate effect of which "is of every object sufficiently uncovered to be easily recognizable" (SE, 129), belies the internal harmony created by the poet's imagination as he moves amongst his materials trying to establish common, unifying principles. The meaning of "Good modern work" is the knowledge accumulated

by the poet in the course of his explorations. Williams' continued use of "rolling up" to describe the methodology of Paterson implies just such an accumulation.<sup>63</sup> The concept of "rolling up" which emphasizes a constant verbal activity in the poem, is paralleled in this essay on Marianne Moore by what Williams here refers to as "a multiplication of impulses that by their several flights, crossing at all eccentric angles, might enlighten" (SE, 123). As in Cubist Collage, the collage-poem must reveal the poet thinking rather than the poet, with the argument carefully developed, manipulating his materials within the argument's restrictive frame. For Williams, as for Marianne Moore, "the <sup>t</sup>inerstices for the light and not the interstitial web of the thought concerned her. . . ." (SE, 128). And it is the workings of the poet's imagination which create that "roughness" in the poem's surface texture Williams urgently demands. It is a "roughness" which destroys Art's sophisticated stasis and thus relates the poem to the reader's immediate reality where change remains the single constant.<sup>64</sup>

Williams' argument in his essay on Marianne Moore represents a clear definition and defence of literary collage in a language which suggests an intimate knowledge of painting, in particular the writings of the Cubists, and states explicitly the necessary context in which to view Williams' experimentation in poetic form and the deliberate surface disjointedness<sup>65</sup> of his longer works.

When, however, Williams sought a more specific association with Cubism, he turned to the Spaniard, Juan Gris<sup>66</sup> rather than to Picasso or Braque. Although Gris' canvases had not been exhibited at the Armory Show, Williams had read Gris' theoretical writing in the transatlantic review and had seen certain of his paintings as black-and-white reproductions in Broom and The Little Review. In particular, Gris' collage "Roses" had prompted Williams to attempt a similar organization in both Spring and All (1923) and A Novelette and Other Prose (1932).<sup>68</sup> His admiration for Gris' work centred on two compositional characteristics of the collage technique. Primarily, Williams responded to the unity of Gris' pictorial surface. "One thing laps over on the other" (110), he wrote in Spring and All, admiring a severely two-dimensional plane whose elements expressed an interlocking series of carefully differentiated objects. Secondly, Williams responded to the way in which, despite the tightly interlocked surface unity, the individual objects had retained their separate identities. Within the composition they remained "detached" (110), recognizable not as part of art's "beautiful illusion" but as "pictures," deliberate evocations of an actual world in the heightened reality of art. For Williams, as for the Cubists in their experiments with the collage technique, the literal inclusion of fact destroyed art's traditional illusion and substituted an openness within the composition where objects



fluctuated between the worlds of the spectator and the artist.

The results of Williams' admiration for Gris' collage "Roses" (Appendix 2, Fig. 22) manifest themselves immediately in poems which the poet juxtaposes against his prose comments on the painter in Spring and All. His experimentation begins with "The rose is obsolete" (SA, 107-109) where he attempts to realize the flower in its "significant" form. If the poem's opening line implies a deliberate renunciation of the rose's traditional literary associations,<sup>69</sup> the rest of the poem articulates the renewal of love through a geometric crystallization of the flower's essential form:

The rose is obsolete  
but each petal ends in  
an edge, the double facet  
cementing the grooved  
columns of air - The edge  
cuts without cutting  
meets - nothing - renews  
itself in metal or porcelain -

whither? It ends -

But if it ends  
the start is begun  
so that to engage roses  
becomes a geometry -

sharper, neater, more cutting  
figured in majolica -  
the broken plate  
glazed with a rose

Somewhere the sense  
makes copper roses  
steel roses -

The rose carried weight of love  
but love is at an end - of roses

It is at the edge of the  
petal that love waits

Crisp, worked to defeat  
laboredness - fragile  
plucked, moist, half-raised  
cold, precise, touching

What

The place between the petal's  
edge and the

From the petal's edge a line starts  
that being of steel  
infinitely fine, infinitely  
rigid penetrates  
the Milky Way  
without contact - lifting  
from it - neither hanging  
nor pushing -

The fragility of the flower  
unbruised  
penetrates spaces

The rose is stripped of its conventionally sensual qualities, its colour and bouquet, and is apprehended within a mathematical grid of "edge" and cutting "line," so that, as Williams reminds us, "to engage roses / becomes a geometry." It is, however, the austerity with which the rose is re-defined formally that leads to a renewal of its "literary" value. Not only is the rose seen as a rose, as an alignment of line and composition, but its formal realization complements its metaphoric value. The renewal of Love is achieved only through the renewal of the flower and it is in the rose's fragility, its formal delicacy, that the surprising power of Love manifests itself. Having realized the rose, having witnessed the process of that realization in the

course of the poem, the reader moves beyond the flower into its metaphoric connotations:

From the petal's edge a line starts  
that being of steel  
infinitely fine, infinitely  
rigid penetrates  
the Milky Way  
without contact - lifting  
from it - neither hanging  
nor pushing -

The fragility of the flower  
unbruised  
penetrates spaces

Clearly Love is expressed as an extension of the rose's formal qualities. Through the "thing" the reader becomes involved in the larger processes of the macrocosm, experiencing that "enlargement" Williams saw as an essential quality in the work of Juan Gris. Such an artist creates objects which give the spectator "the feeling of completion by revealing the oneness of experience" (107).

The process of enlargement is accentuated by the movement within the poem. In "The Rose," Williams achieves a surface of dislocation by breaking up the syntactical composure of sentences into smaller breath groups whose hesitant probing is expressed in dashes. What the reader consequently experiences in the poem is the process whereby the poet himself has renewed the materials. He is witness to a mind analyzing the rose from a number of differing perspectives, each equally valid, each engaged in the ultimate composition and each separately substantiated within the poem.

As the Cubists discovered, the simple juxtaposition of such compositional elements results in a deliberate ambiguity of surface texture. "Whither," for example, suggests both the cry for direction and the withering of the rose. "What," in its spatial separateness, cannot resolve the question mark, and charges the reader with the need for an answer. Here too spatial whiteness suggests that the poet's mind clearly slows to investigate certain possibilities before final consolidation in the concluding three lines of the poem.

Williams' conscious efforts to create a poetic parallel to Gris' collage also manifest themselves in "The Sunlight" (SA, 109-110), the poem immediately preceding Williams' commentary on interlocking pictorial planes. Whereas Gris had attempted to interrelate and thus unify the disparate material he had assembled, Williams sought to express an equal energy, a rhythmical structure which sought a similar reconciliation of the most apparently irreconcilable elements. And just as Gris had sought to express the individual identity of each element within that composition, so Williams structures his poem out of thirteen three-line sections, each section contributing its presence to the composition of the poem, yet organized within its rhythmical structure by the speaking voice of the poet. The result is a crude approximation of what Williams had seen in the Gris collage, and an attempt to achieve a similarly "admirable simplicity and excellent design" (111). What importance the



poem has emerges from its efforts to pull into a coherent order seemingly unrelated material. The poem begins:

The sunlight in a  
yellow plaque upon the  
varnished floor  
  
is full of a song  
inflated to  
fifty pounds pressure  
  
at the faucet of  
June that rings  
the triangle of the air  
  
pulling at the  
anemones in  
Persephone's cow pasture -

and immediately evokes Williams' statement on Gris' own pictorial surface where "the cloud laps over on the shutter, the bunch of grapes is part of the handle of the guitar, the mountain and the sea are obviously not 'the mountain and the sea'" (SA, 110-111). The compositional elements are simultaneously "detached" and engaged in the canvas' organizational rhythm, and exert a tension which moves ambiguously between art and reality. In Williams' own view, that tension was only established satisfactorily in one poem, The Desert Music. There, as I have suggested in my opening chapter, the dance of the imagination is re-enacted upon a factual foundation of a particular journey to a particular place. The foundation exists in spite of that dance, as an irrevocable memory, but the imagination moves relentlessly around it, thrusting it backwards and forwards between literal and metaphoric levels. If "The Rose" and "The Sunlight" are not

wholly successful attempts to approximate Cubist collage, they nevertheless point out certain fundamental compositional problems which consistently obsessed the poet. The working out of these problems resulted in the structures of the longer works, Kora in Hell, Spring and All, The Great American Novel and In the American Grain, structures which I shall investigate in detail in later chapters. Primarily, however, the problems centre on the efforts to interrelate disparate elements within a coherent order and on the substantiation of each dissimilar element's quite separate identity. The resolution of such problems had led the Cubists toward collage. It led Williams toward Paterson and despair, since his initial difficulties in creating an interlocking pictorial surface could not prepare him for the problem of evolving an organization capable of expressing the entire "curriculum" of human knowledge, a curriculum whose difficulties he had already been considering in Spring and All.

What Williams learned from Cubism or from the intensely experimental climate Cubism had stimulated was how to make direct contact with the objective world of the senses. In its inevitable movement from an Analytical to a Synthetic stage of investigation, Cubism had expressed a desire for such contact in the literal inclusion of actual elements of that world, fragments that had known human usage. Williams had recognized in their impulse the destruction of

all he abhorred in art--that "beautiful illusion" of representation--and sought a similarly revolutionary activity in his own works. The results manifested themselves in the poet's obsessive desires to ground his energy and imaginative exuberance in a specific reality he had experienced. Form existed only as structural substantiation of that contact with reality, and not, as previously, as a device which in essence exacerbated the distance between art-object and spectator. Direct contact with the objective world implicitly involved a more intimate awareness of his readers' own ground and identity. For Williams, the value of a work lay in the proximity of its relationship with the people and their local ground. Specifically, the work would express "an escape from crude symbolism, the annihilations of strained associations, complicated ritualistic forms designed to separate the work from 'reality'--such as rhyme, meter as meter and not as the essentials of the work, one of its words" (SA, 102).

In their urge to identify the elements within their composition, to stress the separate identities of their materials, the Cubists had evolved an organization whose openness allowed for a detailed identification of its component parts. Williams, recognizing this refusal to subordinate each element within a melodramatic statement in, for example, Gris' "Roses," begins to explore the visual implications of the page as space, allowing space to dictate separateness and provide adequate stress for each separate

word within the poem. It is, however, in the precision of his attempts to identify each separate element of his art-object that characterizes Williams as a naive poet and suggests that his real roots--that elusive "source" he strove to locate throughout his life--are in the devices and strong psychological pulls of Folk-Art. Influenced, like Picasso and Sheeler, by energy exuding from crudely realized and juxtaposed forms, Williams instinctively recognized that the important antidote to Europe's refinement, its poetic manifestation in the effete structures of T. S. Eliot, was immediately about him in the untrained hands and eyes of America's amateurs.



(ii)

In his Autobiography Williams used the life of Charles Sheeler as metaphor "in presenting the reconstruction of the poem as one of the major occupations of the intelligence in our day" (332). Utilizing his friend's house as literal base in Williams' own past, the poet articulated his personal aesthetics. The ruined colonial experience, the simple structure rescued by Sheeler from the debris of American history, represented for Williams a factual foundation upon which to establish the building of his new poetic. "The house that they have set up," Williams made clear, ". . . is the present-day necessity" and he pursued in its simple, strong architecture an important analogy to the organization of his own work. Like Sheeler's figurative stone house, Williams "lay his own poem, fully conscious of their Brancusis, their Picassos, their Cézannes," as important stylistic impulses requiring immediate adaptation to the American context. The specific context shared by Sheeler and Williams, and indeed by Demuth, was Pennsylvania, centre of American Folk Art and home for those Shaker communities whose life-style, rooted in the local and in the materials afforded by that locale, offered a most pertinent exemplar of those artistic conditions Williams had been arguing for.<sup>70</sup> It was the relationship Williams saw between the work of Sheeler and

Shaker context<sup>71</sup> he had made his home that Williams set against the threatening influence of European artists:

And what had he to give? Bucks County barns? How shall we in this region of the mind which is all we can tactically, sensually know, organize our history other than as Shaker furniture is organized? It is a past, totally uninfluenced by anything but the necessity, the total worth of the thing itself, the relationship of the parts to the whole. The Shakers made furniture for their own simple ritualistic use, of white pine, applewood, birch--what they had. (333-334)

In the useful craftsmanship of Shaker furniture Williams recognized an American analogy to the geometry of Cubist architecture, a structure in which only what was essential to the demands of the composition was retained, and in which a useful art was expressed with its roots in an indigenous art tradition.

It is important, I would argue, to understand Williams' subsequent experimentation in literary structure in light of his admiration for primitive art forms for his development as an artist is closely related to his shedding of those numerous "paleface" skins that concealed his truer Indian self. And as Harold Rosenberg in The Tradition of the New suggests, creation "by a mind devoid of background, or deliberately cleansed of it, results in primitive art."<sup>72</sup> Such a deliberate cleansing had sent Cézanne and Picasso to look carefully at the rough masses of African sculpture<sup>73</sup> and sent Williams to "exalt the Redskin, the frontiersman" (IAG, 219). By Redskin Williams clearly intended those people whose communal strength represented a native bulwark against later artistic invasion from Spain and France. Indeed he organized

In the American Grain about the simple tension between those who created their lives out of their local ground and those who created their lives in spite of it. Whilst he admitted in The Desert Music that his personal energy raged against their quiet decorum,<sup>74</sup> he continued to admire the closeness of the Indians' relationship to the local ground, particularly in the ways that relationship was manifested in primitive arts. His personal disgust with traditional, closed forms of poetry--that "commonplace opaque board covered with vain curlicues" (SE, 129)--is an inevitable extension of his hatred of foreign life-styles and artistic structures whose very refinement rendered sterile the coarser grain of America. "Deliberately cleansed," however, Williams continued to applaud those works which manifested a rough energy created out of the artists' enthusiasms.<sup>75</sup> He preferred, for example, the early editions of Mencken's The American Language because:

The often unsupported surmises, the ill-assorted jumble of some of the matter in earlier editions had an instinctive justness about them, sometimes, which added zest to the whole. I miss them. They left a jagged edge but so does the American language. (SE, 170)

What Williams insists upon in his critical essays is the manifestation of creative energy, of the artist's determined probing of his materials. Williams thus commends Louis Zukofsky's early work for "plenty of debris, plenty of smudges" (SL, 94).

One constant source of reference for Williams in his

justification of organizational intent was the primitive art of the American Indian. In the American Grain explores the relationship between the Indian and his locale and articulates fully the poet's admiration for the culture flowering from it. The energy of the Indian, at once expressive, passionate and brutally cruel, Williams sets against the "sly, covert, Puritanical forms of self-expression which he so hated."<sup>76</sup> The rough and naive enthusiasms of the Indian were reflected in his art, and Williams was particularly attracted to the solid grandeur of Inca Masonry--"the massive walls of fitted masonry - no plaster - just fitted boulders"<sup>77</sup>--which he attempted to approximate in the Tenochtitlan chapter of In the American Grain, written in "big, square paragraphs."<sup>78</sup> The celebration of the structure's formal solidity and the absence of plaster suggests an interesting parallel to Williams' own poetic investigations where connectives and "ex machina props of all sorts" (SE, 126) are disregarded in favour of "pure craftsmanship" which joins "hard surfaces skilfully" (SE, 126). In his arrangement of source materials in Paterson and In the American Grain, Williams used documents, letters, advertisements and otherwise irredeemable local data in much the same way the Incas had assembled hewn blocks of stone. Without overt connectives, the individual blocks retained their separate identity within the new context of the poem, contributing inevitably that older context from which they had



been taken. Each hewn block, indeed, introduces into the poem that aura of experience which had previously surrounded it. Williams thus asked that the seemingly unassimilated material of his longer works be regarded as "units unglued and as in the greatest early constructions unstandardized" (SE, 130). It was the poet's function to balance the unstandardized fragments and to make out of their disparateness a solid and enduring architecture. The result of such efforts is manifested in such works as Paterson which remains a "construction" (SE, 165) of experiences, "set down with no more art than necessary to make the whole a sound functioning body" (SL, 56). The distrust of artifice, the celebration of a raw vitality and the resulting emphasis on craftsmanship which immediately dispelled any suggestion that it was the poet's function "merely to arrange things prettily" (SL, 62), suggests an approach to poetic form similar to the Cubists' later explorations into pictorial architecture and the evolution of Collage.

Whilst it seems incongruous to discuss collage within the context of folk-art, it is the simple desire "to save things"<sup>79</sup> by cutting and pasting that relates, for example, Kurt Schwitters' use of discarded materials and the Pennsylvanian folk-artists' assemblies of personally relevant mementoes into scrapbooks and memory-jugs. The urge to save and the equally urgent need to make some sort of organization for what is saved provides a common impulse

for apparently irreconcilable artistic periods and schools. Collage indeed represents the more obvious characteristics of all Folk-Art and illuminates many of Williams' poetic statements with their obvious dislike of Academies and academic "finish" and their complementary praise of craftsmanship and the simple, understated structures of earlier, less exploited periods of American history.

Folk-Art in America, flourishing chiefly in New England and Pennsylvania, achieves total independence of representational realism by its very technical limitations. Developing out of craft rather than painters' traditions, it expresses an essentially "non-derivative, individual, unpretentious, most often anonymous style," and has as its main characteristic "an independence that not seldom amounts to real opposition."<sup>80</sup> Emanuel Lowy, in his The Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art, argues for a common principle in primitive art in what he calls "the primitive memory image," a memory which "does not retain all images equally but makes a selection of those aspects which present the object in the greatest clearness and completeness." Lowy continues:

along with the pictures that reality presents to the eye, there exists another world of images, living or coming into life in our minds alone, which, though indeed suggested by reality, are nevertheless essentially metamorphosed. Every primitive artist, when endeavouring to imitate Nature, seeks with the spontaneity of physical function to reproduce merely these mental images.<sup>81</sup>

The "seeking" results in an extreme fidelity to the mental picture at the cost of purely "optical" realism and in the artist's ability to create out of the mental images "the purely aesthetic qualities of abstract design."<sup>82</sup> Within the completed design each unit of composition "seems to exist separately, as it did in the series of memory images in the artist's mind, and these images appear to have been combined rather than synthesized in the final representation."<sup>83</sup> Thus the qualities of folk-art emerge largely out of the preserved integrity of the memory image and the place assumed by that image within the abstract design--characteristics Williams had argued were essential prerequisites for the making of a poem. In a comparison of W. H. Bartlett's "Washington's Tomb and Mount Vernon" (Appendix 2, Fig. 23) and an anonymous "Memorial for Polly Botsford" (Appendix 2, Fig. 24), Jean Lipman, in her book American Primitive Painting, suggests the main difference between "Academic" and "Primitive" styles of composition:

In the academic picture there is an optical unification of the whole scene. The eye of the spectator takes in the pictured area as a whole just as the artist's eye originally observed the scene which he chose to represent. In the primitive picture there is no unifying aerial perspective, no naturalistic lighting, no approximation of the appearance of observed reality. The spectator's eye travels from one portion of the picture to another, accumulating bit by bit the represented content, for it was in this way that the primitive artist constructed his picture.<sup>84</sup>

The process by which a primitive painting grows is thus one of gradual accumulation and combination whereby "rigorously simplified"<sup>85</sup> images are brought together in a stylized organizational rhythm. Without subordination within the picture the stripped image continues to express its individuated presence even after it has been juxtaposed to other images. The primitive artist does not then attempt to synthesize his images but tries rather to allow each its peculiar character and energy. The quality of such a composition does not consequently rest in the accuracy of its visual representation but in the artist's ability to conceptualize the unity and coherence of his experiences within an abstract design, to make clear the emotional urgency of his composition (Appendix 2, Fig. 25).

Such a process, however, is most strongly expressed in the technique of collage where memory images are clipped from newspapers and illustrated magazines and placed in simple juxtaposition in scrapbooks. Collage makes obvious use of the literalness of its assembled materials and in the crude energy emerging from the placement of such materials within a vividly realized structure. Furthermore, collage, by stressing the architectonics of its composition, by making its building rhythms clearly apparent to its spectators, does not seek to synthesize its experiences but to activate each image by means of some commonly shared energy or identity. Folk collage, as Janis and Blesch remind



us, also begins in the "urge to save things," an urge which becomes at times an obsessional activity. For Williams the need to save the real parts of self and country, which layers of soporific legend were attempting to conceal, had led him toward a deliberately "naive" art in much the same way that his unacknowledged Puritan ancestors had tried to retain some hold over their own pasts by pasting materials into a decorative design or by covering a jug with shells or bringing memories together in an album.<sup>86</sup> For the folk-artists and for Williams collage begins in nostalgia and continues as a creative effort to redeem from memory the discarded elements of family and individual life. The return of utilization of this aesthetic and technique by artists in the twentieth-century is thus in part an attempt to return to art a "primitive reality" and in its "seeming impertinence and incongruity" to disturb art's traditional quality of illusion with a "baffling intrusion of objects."<sup>87</sup>

Whilst Williams' efforts to disturb and renew the "literary" surface are more easily revealed in the organization of such long works as Paterson, the initial experiments were conducted on a smaller scale. In the short "speaking" poems of Al Que Quiere, for example, Williams "colloquializes" poetic structures, making their organization dependent upon the unpredictable tensions and movements of a man talking. What results is a deliberate brokenness, the simplest expression of the poet's determination to make contact with

ordinary worlds around him. The aesthetic developed by Williams in writing these early poems, particularly as its basic urge is a direct touching of banality, points forward inevitably to the making of Paterson where the speaking voice is seen to move about the city streets, "gathering up" the materials at hand and enlarging their local assertions. By examining his justification for making poems, I wish to clarify Williams' consistent need in his writings to reach out to the real world of Doctor and Patient, to give shape to that shapeless routine which constantly threatened to negate him as Man, and to establish a context where humble fragments of that larger, public self resonated in celebratory dancing in the North room of the artist's imagination.

(iii)

Williams argued that the search for new forms was inextricably related to the development of a distinctly American spoken idiom, that the form a poem takes is the natural extension of the poet's speaking voice. Preconceived forms like the sonnet,<sup>88</sup> on the other hand, demand "a contortion of speech to conform to a rigidity of line" (SL, 134) whereas the formless poem allows the speech of the poet to become dissipated, to lose its tautness and to degenerate into that "senseless padding, bombast, bathos" (SL, 135) which Williams saw as an implicit danger in the poetry of Whitman.<sup>89</sup> He argued consistently that "it is in the newness of a live speech that the new line exists undiscovered" (SL, 134), and that the immediate results of such a speech would be what Robert Duncan later called "an open composition in which the accidents and imperfections of speech might awaken intimations of human being."<sup>90</sup> Such intimations destroy emphatically the artist's traditional "aloofness," confirming his position within the immediate social context. And, for Williams, such a destruction was deliberate. "I have defeated myself purposely," he stated, "in almost everything I do because I don't want to be thought an artist." He continued:

I much prefer to be an ordinary person. I never separated from my fellow mortals by acting like an

artist. I never wanted to be an artist externally - only secretly so as not to be set apart. I wanted to be something rare but not to have it separate me from the crowd.

The roughness of the speaking voice was thus an act of rebellion against the "literary" voice, an artistic "rebellion against stereotyped poetic process--the too meticulous choice among other things." Like the Cubists, Williams argued that in too much refinement "there lurks a sterility that wishes to pass too often for purity when it is anything but that." In contrast, the colloquial idiom manifests that "Rabelaisian sanity" which requires that "the rare and the fine be exhibited as coming like everything else from the dirt" (SL, 155-156). The poems he evolved in so deliberate a rebellion were poems of extreme actualism, solid realizations of the public world which utilized, as I have already suggested, fragments of that world. In general, however, the poems reveal a poet who simply "craved to talk, as any live man does, to get at things by talking about them."<sup>91</sup>

Such poems inevitably refute the possibility of mechanical form, of a preconceived "net" to determine the ultimate structure of the poet's perceptions. They point rather to Williams' belief that "the FORM and the gist, the very meat, of a new cultural understanding are interlinked inseparably" (SL, 227) and his insistent call for a language which embodies "all the advantageous jumps, swift-nesses, colors, movements of the day" (SE, 109). This new



language, of necessity American, would lead to a revaluation of America, its indefatigable urge toward self-abasement, and to a revitalization of its "collective world--in time of stress, in a new mode, fresh in every part, and so set the world working or dancing or murdering each other again" (SE, 103). The means to revitalization of locale involved Williams in two essential difficulties. Primarily he had to make of his poem a process, a re-enactment as it were of his original confrontation with his material as a means by which he could convince the reader of his work's authenticity and ask him to share the struggles, failures and triumphs implicit in the creative process. Secondly, Williams' attempt to renew the collective world led him to a renewal of language, cleansing words of the ideological encrustations they had accumulated through usage and stressing instead "the skeleton, the formal parts of writing, those that make form" (SE, 115).

In his Autobiography, Williams argues that "an advance of estimable proportions is made by looking at the poems as a field rather than an assembly of more or less ankylosed lines" (329). To illustrate his statement, he cites Charles Olson's essay, "Projective Verse," which in essence recapitulates the demands Williams had been making for the poem for forty years. Olson makes explicit the concept of the poem as a process, seeing the poet's fundamental problem in the discovery of a method to "get in, at

all points energy at least the equivalent of the energy which propelled him in the first place, yet an energy which is peculiar to verse alone and which will be, obviously, also different from the energy which the reader, because he is a third term, will take away?"<sup>92</sup> The resolution of this problem, "which any poet who departs from closed form is specially confronted by," rests for Olson in a single statement attributed to Edward Dahlberg: "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION."<sup>93</sup> In a further amplification of the statement, Olson reveals the implications of such a methodology in his own sentence-structure:

It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at all points (even, I should say, of our management of daily reality as of the daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, theirs, the acts, the split-second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. And if you also set up as a poet, USE USE USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER! . . .<sup>94</sup>

In this passage the lack of connectives results in an extreme rapidity of movement, making it impossible for the reader's attention to remain long on any particular perception. The proliferation of verbs generates an activity in which "meaning" is accumulated by repetition. The reader's mind is denied stable focusing points in the same way that Cubism had denied them to his eye.

Olson, in a further essay entitled "Human Universe," distinguishes between two ways of talking, between Tongue

(Shout) and Logos (Discrimination). The distinction, he argues, is between "language as the act of the instant and language as the act of the thought about the instant." As Tongue, language becomes an "instrument" by which the poet may explore and articulate his two universes: "that of himself, an organism, and that of his environment, the earth and planets."<sup>95</sup> As Logos, language becomes an "absolute," embalming in definitions the very world it seeks to bring to life. Duncan, examining the ramifications of this aesthetic in Olson's Maximus Poems, states that "conception cannot be abstracted from doing; beauty is related to the beauty of an archer hitting the mark."<sup>96</sup> Olson thus argues for a poem which records the energy of the poet's intellect as it struggles to come to terms with the objective world, for a poem which attempts to communicate a sense of the process and growth such a struggle entails. What Olson later understood as the energy of the poet's voice, Williams had earlier seen as "an unimpeded thrust right through a poem from the beginning to the end, without regard to formal arrangements" (SL, 50). He argued that the aim of this thematic thrust:

is to keep a beleaguered line of understanding which has movement from breaking down and becoming a hole into which we sink decoratively to rest. (SE, 118)

By this means Williams sought to involve the reader directly in the very act of composition and to reduce him ultimately to a state of "breathlessness" (SL, 136).

To fulfil his purpose, Williams proposed to handle the words which revealed the thrusting intellect of the poet "with feeling for the delicate, living quality in them--not disinfecting, scraping them, but careful of the life. The result is that they stay living--and discreet" (SE, 111). Like Olson, he learned to discard similes and adjectives as inessential elements of composition, mere pictorial effects<sup>97</sup> which detracted from the "beleaguered line of understanding." "Is it not a heart which has gone lazy," Olson asks, "is it not, suddenly, slow things, similes, say, adjectives, or such, that we are bored by." Olson, in "Projective Verse," argues that:

Observation of any kind is, like argument in prose, properly previous to the act of the poem, and, if allowed in, must be so juxtaposed, apposed, set in, that it does not, for an instant, sap the going energy of the content toward its form.

Art, he continues, "does not seek to describe but to enact."<sup>98</sup> Williams demanded a similar absence of ornamentation in his poems, paring away unnecessary compositional elements. He emphasized the internal structure of his poems, the delicate architecture created out of the words themselves and not the moral or political connotations they brought with them into the poem.<sup>99</sup>

The ruthless discipline implicit in the attempt to reduce the poem's structure to its purest compositional elements is clearly exemplified in the two versions of "The Locust Tree in Flower," both published in The Collected

Earlier Poems of 1938:First Version

Among  
the leaves  
bright

green  
of wrist-thick  
tree

and old  
stiff broken  
branch

ferncool  
swaying  
loosely strung-

come May  
again  
white blossom

clusters  
hide  
to spill

their sweets  
almost  
unnoticed

down  
and quickly  
fall

(CEP, 94)

Second Version

Among  
of  
green

stiff  
old  
bright

broken  
branch  
come

white  
sweet  
May

again

(CEP, 93)

The second version, included in his Collected Poems (1934) and reprinted in An Early Martyr (1935), reveals Williams' deliberate attempt to create within the poem a movement analogous to the creative thrust of Spring. This insistence upon the process delineated by the poem results in a stripping away of all elements inessential to that movement. Verbal activity is accentuated by the seemingly



perverse removal of verbs and the inevitable stress, in the second version, on the "come" which marks the season's fertility in ironic sexual tones. Furthermore, the second version deliberately destroys the poem's original syntactical structure which made explicit, and thus rendered sterile, the year's renewal. In juxtaposing prepositions, adjectives and nouns, Williams ridicules the human logic upon which grammatical function is based and more closely articulates the uneven birth and growth of the season. The two prepositions, for example, with which the poem opens, suggest the mind of the poet struggling to make sense of his renewing world and fumbling awkwardly for language to articulate the diffident, slow-to-open buds of spring. The single word "green," removed from its specifically descriptive function, introduces into the process of the poem the concept of fertility in the world whilst avoiding the structural dangers of so gross a generalization. Unlike the first version which limits "green" to a grammatical position as adjective qualifying a single noun, the second version utilizes the word to suggest the world's capacity for renewal. The deliberate destruction of a debilitating syntactical structure thus extends the range of the poet's original vision. In the first version of "Locust Tree" the poet articulates the movement of Spring within the single tree. By paring away certain elements, Williams has created in the second version a poem which reveals the

creatively renewing cycles of existence to which man is related. The "stiff / old / bright / broken" elements of the poem's composition, for example, suggest a relevance not merely to the "branch" they logically qualify but to all natural processes, including man's own, in which "bright" remains as a constant possibility in an existence characterized by ageing. The reader, sharing this movement within the poem, recognizes in "branch" the vital co-existence of life and death. Such a realization, implicit in the words themselves, negates the value of explicit or clarifying statement. "Again" of the second version, with its succinct and confident connotations of life's renewal, renders superfluous the long final section of the first version beginning "blossom / clusters / hide / to spill . . ." The reconstruction of the poem is thus intended to extend the applicability of the poet's initial perception, involving in a final analysis the sexual drive to satisfaction in man. Thus, in seeking to "knock off every accretion from the stones of composition," Williams stressed the poem's internal architecture, its internal movement as a natural extension of the poet's imagination as it seeks to create a momentary order. The poem, he maintained, is writing. It is not a vehicle for "science, philosophy and religion" (SE, 96).<sup>100</sup>

Noting that the principal move in imaginative writing was "that away from the word as a symbol toward the word as reality" (SE, 107), Williams selected words whose "cut . . .

tint . . . texture" (SE, 97) approached most directly the words they denoted. The immediate implications of such a statement point to the poet's desire to maintain an essential contact with reality and to incorporate where necessary those elements of external reality which denied transformation. This primary urge to make art continuous with life which had motivated the experimentation of the Cubists, led Williams to make poems out of the apparent trivia of his daily existence. In "Della Primavera Transportata Al Morale" (CEP, 57) Williams included lists of kinds of ice cream and hospital signs, demanding visual as well as linguistic accuracy:

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	

The list, prefaced by "I believe," is thus transformed into an ironic modern credo. "Anything," as Williams consistently argued, "is good material for poetry" (P, 262) because it can be incorporated into the poem's argument and transformed for its duration without losing its essential integrity. In "The Great Figure," for example, the figure 5 is included as a vital remnant of the poet's memory. Within its new

context, it assumes magical proportions. As with Cubist canvases, the startling disruption of the poem's surface compells the reader into a re-examination of his familiar world and its objects. In "The Attic Which Is Desire" the sudden emergence of a neon advertising sign disturbs the reader into a revaluation of the language of the poem.<sup>101</sup>

Williams utilized the banal and discarded trivia in his poems for two further reasons. Primarily the "found-words" destroy the metrical flow of the poem, forming what Williams referred to as "a jagged pattern" (P, 262)<sup>102</sup> in the reader's mind and, secondly, they undermine, by their extreme banality and by their overt associations with commercial interests, human foibles and aspirations. Poem XXV of Spring and All, later titled "Rapid Transit," is fabricated out of observed signs and slogans:

Somebody dies every four minutes  
in New York State-

To hell with you and your poetry  
You will rot and be blown

through the next solar system  
with the rest of the gases-

What the hell do you know about it?

AXIOMS

Don't get killed

Careful Crossings Campaign  
Cross Crossings Cautiously

THE HORSES

black

&

PRANCED

white

Outings in New York City

Ho for the open country

Don't stay shut up in hot rooms  
Go to one of the Great Parks  
Pelham Bay for example

It's on Long Island Sound  
with bathing, boating  
tennis, baseball, golf, etc.

Acres and acres of green grass  
wonderful shade trees, rippling brooks

Take the Pelham Bay Park Branch  
of the Lexington Ave. (East Side)  
Line and you are there in a few  
minutes

Interborough Rapid Transit Co. (CEP, 283)

Working in juxtaposition, the signs and slogans ironically point to the superficiality of human life and the fragile social framework in the face of death. Perhaps of equal importance is Williams' inclusion of the very axioms created and perpetuated by society to defend itself against such unpalatable truth. Words thus are utilized as "ready-mades," taken out of their contexts and incorporated into the poem just as they are found. Hillis Miller argues that it "is not necessary to change something to make it poetic"<sup>103</sup> and Williams so incorporated his mots-trouvés into the movement of the poem that their useful significance, their syntactical function for example, disappears under a new title and point-of-view. He created what Marcel Duchamp understood in arguing for his object-trouv   as a "new thought for that object."<sup>104</sup>



The word-object relationship Williams sought manifests the essential impulse of his work towards realism and the construction of poems immediately accessible to a non-specialist reading public. To remove the deceptive techniques by which the artist traditionally had manipulated the viewer's vision of the objective world and had carefully delineated the sacred precincts of their art, the Cubists had been compelled to approach the canvas as a new world, a new reality subject only to the resolution of painterly problems. In similar vein, Williams early decided that poems structured according to anachronistic European forms denied the immediacy of American life by representing contemporary reality in the "senseless image of yesterday" (SE, 210) and imbuing its significance with a "false cast" (SE, 202). Consequently Williams strove to suppress technical artfulness which would impede the reader's intimate contact with the new or renewed world the poem revealed. The illusionistic perspective discarded by the Cubists has its parallel in the fixed metre of mechanical form which binds in inevitable sequence the words it seeks to release. Stability was further denied the reader by the apparently haphazard shape the poem assumed on the page and the ruthless stripping away of words inessential to the creative enactment the poem's movement traced.

Williams' experimentation in poetic form was thus the result of his determination to destroy that "softening

effect of word upon word" (SE, 129) he associated with mechanical form. He referred to it as "the subtle brainlessness of our meter and favorite prose rhythms--which compell words to follow certain others without precision of thought" (SE, 165) and which induce in the reader that sensation of inevitability he angrily rejects. Williams' distrust of a sensual and appealing surface to the poem provides an interesting parallel to the suppression by the Cubists or colour during the austere discipline of their monochrome period. Such austerity characterizes Williams' poems. "The Young Sycamore," for example, published in The Dial (March, 1927) and collected in the 1934 volume of Williams' poems, articulates an approach to external reality based on extreme clarity of perception and precise organization of observed detail:

Young Sycamore

I must tell you  
this young tree  
whose round and firm trunk  
between the wet

pavement and the gutter  
(where water  
is trickling) rises  
bodily

into the air with  
one undulant  
thrust half its height-  
and then

dividing and waning  
sending out  
young branches on  
all sides-

hung with cocoons  
 it thins  
 till nothing is left of it  
 but two

eccentric knotted  
 twigs  
 bending forward  
 hornlike at the top (CEP, 332)

Williams' emphasis in the poem rests on the immediacy of his initial confrontation with the young tree, a confrontation the process of the poem carefully re-enacts. The necessary emphasis in the re-enactment is on the poem's verbal activity which subtly unites the growth of the tree itself, its entire life comprehended "in the singleness of the moment," and the growth of the poet's mind as he explores the possibilities implicit in the original confrontation. "Young Sycamore" marks no attempt by Williams' to "represent" the face of external reality but rather an urgent desire to point to the inextricable interpenetration of Man and Nature, to make the process delineated by the poem one with the inexorable process of ageing which constitutes his life.<sup>105</sup> The urgency of Williams' poetic commitment, suggested in the brashly energetic first line of this poem, is demonstrated by the marked absence of extraneous pictorial effect and a consequent paring away of poetic excrescences which might deprive the poem of its primal energy.

The structure of the poem evolves naturally out of the poet's speaking voice and thus provides an organization in which individual words are not overwhelmed but "in their

assembly remain quite as 'natural' as before they were gathered" (SE, 129). His insistence upon the individual existence of each word in the poem resulted in a growing emphasis on the shape the words assumed on the page. He disrupted deliberately the solid contours of mechanical form and their visual implications of continuity and substituted a shape to the poem which immediately evoked a sense of the discontinuity of experience and the nervous energy of the poet in his confrontation with it. His arguments with Kreymbourg over Cubism had led to his initial experimentation in visual structure with the omission of capitals and punctuation and the subsequent release of words from their confinement within the poem's syntactical structure. Such words, as Miller suggests, become "a set of fluid energies whose life exists only in the present."<sup>106</sup> By stressing the individuality of each word, Williams sought to discard the possibility of one object assuming greater importance in the poem than any other object. His poems thus demonstrate his rejection of a poetry which is mere vehicle for morality, in which objects are graded according to their place within a preordained scheme. The poem's newly conceived shape on the page emphasizes the importance of each element of composition in its final organization. In a later poem, "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus," Williams exploits such separateness to suggest the indifference and inevitable selfishness the compositional

elements affect towards the tragedy of Icarus' drowning:

According to Brueghel  
when Icarus fell  
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing  
his field  
the whole pageantry

of the year was  
awake tingling  
near

the edge of the sea  
concerned  
with itself

sweating in the sun  
that melted  
the wings' wax

unsignificantly  
off the coast  
there was

a splash quite unnoticed  
this was  
Icarus drowning (PB, 4)<sup>107</sup>

In such poems, Williams opens up the whiteness of the paper to express the shapelessness out of which the words have, with difficulty, been selected. In consequence, the words evoke the care and precision of the poet himself and augmented the reader's awareness of the creative process in which he has been involved. Whilst, however, the emphasis remains on the individual life each word projects, the poem's shape accentuates their juxtaposition and the subsequent importance of the spaces existing between them. Miller expands this point:

Into the white space surrounding the word go a multitude of lines of force, charging that space with the



almost tangible presence of the various words which might come to complete the central word and appease its tension.<sup>108</sup>

The words enter into new relationships created out of their juxtaposition and interaction in the new "field" of the poem and result essentially from the deliberate suppression of punctuation.

Furthermore the absence of punctuation, initially instigated by the work of Apollinaire and the larger influence of Cubist painting, led to the disappearance of causality from Williams' poems. Rejecting Time in much the same way the Cubists had renounced Space delineated by linear perspective,<sup>109</sup> Williams organized his poem as a self-contained structure in which all words exist simultaneously. All things, as he has argued, "enter into the singleness of the moment and the moment partakes of the diversity of all things" (NOP, 282). This interesting definition of the principle of simultaneity is the natural extension of Williams' determination to approach the "necessary appearance of disorder in all immediacy" (SE, 121). The fluidity of the poem's organization which emerges from the simultaneous presentation of words and Williams' conception of them as "multiple units crazy except when viewed as a whole" (SE, 123), is well illustrated in "Between Walls":

Between Walls

the back wings  
of the

hospital where  
nothing

will grow lie  
cinders

in which shine  
the broken

pieces of a green  
bottle (CEP, 343)

In a letter to Babette Deutsch in 1948, Williams remarked that:

There's nothing very subtle about the poem; all it means, as far as I know, is that in a waste of cinders loveliness, in the form of color, stands up alive. Epicurus meant something of the same. (SL, 256)

Alan Ostrom sees the true significance of the loveliness in the "apparent relationship through color of the green bottle to the green that will not grow." He concludes that the "beauty of the made thing replaces and stands for the natural."<sup>110</sup> It is not, however, this extracted "meaning" to the poem which is important.<sup>111</sup> Rather it is the tension created by the simple juxtaposition of words suggesting growth or its potential for growth and words which suggest stasis or decline. The "meaning" of the poem rests in the process which records the delineation of this tension and the gradual accumulation of meaning in the mind of the reader. The visual separateness, for example, of the first five words of the poem accentuates the element of animation in the single noun "wings." The space between the first two sections of the poem is thus charged with expectancy of growth and continuity--an expectancy which is abruptly

curtailed by the first word of the second section "hospital" and its immediate connotations of sickness, stasis and decline. The contrast remains in the first section's substantiation of decline, a contrast which emphasizes the importance of whiteness of the page and the reader's role in participating in the process of the poem. The third section continues the contradiction by opposing syntactical and visual meaning. "Will grow," separated from its noun "nothing," contrasts ironically with "cinders" and the suggestion of lifelessness that word introduces into the poem. The immediate effect is of uncertainty and ambiguity as the simply organized sentence, "the back wings of the hospital where nothing will grow," is constantly modified by the position of the words on the page and the paradoxical juxtapositions the fragmentation of the sentence achieves. It is a contradiction continued in the fourth section where "shine" with its implications of warmth and fertility clashes with "the broken." I say "clashes" because a conventional response to the poem expects "broken" to point toward an inevitable uselessness, one with the "cinders." The final section of the poem, however, destroys completely this expectation by finding growth in the "pieces of a green / bottle." The growth referred to is presumably the process of transformation the bottle undergoes in the poet's imagination, a process defined in the poem's structure. Thus, the five sections of the poem, despite their visual separateness,

maintain a delicate balance between life and death, between the potential for growth and the inevitability of decline. What structures the poem is the poet's ability to see "loveliness" in banality and to redeem it, and his gentle irony which opposes the stasis behind the hospital to the growth of the poem itself.

In general, however, the shape of the poem on the page defines the poet's speaking voice, its inflexions, hesitations and impulses. It is a distinctly individual voice as one man's unique response to his materials, a visual chart of what Charles Olson saw as "the PLAY of the mind."<sup>112</sup> In its asymmetrical structure, it stands as the antithesis to that preconceived "net" Williams consistently derides in his critical writings. In "Notes in Diary Form," he suggests the release of the speaking voice achieved by allowing the visual structure to suggest the mind's play:

To be nothing and unaffected by the results, to unlock, and to flow (They believe that when they have the mold of technique made perfect without a leak in it that the mind will be drilled to flow there whereas the mind is locked the more tightly the more perfect the technique is forged) (or it may flow, disencumbered by what it has learned, become unconscious, provided the technique becomes mechanical, goes out of the mind and so the mind (now it has been cut for life in this pattern)) can devote itself to that just as if it had learned it imitatively or not at all. (SE, 72)

The emphasis in the "Notes" is on the "flow" of the poet's mind as opposed to the stasis imposed upon it by mechanical form. Influenced by the work of Joyce and the Surrealists, Williams sought a poetry which would inevitably evoke the

poet's individual humanity. As a stream of consciousness the poem would "unlock and flow, uncolored, smooth, carelessly--not cling to the unsolvable lumps of personality (yourself and your concessions, poems) concretions" (SE, 72-73). The initial experimentation resulted in Kora in Hell, an interesting but not wholly successful search by Williams to liberate himself from the constraints of technique.

The visual results were manifested in poems which attempted to suggest typographically the "breathing" of the poet, the very unevenness of line length pointing to varying degrees of emphasis. In this Williams shared with his contemporaries the benefits of the typewriter whose advantage, argued by Olson in "Projective Verse," is that "due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of parts of phrases, which he intends."<sup>113</sup> Olson contends that for the first time the poet, with the aid of this machine, can "without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work."<sup>114</sup> The possibilities, Olson argues, for the poet in his utilization of the typewriter are that:

If a contemporary poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held, by the breath, an equal length of time. If he suspends



a word or syllable at the end of a line . . . he means that time to pass that it takes the eye--that hair of time suspended--to pick up the next line. If he wishes a pause so light it hardly separates the words, yet does not want a comma--which is an interruption of the meaning rather than the sounding of the line--follow him when he uses a symbol the typewriter has ready to hand:

"What does not change / is the will to change"<sup>115</sup>

Speaking of "the sons of Pound and Williams," his acknowledged contemporaries, Olson declares that they are composing:

as though verse was to have the reading its writing involved, as though not the eye but the ear was to be its measurer, as though the intervals of its composition could be so carefully put down as to be precisely the intervals of its registration.

In this emphasis, the ear of the reader would be asked to listen to the words themselves and to respond to the music they evoked beyond the aids of "rime and regular cadence."<sup>116</sup>

What essentially is transferred to the reader's ear is the intellectual energy of the poet as he moves through the materials of his poem. In "Liberated! Igualidad! Fraternidad!", for example, the explosive anger of the voice at the poem's opening gradually gives way to rueful resignation:

You sullen pig of a man  
you force me into the mud  
with your stinking ash-cart!

Brother!

-if we were rich  
we'd stick our chests out  
and hold our heads high!

It is dreams that have destroyed us.

There is no more pride  
 in horses or in rein holding.  
 We sit hunched together brooding  
 our fate.

Well-  
 all things turn bitter in the end  
 whether you choose the right or  
 the left way  
 and-  
 dreams are not a bad thing. (CEP, 134)

Basically, the movement of the poem records the diminishing anger of the poet's initial outburst, beginning in unequivocal statement and closing, after an investigation of his original anger, in gently ironic acceptance of the situation. The ear of the reader, without rime or regular cadence to intervene between the words and the experience they strive to evoke, follows in the seemingly haphazard arrangement of the words across and down the page the developing "tone" of the poet's voice. He understands implicitly the scornful overtones of "Brother!" from its spatial separateness on the page and its juxtaposition to words of impulsive hatred. The three lines, separated by a similar distance from "Brother!", beginning "-if we were rich," have little overt connection with the first three words but suggest an anger directed against the Marxist myth which has sustained them. The whiteness of the page denotes the suppressed thought processes of the persona as he attempts to come to terms with his passionate response to a simple situation. The isolation of the sentence--"It is dreams that have destroyed us."--points to his bitter conclusion and temporary renunciation of the ideals he once

embraced. A further space leads to the ramifications of the conclusion he has reached, a space charged with consideration of what appears to be at this stage an unequivocal statement:

There is no more pride  
in horses or in rein holding.  
We sit hunched together brooding  
our fate.

But, imperceptibly through the poem, the initial anger of the poet has subsided and what appears to be a definitive conclusion in the middle section of the poem is ironically undermined in the final section. Here anger gives way to cynical pleasure in the myth's deflation and a grudging acceptance of ideals:

Well-  
all things turn bitter in the end  
whether you choose the right or  
the left way  
and-  
dreams are not a bad thing.

The movement of the poem, its uneven lines and lack of explicit connectives, brings to mind Duncan's demand for an "open composition in which the accidents and imperfections of speech might awaken intimations of human being." The poem's structure records one man's response to his immediate situation, expressing his gradual progress through anger to rationalization of his anger and, finally, to an understanding of the fallibility of man confronted by an inflexible myth. The visual structure augments the reader's sense of the individuality of the speaker, demanding that

the reader hear in the spaces between the sections of the poem the suppressed processes of thought.

In Williams' short poems, the emphasis remained on the object's visual realization, on the solidity of its reconstruction for the reader. Clearly apprehended and structured, the process delineated by the poem transformed the object into an extension of the poet's own reality, into an object of his own subjectivity. The finished poem-- "Young Sycamore," for example--fuses object and subject in an organization which reaffirms the interpenetration of poet and external reality. Williams' rejection of the poem's descriptive possibilities, his stringent paring away of all excrescences, is the natural extension of his concern for the immediacy of such an interpenetration. The poem, stripped of all effects extraneous to the "pure" movement of the poet's perceptions, aims to break down that "constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world."<sup>117</sup> In such short poems Williams is concerned with the unique identity of the individual object and its truthful imitation. Only by reassuring his reader of the authenticity of the new object of the poem, of the poem's own "thingness," could the poet ask him to share the object's transformation within the poem.

Williams established the authenticity of his poems



by insisting upon the unique quality of each fragment of external reality. His insistence inevitably brought him to the problem of the fragments' incorporation into the poem's taut structure which threatened constantly to subordinate their individual integrity to the demands of the poet's speaking voice. Undermining any possibility of dogmatic assertion in the poet's emphasis on his fallible humanity, Williams also distinguished carefully in his short poems between syntactical and spatial relationships. Objects, parts of objects and compositional elements, restricted within the poem's syntactical structure--its "meaning"--nevertheless preserve their essential individuality within the poem's spatial organization. The spare statement, for example, that "so much depends upon a red wheelbarrow, glazed with rain water, beside the white chickens" immediately subordinates "rain water" and "white chickens" to the seemingly more important realization of "a red wheelbarrow." In its poetic structuring, however, the compositional elements retain a spatial separateness which stresses their individuality:

## XXI

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens. (CEP, 277)

What "depends" upon the elements of the poem in their new interrelationships is Williams' entire poetic commitment. Primarily, the particulars of the poem are visually separated to suggest precisely the raw materials out of which the poet has assembled the poem. These particulars are superficially organized within the urgent tension generated by the opening two lines of the poem, an urgency which implies that the poet's function is to insist upon a literal representation of external reality through the object's fullest possible physical realization. The enduring relationships in the poem, however, are not those created solely by external correspondences or by the establishment of the precise context in which the red wheelbarrow itself finds substantiation. The enduring relationships are those Williams has, consciously or unconsciously, discovered in the words themselves. More specifically, the "a" sound present in "glazed" and "rain" and the "i" sound of "beside" and "white" confirms linguistically that visual unity the poet immediately grasped and so desperately attempted to communicate. What is immediately apparent, however, is that the visual and the linguistic harmonies communicated by the poet do not run parallel. In the new world of the poem, the poet establishes a reality out of the language he uses and it is only within that language that a re-ordering of objective reality can take place. In "The Red Wheelbarrow," Williams refuses to coerce the particulars which he has assembled to make the

poem into distorting relationships but suggests linguistically the unity of their poetic assemblage. "Wheel" and "water" and "white" relate seemingly disparate fragments of the external world to one another whilst preserving the unique characteristics of each compositional element.

Williams' emphasis on linguistic as opposed to purely visual correspondances asserts his belief in the poem as an independent organism and affords an interesting and pertinent parallel to the canvases of the Cubists which John Golding has described as "small self-contained worlds, not reflecting the outside world but recreating it in a completely new form."<sup>118</sup> In Williams' short poems each word is a separate compositional element, regardless of its relative importance in the poem's syntax, and the fluidity Williams establishes leads to his discovery in language of surprising relationships. The resulting poem is a construction where words and the objects they denote retain separate identities, fluctuating violently between occasional reconciliation and rejection. What gives Williams' poems their essential unity is the poet's search through his material to discover signs, in the language by which the material is evoked, of possible relationships. The ultimate function of the poet is to re-order external reality and to establish some moments of order in a chaos of fragmented experience. The poet, Williams argued, must acknowledge "the fragmentary stupidity of modern life, its lucunae of sense, lous, perversions of

instinct, blankets, amputations, fulsomeness of instruction and multiplications of inanity" (SE, 62) for he is "the whole man, not the breaker up but the compactor" (SE, 97).

As "compactor," the poet:

does not translate the sensuality of his materials into symbols but deals with them directly. By this he belongs to his world and time, sensually, realistically. His work might and finally must be expanded--holds the power of expansion at any time--into new conceptions of government. It is not the passive "to be" but the active 'I am.' (SE, 97)

Williams' difficulties in the organization of his material result from this belief in the poet's function. Throughout his work he attempted to maintain the difficult balance between himself and his material, whether that material was a single word or larger fragment of the poet's environment. The poetic structure which resulted from the tension implicit in his dilemma was the literary equivalent of Cubist Collage. Essentially, Williams moves gradually toward an open and flexible structure for his materials in which their visual juxtaposition alone appears to unify the individual work. As in Kora in Hell and Paterson, such surface confusion, characterized by Williams' critics as "creative incoherence"<sup>119</sup> or as an "organization of irrelevance,"<sup>120</sup> merely deceives. For it is the poet's "internal frame" which suggests the relationships Williams wishes to establish in the poem's new reality, an internal frame created by the poet's consistent and personal search through otherwise unassimilated material. Williams' evolution of the poetic collage suggests an

interesting parallel to the earlier realization by the Cubists that certain fragments of their immediate environment resisted artistic paraphrase, demanding inclusion as literal and objective tokens of external reality into that greater reality created by the artist. Once included in the elements assembled for the painting, the artists' immediate difficulty was to erect a firm architecture which would suggest in a purely pictorial language the relationships slowly evolved by the artist. Such a difficulty, as Williams quickly realized, could be resolved only in terms of the materials at hand. The tableau-tableau--the painter's painting--has its literary equivalent in Williams' poems as he recognized that poetic form involved "the resolution of difficulties to its own comprehensive organization of materials" (SE, 120). Collage is the inevitable extension of Williams' poetic commitment and the self-reflexiveness of Paterson, for example, is the direct result of the poet talking of the insuperable problems involved in organizing the innumerable fragments of Paterson's environment which he has personally assembled. Kora in Hell, Spring and All, In the American Grain, The Desert Music are, like Paterson, works whose central "thrust" is the impossibility of evolving such an organization. They talk incessantly of the difficulties involved in the writing of a poem. Indeed, it is the very impossibility of sustaining his search and of creating the "finished" form which generates the anger,



disgust and frustration permeating each work.

Without the context of earlier Cubist experimentation, however, critics of Williams have failed consistently to comprehend the poet's own search for form, insisting on his failure to continue the chronological priorities of narrative poetry. The otherwise sympathetic Weatherhead, in The Edge of the Image, argues for example that:

To have a form, however, which is not a "finished form" seems to me to be tantamount to having no structural form at all. That which is not finished must be said, without undue asperity, to lack a structural form.<sup>121</sup>

Williams strongly denies that lack of a "finished form" immediately gives way to formlessness or, indeed, that a poem can be finished. The source of the poet's materials in objective reality is inexhaustible and, if he is prepared to accept the arduous responsibilities implicit in the making of a poem, the form must reflect a similar inexhaustibility. Book V of Paterson and the fragments for a sixth book attest that a form is finished only at the death of its poet and that, like Pound's Cantos, it continues to grow as the poet confronts and accumulates new experiences. Indeed, for Williams, complacency and sterility result within the "finished form," arguing that:

The artist addresses himself to life as a whole. By reason of this he is constantly questioned and attacked. He is attacked by the closed lobbies of thought, those who have special solutions. Those who wish to halt the mutations of truth under a single aegis fixing it to a complexion of their private manufacture in search of a way through to order as against the modern lostness and distress. (SE, 204)

In a letter to James Laughlin, Williams argued against such a "private manufacture" of truth, preferring a "looser, wider world where 'order' is a servant not a master." Most importantly he stated that "Order is what is discovered after the fact, not a little piss pot for us all to urinate into--and call ourselves satisfied" (SL, 214). The openness of the collage-poem suggests precisely this "looser, wider world" in which, as he states in his important essay on Marianne Moore:

nothing loses its identity because of the composition  
but the parts in their assembly remain quite as "natural"  
as before they were gathered. (SE, 129)

## NOTES

### CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>Williams attended Medical School at the University of Pennsylvania from 1902 until 1906. Demuth studied at both the Drexel Institute and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art from which he graduated in 1905.

<sup>2</sup>See Williams' Autobiography, particularly pages 48 and 51 where the "preliminary skirmish" (48) is discussed.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Demuth: Behind A Laughing Mask, 48.

<sup>4</sup>"Across a Greco is Written," Creative Art, V (Sept. 29, 1929), 629.

<sup>5</sup>Demuth, 19.

<sup>6</sup>See I Wanted To Write A Poem where Williams declared:

Under different circumstances I would  
rather have been a painter than to  
bother with these god-damn words. (29)

<sup>7</sup>Demuth, 48.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted by Farnham, Demuth, 48.

<sup>9</sup>Farnham, Demuth, 62.

<sup>10</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup>Farnham, Demuth, 92.

<sup>12</sup>See Bram Dijkstra's remarks in Hieroglyphics that

Following the example of Cézanne, such painters as Picasso, Braque, and Marc make the space surrounding the objects in their paintings tangible, visible and active by forcing it into geometric planes. (66)

<sup>13</sup>Andrew Ritchie, Introduction to Catalogue of Works of Charles Demuth, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1950, 6.

<sup>14</sup>Farnham, Demuth, 90.

<sup>15</sup>Ritchie, Catalogue, 10.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>17</sup>See, in elucidation of "decadence," Ritchie's remarks in his Introduction to the Catalogue, 12.

<sup>18</sup>See Ruth Grogan, "The Influence of Painting on William Carlos Williams," 293.

<sup>19</sup>Farnham, Demuth, 92.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>21</sup>A pertinent example is Demuth's 1917 Watercolour "Trees and Barns" (Bermuda). See Appendix 2, Fig. 3.

<sup>22</sup>This change of materials reflects a movement from spontaneity to a more heavily studied labour.

<sup>23</sup>Ritchie, Catalogue, 15.

<sup>24</sup>Goodrich and Baur, American Art of the Twentieth-Century, 26.

<sup>25</sup>Robert Rosenblum, Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art, 223.

<sup>26</sup>Their meeting is described by Constance Rourke in her biography, Charles Sheeler: Artist in the American Tradition, 49-50, where their enthusiasm was clearly rooted in intimate knowledge of one another's work. For Williams' own account of their meeting, see Autobiography, 171.

<sup>27</sup>Just as Sheeler's final image of America was a composite one, based on the selection of aspects of different single images, so Williams' final image of, for example, Paterson was the result of a similar selection of salient details and information brought together from individuated inquiries into that city.

<sup>28</sup>SE, 231.

<sup>29</sup>Martin Friedman, "The Art of Charles Sheeler: Americana in a Vacuum," Catalogue to Exhibition of Works of Charles Sheeler, 34.

<sup>30</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted by Rourke, Sheeler, 119.

<sup>33</sup>Friedman, 44.

<sup>34</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted by Rourke, 118.

<sup>36</sup>Friedman, 36.

<sup>37</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>39</sup>Charles Millard, "The Photography of Charles Sheeler," Catalogue to Sheeler, 81.

<sup>40</sup>The Art of William Carlos Williams, 42.  
But see, in particular, Demuth's "After Sir Christopher Wren" (1920) in Appendix 2.

<sup>41</sup>See Calvin Tomkins, Ahead of the Game, 29-31.

<sup>42</sup>Shahn, in The Shape of Content, later argued in similar fashion that:

form is the shape of content . . . form could not possibly exist without a content of some kind. It would be and apparently is impossible to conceive of form as apart from content. (60)

<sup>43</sup>Used by Williams in the compilation of Kora's preface, 17-18.



<sup>44</sup>"Dimensionality in Dr. Williams' Paterson,"  
A Profile of William Carlos Williams, 98.

<sup>45</sup>Guimond, The Art of William Carlos Williams, 44.

<sup>46</sup>See IW where Williams discusses the cover of Al Que Quiere (1917):

The figure on the cover was taken from a design on a pebble. To me the design looked like a dancer, and the effect of the dancer was very important--a natural, completely individual pattern. The artist made the outline around the pebble too geometrical; it should have been irregular, as the pebble was. (18)

<sup>47</sup>Particularly relevant here are Olson's remarks in his essay "Projective Verse" on the displacement of the sentence by the breath-group. See Human Universe, 57.

<sup>48</sup>The Modern Century, 68.

<sup>49</sup>Williams' Autobiography records his deliberate attempt to lead a life of normalcy and to write out of a specifically ordinary context:

My furious wish was to be normal, undrunk, balanced in everything. I would marry (but not yet!) have children and still write, in fact, therefore to write. I would not court disease, live in the slums for the sake of art, give lice a holiday. I would not die for art, but live for it, grimly! and work, work, work (like Pop), beat the game and be free (like Mom, poor soul!) to write. . . . (51)

<sup>50</sup>Rosenblum, Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art, 70.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>52</sup>Rosenblum cites as pertinent example Gris' "Table" (1914) which incorporates the headline "Le Vrai et Le Faux" and by so doing "verbally announces the cubist theme of ambiguous identities." (121)

<sup>53</sup>An inquiry reflected in the parodic structures of The Great American Novel, In the American Grain and Kora in Hell and Spring and All.

<sup>54</sup>Frye, The Modern Century, 63.

<sup>55</sup>The title of a recent biography of Pollock by B. H. Friedman is Energy Made Visible, New York, 1972.

<sup>56</sup>Duncan, in defining the qualities of Olson's Maximus Poems, relates the movement of thought they express to:

the beauty of an archer hitting the mark.  
Referred to its source in the act, the intellect actually manifest as energy, as presence in doing, is the measure of our arete (as vision, claritas, light, illumination, was the measure of Medieval arete).

That aesthetic in which "conception cannot be abstracted from doing" is clearly relevant to the verbal energies of Williams. "Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's Maximus Poems," 36.

<sup>57</sup>See Harold Rosenberg, The Tradition of the New, 26.

<sup>58</sup>"Of Modern Poetry," The Palm at the End of the Mind, 174-175.

<sup>59</sup>For further amplification of the cubist interest in mathematical terminology, see Gray, Cubist Aesthetic Theories, 71-74.

<sup>60</sup>Kurt Schwitters, for whom collage remained the most important means of communication, argued similarly when he declared that "even striving for expression in a work of art is harmful to art." Schwitters maintained that:

Art is an archprinciple, as sublime as the god-head, as inexplicable as life, undefinable and without purpose. The work of art is created by an artistic evaluation of its elements. I know only how I do it; I know only my material, from which I derive, to what end I know not.

<sup>61</sup>The essential analogy is with music. Williams argues for the "movement of an animal" (126), rejecting the more mechanical music of Swinburne. Moore's work is thus clarifying "in its movements as a wild animal whose walk corrects that of men" (123).

<sup>62</sup>He also refers to Moore's poem "Marriage" as an "anthology of transit" (123).

<sup>63</sup>Paterson, 11-13.

<sup>64</sup>Olson in "The Kingfishers," citing Heraclitus, states:

What does not change / is the will to change

New American Poetry, 2.

<sup>65</sup>See Williams' stress on this concept in Novelette:

The compositions that are smoothed, consecutive are disjointed. Dis-jointed. They bear no relation to anything in the world or in the mind. (11)

<sup>66</sup>See, for example, Spring, 34-35.

<sup>67</sup>"Des Possibilités de la Peinture," the transatlantic review 1, 6 (June, 1924), 482-486; 11, 1 (July, 1924), 75-79. Translated by D. H. Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, 142-143.

<sup>68</sup>See in particular his chapter entitled "Juan Gris" in Novelette.

<sup>69</sup>Ruth Grogan, in her essay "The Influence of Painting on William Carlos Williams," argues that:

perception of roses involves the structure of mathematics.

William Carlos Williams; A Critical Anthology, ed. Charles Tomlinson, 276.

<sup>70</sup>Lipman, in American Primitive Painting, argues Sheeler's debt to formative influences of Pennsylvanian folk-painters. Michael Weaver, in William Carlos Williams, calls the Precisionists "Modern Primitives" (61).

<sup>71</sup>Rourke details Sheeler's list of Shaker artefacts in Charles Sheeler, 99. Williams' knowledge of Sheeler's collection is mentioned in his introduction to the works of that painter, reprinted in SE. See, in particular, 232.

<sup>72</sup>Tradition, 18. See also a similar position attempted by Paul Klee who argued that:

It is a great difficulty and a great necessity to have to start with the smallest. I want to be as though newborn, knowing nothing, absolutely nothing, about Europe; ignoring poets and fashions, to be almost primitive. Then I want to do something very modest; to work out by myself a tiny, formal motive, one that my pencil will be able to hold without any technique. One favourable moment is enough. The little thing is easily and concisely set down. It's already done! It was a tiny but real affair, and someday, through the repetition of such small but original deeds, there will come one work upon which I can really build.

"On Modern Art," trans. by Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, reprinted in Modern Artists on Art, New York, 1945, 442.

<sup>73</sup>Werner Haftman makes an interesting observation on this interest in and enthusiasm for primitivism in the arts:

This passionate interest in primordial artistic expression spread more and more. In the last decade of the nineteenth century children's drawings were "discovered": Paul Klee was soon to experiment with their formal characteristics. Ethnologists began to appreciate the artistic value of their pictorial 'documents' and Picasso and Kirchner were soon to draw upon the consequences of this discovery. . . . The primitive, the daemonic, the archaic: behind them the modern mind sensed the old magical unity between man and his environment. A yearning was born to return to this magical world. In terms of the history of ideas, we witness a powerful resurgence of the romantic longings that had been repressed by the positivism of the nineteenth century. But from the standpoint of art, we witness an active search for the symbols and pictorial forms by means of which man secured his hold on the world of things in a bygone age when man and object were still one.

Painting in the Twentieth Century, 167.

<sup>74</sup>See, in The Desert Music, his eventual frustration with the quiet decorum of the Indians:

Why don't these Indians get over this  
nauseating prattle about their souls and  
sing us something else for a change? (115)

<sup>75</sup>Goodrich and Baur, in American Art of the Twentieth Century, suggest that such "roughness" has always been a characteristic of American art. They point out that:

In early times, there were few art schools, and most artists were largely self-taught. Many were artisans--carpenters, house painters, sign and carriage painters--who never graduated into professionalism. But they had certain qualities that more sophisticated artists had lost. The primitive artist cut straight to the heart of things. Instinctively, without theorizing, he realized that art is not the photographic copying of nature but the creation of a pictorial equivalent for nature. He retained the craftsmen's respect for the physical substance and structure of the work of art. His eye was an innocent one, concerned more with the object itself than its illusory appearances. He had an innate gift for simplification, for recording the essentials. And if he was gifted, he had an instinctive feeling for form and colour and line, and the patterns they created. So his art, within definite limits, represented something sound and pure that had been lost in the complexities of nature. (26)

<sup>76</sup>Linda Wagner, The Prose of William Carlos Williams,  
20.

<sup>77</sup>IW, 42-43.

<sup>78</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>79</sup>Janis and Blesch, Collage, 3.

<sup>80</sup>Lipman, American Primitive Painting, 3.

<sup>81</sup>Lowy, The Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art,  
quoted by Lipman, 4.



<sup>82</sup>Quoted by Lipman, 5.

<sup>83</sup>Lipman, 5.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>85</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>86</sup>Janis and Blesch distinguish five styles of folk-collage, ranging from pasting materials into a decorative design to creating a 3-D object by sticking, for example, shells onto a bottle. See, in particular, Collage, 3-4.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>88</sup>Williams acknowledged the sonnet as the tyrannical representative of mechanical form and Yvor Winters as its chief apologist whose poems he referred to as "tight, hopeless, sterile" (SL, 227). See also SE, 236.

<sup>89</sup>In I Wanted to Write, Williams himself discussed this dilemma central to his development:

It is curious that I was so preoccupied with the studied elegance of Keats on the one hand and with the raw vigor of Whitman on the other. (8)

<sup>90</sup>"Pages from a Notebook," quoted by Donald M. Allen, The New American Poetry, 401.

<sup>91</sup>Olson, Human Universe and Other Essays, 140.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>93</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 52-53. M. L. Rosenthal suggests that Olson may have derived a notion or two from Dylan Thomas' description of his poetry as a "moving column of words" and from his image of "blaspheming down the stations of the breath," "as well as from his sexually coloured notion of the dialectical process by which a poem grows, finding its own antitheses to the original impulse and then its syntheses beyond that." The New Poets, 145. Olson's description, however, of the

poem as a "composition by field" is a direct extension of the aesthetic position Williams carefully articulated in numerous critical statements.

<sup>95</sup>Human Universe, 4.

<sup>96</sup>"Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's Maximus," The Review, 36.

<sup>97</sup>Robert Creeley argues that "A Poetry denies its end in any descriptive act, I mean any act which leaves the attention outside the poem." "To Define," quoted in The New American Poetry, 408.

<sup>98</sup>Human Universe, 55.

<sup>99</sup>Williams argued that:

It is in the minutiae--in the minute organization of the words and their relationship in a composition that the seriousness and value of a work of writing exist--NOT in the sentiments, ideas, schemes portrayed. (SE, 109)

<sup>100</sup>He referred to such a poem as "the commonplace opaque board covered with vain curlicues" (SE, 129), arguing that "It is unclear / which is not straight to the mark" (CEP, 258).

<sup>101</sup>CEP, 353.

<sup>102</sup>Williams includes in Book IV of Paterson an interview involving a poem acknowledged as a "fashionable grocery list" (P, 262).

<sup>103</sup>Poets of Reality, 293.

<sup>104</sup>See Note 7 to Chapter Two.

<sup>105</sup>Christopher Gray points to the Cubists' own awareness and preoccupation with this concept, arguing that:

It is the vitalism and relativism of the approach of the twentieth century which is to exert such an enormous influence on the early phases of Cubism--the acceptance of the concept that

reality for man exists only as an idea--that he can know no other reality--but that it is a living, changing, progressing idea, an idea of which the central element is life, change and progress.

Cubist Aesthetic Theories, 71.

<sup>106</sup>Poets of Reality, 304.

<sup>107</sup>The important parallel here is with Auden's "Musee Des Beaux Arts" in which the individual painting is subordinated to the general statement Auden has distilled prior to the act of writing the poem.

<sup>108</sup>Poets of Reality, 293.

<sup>109</sup>Alan Ostrom argues that:

As the Modern Painter dropped spatial perspective as the basis for their relationships, Williams dropped the "perspective" of temporal and syntactical (causal) relationships.

The Poetic World of William Carlos Williams, 126.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 728.

<sup>111</sup>Pound, in his ABC of Reading, makes a similar point when he states that:

The term "meaning" cannot be restricted to strictly intellectual or "coldly intellectual" significance. The how much you mean it, the how you feel about meaning it, can all be "put into language." New York, 1960, 47-48.

<sup>112</sup>Human Universe, 55.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>117</sup>Prose from Spring and All, reprinted in Imaginations,  
88.

<sup>118</sup>The Cubist Painters, 94.

<sup>119</sup>Randall Jarrell, Poetry and the Age, 263.

<sup>120</sup>Harvey Gross, Sound and Form in Modern Poetry, 309.

<sup>121</sup>Edge of the Image, 130.

## CHAPTER FOUR

"Writing"



(i)

Al Que Quiere (1917) represents a primary expression of Williams' predilection for the real.<sup>1</sup> The poems, in their manifestation of the poet's stress on speech rhythms as vital poetic energy and structure, begin that immersion in flux which Williams argued in The Wanderer (1914)<sup>2</sup> was the prerequisite for any confrontation with the hidden, inner self.<sup>3</sup> In ending the "obscure with the actual,"<sup>4</sup> he aligned himself specifically with the painters who had initiated the destruction of art's "beautiful illusion"<sup>5</sup> by their concentration on claritas<sup>6</sup> and intensified focus in their reconstitution of the external world.

If the obscure signified for Williams that sentimental overlay he associated with representational art, the actual came gradually to mean a more and more frequent use of found materials, linguistic tokens of his society's idiosyncratic nature. An obsessive collector of verbal idiom, as Michael Weaver has confirmed,<sup>7</sup> Williams began to incorporate into his work that societal presence, grounded in the fact of its own signs and slogans, that revealed both its compulsive materialism and his own ambivalent attitude toward it. In January, for example, the "legend in gold letters on the window of the abandoned saloon":

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implicitly draws attention to this "sense of the actual" (NOP, 304) whereby America's original Olympian promise is set ironically against the corruption of time.<sup>8</sup> Further manifestations of the actual suggest a growing absorption in utilizing manufactured slogans--the medicinal and traffic signs of Della Primavera Transportata Al Morale,<sup>9</sup> the trompe l'oeil neon SODA sign of "The Attic Which Is Desire," the spatial context of Lee's Lunch Window in "Brilliant Sad Sun" (CEP, 324)<sup>10</sup>--as elements which refuse further modification within the composition. Rather their factual presence anchors the metaphorical thrust of the poem in a banal but immediate reality.

The frequency, however, of such linguistic "reminders" is merely symptomatic of Williams' obsession with the actual--that continuing compulsion to get things, linguistic things like Kenner's syntactical cat,<sup>11</sup> back into poetry.<sup>12</sup> The colloquial voices of Al Que Quiere demonstrate Williams' intent to return the people of America, long secluded by alien speech, to poems whose idiomatic energies refute the separation of Art and Life.<sup>13</sup> The evolution of Williams' speaking voice--charged with but clearly not synonymous with those idiomatic energies<sup>14</sup>--is the earliest manifestation of that impulse toward "immersion" the poet had previously talked of. The impulse engenders too Williams' concern with the local and the relationship between inner and outer

worlds he expressed as "No ideas but in things." It provokes, in "The Red Wheelbarrow," for example, experimentation in visual form, particularly in the spatial disposition of words to stress their individual presence as something stronger than their syntactical function alone allows.<sup>15</sup>

In general, the impulse toward the actual lead Williams into a poetry of textures, the immediate expression of which was the deliberate disruption of poetic continuity<sup>16</sup> by a structural disjointedness. Intensifying tonal dislocation by the spatial disposition of compositional elements, he evolved structures of varying densities whereby his formal voice as poet was brought into ambiguous play with that public voice introduced by found materials. It was, for Williams, at once an antidote to creeping dogmatism--that Academic condition<sup>17</sup> he consistently reviled--and a further assertion of the need to ground the poem in idiomatic vitality. Thus, in its wider ramification, the actual is an extension of Williams' insistence on the local where local involves the aesthetic of immediate objects articulated by a specific local speech and retaining their individual presence only within their contexts.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the poetry of texture fulfills Williams' demand for a structural energy consonant with reality.<sup>19</sup> What results is an organizational surface broken by the introduction of non-poetic materials ranging from interjections and personal oaths<sup>20</sup> to "alien" rhythms of advertising and commerce.<sup>21</sup> This modulation

which recalls Cubist determination to disturb the fixity of pictorial illusion, committed Williams to experimentation in determining what materials could serve in such poetic structures and what kind of structure would adequately express those materials.

In essence, Williams dedicated himself to an investigation into the public sources of his own poetic voice.<sup>22</sup> It led him inevitably into more than a revaluation of poetry for his own speech was far closer to the jagged rhythms of prose than the traditional rhetoric of the poet's voice. The results of Williams' experiments into the nature of "writing" were the publication between 1917 and 1934 of seven books of prose and two volumes of poetry. And of these latter two volumes, many of the Collected Poems (1934), as his worksheets confirm, were initially drafted as prose. Prose thus quickly becomes equated with the public voice from whose unformed but dynamically expressive energy the speech of Williams gradually evolves.<sup>23</sup>

(ii)

The essential characteristic of Williams' writing during the 1920's and 1930's was its self-conscious "newness."<sup>24</sup> A literary radicalism, exacerbated by contact with Dadaesque energies in New York, attempted the "annihilation"<sup>25</sup> of traditional genres and sought relief from its insistent drives in a revaluation of "writing"<sup>26</sup> itself. The initial explosion, Kora in Hell (1920), derives its idiosyncratic character from improvisational roughness<sup>27</sup> and the immediacy of its contact with the creative process. Its particular methodology manifests an intense concern with the control and organization of those textures implicit in the release of creative energy. For Williams, continuing his attacks upon literary and human "fixedness" Kora in Hell's value lay specifically in its "disjointing process" (NOP, 25). What importance Kora in Hell retains for later readers rests in the tension between compositional elements of varying densities, overtly expressed as the confrontation between improvised passages (poetic writing) and their studied evaluations (prose). Thus, where there is poetry, Williams is already at pains to state the factual ground upon which the imagination began its dance.

The stridency of tone continues in Spring and All



(1923) where improvisational energy is refined within an organization which deliberately flaunts conventional "finish" to attack, in typographical play, that "literary" progress<sup>28</sup> imposed by the artist on his materials. Explicitly disrupting logical order, Williams parodies literary time<sup>29</sup> and evolves simultaneity<sup>30</sup> as a principle of composition. The immediacy of expression, however, and the stress upon the very activity of the imagination in its movement between old and new realities, results in Spring and All in a new kind of preciousity, specifically manifested in the separation of prose and poetry as contending textures within an open organization.<sup>31</sup> Williams rejected the completeness of form to express more immediately and intensely the activity of writing. Tapping the creative source, its historical dimensions pursued in Paterson, he was able to avoid the dangers implicit in arbitrary "literary" patternings. By those internal jumps effected by the principle of juxtaposition, Williams shaped his materials within an organization whose "energies" were human. Within such a world characterized by rapid shifts in concentration--by the mind's own flux--the materials were not subsumed by purposive meaning but revealed, like the Stripper in The Desert Music, within a new reality controlled by the improvising, releasing mind of the poet. The very purpose of The Great American Novel is to exploit the concept of a Novel's "progress"<sup>32</sup> by substituting an apparent "disorder"

where overt transitions are suppressed and where units of composition fluctuate between order and disorder in ironic counterbalance.

The Great American Novel "works" for its readers because Williams is able to make explicit in the parodic nature of his attacks upon genre a primary relationship in his work--the relationship of form to formlessness. Against the stereotypes of plot, character, causal logic, Williams opposes the playful, ironic poet's mind which subverts purpose, destroys finish and subordinates "seriousness" in Art to an energy which is clearly human in its roughness. If the Cubists had broken their compositions by including non-art materials and had set in play the contraries of oil paint and newspaper--the world of art and the world of man and the sources of their knowledge--Williams lets his imagination loose on the fixed materials and values of Literature. "What then is a novel?" Williams asks. It is "Un novello, pretty, pretty Baby. It is a thing of fixed form. It is pure English. Yes, she is of Massachusetts stock. Her great grandfather was thrown out of the Quaker Church for joining the Continental army. Hates the English. Her life is a novel--almost too sensational" (GAN, 173). Williams has clearly discovered in the stripped world of literary form a central metaphor for his public obsessions. The Novel becomes gradually metamorphosed into a continuing consciousness in America which suppresses local desires to

embrace European energies. Although in its purest sense a confrontation between Form and Chaos, Williams constantly moves that opposition into the public's world, by seeking individuals whose lives specifically embody the larger principles he talks of.

Williams' concern for the integrity of his materials is most strongly expressed in In The American Grain (1925) wherein the poet re-defines the past in its own terms by allowing specific historical documents their precise voice in their original context. Essentially, In The American Grain represents an inevitable corollary to the poet's fundamental problem: how to dynamize fact?<sup>34</sup> It manifests one simple answer in its inclusion of literal fact as an element of composition. Such documents provide for Williams a reply to Art's "beautiful illusion" by incorporating into the art-object that precise context in reality upon which the imagination initiated its dance. Documents, historical data, Williams appears to argue in In The American Grain, cannot perpetuate art's traditional "lie,"<sup>35</sup> effecting, as it were, a truthfulness which appears to ground the work in the "real" world of the reader. Whilst it is evident that Williams has merely replaced one illusion by another illusion, it is important to see Williams' structure in In The American Grain as an important stage in the evolution of Paterson. How to dynamize fact, how to evoke as personal metaphor passages of prose which stubbornly cling to their

representational function in reality, articulate problems which Williams confronted and, at least to critical satisfaction, resolved in the process of gradual accumulation which characterizes the structure of the longer work.

In Descent of Winter, Williams began to resolve a further organizational problem imposed upon him by the endlessness of that "curriculum of knowledge"<sup>36</sup> he had uncovered in Spring and All. Given so limitless a "retrieval" of information--"Everything in the social, economic complex of the world at any time-sector ties in together" (SE, 283) he later declared--the function of the artist was not to fix such "news"<sup>37</sup> inside limiting patterns but rather to seek an openness of organization where lack of finish was specifically related to the limitlessness of artistic materials and where the artist's function was not to shape materials but to balance their individual presence one against the other. As in Cubist collage activity, the compositional method is one of careful evaluation of materials, of the sensitive evolution of a structure where they are balanced according to the reality they express. What results is the apparent diminution of artistic "control" and the consequent release of a more immediate reality implicit in the unmodified nature of materials.

Williams' exhortation to "smash" (GAN, 171) Art, to "annihilate" (SA, 91) its "beautiful illusion" (SA, 88),

expresses a literary subversiveness which intends a radical revaluation of art and the stereotyped consciousness responsible for its production. "To hell with art. To hell with literature" (GAN, 170), Williams exclaimed in 1923 where literature is specifically associated with "Permanence" and "Beauty," traditional conceptions of Art's function he undertakes to dispel. By seeking new forms to express idiosyncratic American energy, by discovering validity in apparently irrelevant and irreverent materials, Williams began to clarify his readers' response to external reality, destroying perceptual platitudes.



(iii)

The immediate context in which Williams began his series of artistic experiments was that created and aggravated by Dada, whose essential spirit was embodied in Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia. If the international context against which the Dadaists "sang, painted, made collages and wrote poems"<sup>38</sup> was the grosser madness of the First World War, the more pressing social environment was New York, its brutal energies erupting like Tom Buchanan's in The Great Gatsby with absurd suddenness. Williams' own recognition of the befouled New World in In The American Grain as "a panorama of murders, perversions, a terrific ungoverned strength" (68) is confirmed by Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, wife of Francis Picabia, who stated later that New York had supported "a brutal life, from which crime was not excluded."<sup>39</sup> Against this background of "stupidity"<sup>40</sup> which he saw as his country's most overt characteristic, Williams created artistic structures undermining the very consciousness, linear and logical, syntactical and grammatical, which had evolved within its rabid materialism. If the basic exhortation was the annihilation of established means whereby such a consciousness was expressed, the dominant tone was "disgust," acknowledged by Williams, in a letter to Alva N. Turner, to be "my most moving emotion" (SL, 46).

The violence of that anger and despair characterizes Williams' writing of the 'twenties and 'thirties and finds expression as repressed energies seeking an adequate creative outlet. The sense of frustration which permeates Kora in Hell and Spring and All characterizes the later Paterson and results primarily from the difficulties implicit in that quest and in the continuing necessity for it. The manifestation of creative, personal energy as the fundamental compositional rhythm has its origins in the very violence of Williams' reaction to his world. Thus the poet's insistent belief, during this period, was in the power of the imagination as a creative source of personal and social amelioration, a dormant power within each individual. The poet's function was to "unlock" and "release" this deeply repressed power, a function which provides both form and thematic continuity for Kora in Hell. Clearly, as Williams later said in The Great American Novel, his immediate task was to confront his environment with an energy-release which rejected the sterile conformity of public consciousness:

The imagination will not down. If it is not a dance, a song, it becomes an outcry, a protest. If it is not flamboyance, it becomes deformity; if it is not art, it becomes crime. Men and women cannot be content, any more than children, with the mere facts of a humdrum life--the imagination must adorn and exaggerate life, must give it splendour and grotesqueness, beauty and infinite depth. And the mere acceptance of these things from without is not enough to agree and assert when the imagination demands for satisfaction creative energy. Flamboyance expresses faith in that energy--it is a shout of delight, a declaration of rightness. It is at least the beginning of art. (GAN, 200-201)

The immediate results of Williams' poetic demands were the improvised passages of Kora in Hell where, unlocking the conscious mind's syntactical hold upon poetic expression, Williams more closely approached the formally repressed area of self, personified by Persephone. Whilst the spontaneity effected by such a release was important to Williams as expression of creative potential within all men, it nevertheless moved the work too far away from the public world. Whilst men and women cannot be content "with the mere facts of a humdrum life," at least they must begin with those facts, sharing through the activity of the imagination the transcendence of that fact into some richer, magical reality, into "truth." Kora in Hell's dance, as Williams later stated in Spring and All, had been too intensely private, unrelated to that local ground whereby tangentially reader and poet inhabit a single, defined reality. The facts of Kora in Hell are addenda, refusing integration into the rhythmic organization of the work. And, more dangerously, they begin to clarify the mystery of the poetry, intent on making the metaphorical thrust of the improvised passages obvious. This quality of prose, as Williams recognized and utilized in the David Hower passages of Paterson, serves only to return the poetic voice to its place in banality; it does not allow the public and poetic dimensions of the poet's world a sympathetic co-existence.

Kora in Hell's "public front," however, expresses in

the structure of a longer work that continuing celebration of fact manifested in many of Williams' shorter poems as a predilection for signs, slogans and the mundane externals of his immediate world. Clearly, the incorporation of non-art materials into the poem and the sense of exuberant energy and release which characterizes Kora in Hell results from immersion in that Dadaesque spirit prevalent in New York from the time of the Armory Show. Indeed, the experience of Kora in Hell is as liberating to Williams as the poet's visit to the show in 1913 and his confrontation with the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp. The ready-mades thus suggest a pertinent context in which to view Williams' own utilization of found materials and a necessary step toward establishing a methodological procedure whereby Paterson evolves.

Ready-mades, as Andre Breton later argued, were "manufactured objects raised to the dignity of art through the choice of the artist,"<sup>41</sup> and were intended as deliberate works of non-art, common objects without aesthetic value. As Hans Richter points out, the choice of object was based on a "reaction of visual indifference with a total absence of good or bad taste . . . in fact a complete anaesthesia."<sup>42</sup> They existed as themselves, their cliché presence archetypalized by the viewer's awakened perceptual inquiries. Inviolable, unmodified by an intervening artistic personality, they were a concrete part of an environment whose art had

traditionally preferred to sentimentalize its garbage. In that such ready-mades had been removed from their original context and thus from our normal perspective upon them, they began to assume in their isolation a magically expressive quality. In "The Great Figure" Williams had attempted a similar confrontation with literal reality, revealing the 5 as an irrefragible part of experience. In such a poem, Reality and Art, the fabric of humdrum fact and its imaginative interpretation within the poetic structure, exist simultaneously within the viewer's mind, causing the structural emphasis to be on the tension between the work's dimensions.

After his inverted "Urinal," signed R. Mutt, had been rejected by the hanging committee of the 1917 Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, Duchamp wrote that:

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.<sup>43</sup>

The bald actuality of the chosen object thus rejects as irrelevant such traditional concerns as "Beauty," "finish" and "decorum," opposing instead a factual life that defied "management." The Dadaist ready-mades are therefore a natural extension of earlier Cubist attempts to renew contact with the public world by including fragments of it--newspaper headlines, wine-labels, cloth textures--into their constructions. Despite their eventual incorporation into



the rhythmical organization of collage and papier-collé, the fragments continued to express a sense of a world moving beyond the artist's control as interpreter of formlessness. Huelsenbeck, one of the founders of Dada's "Cabaret Voltaire," had said that Dada's real origin resided in just such "a doubt in the interpretive function of art." He later recalled:

We tried to bring in life as much as possible--Schwitters with his little bits of raw life, life assembling itself in the picture. Then we went even further and denounced abstraction in art as just another form of interpretation, a search for some deeper meaning. Duchamp went even further with his ready-mades, things for which he gave no interpretation at all. One step beyond would have meant giving up art altogether.<sup>44</sup>

Duchamp, as Dijkstra reminds us, had begun to collect his objects in France but had developed "the implications of this notion fully only after he had settled in New York,"<sup>45</sup> the period during which Williams came into closest contact with him. The ready-mades, in their ironic dimension, confirm Williams in his rediscovery of the American world, standing as religious ikons in a landscape of "candy" surfaces. If Williams' intention in his literary structures of the 'twenties and 'thirties was to break down that "constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world" (SA, 88), its primary manifestation was in his concern with the deliberate incorporation of pieces of that world into his composition. How to remain "true" to such literal fragments and how at the same time to involve them within a new imaginative context, occupied

Williams throughout this period and established the polarization of forces between whose extremes of art and actuality the work constantly moves.

Roy Harvey Pearce has called one pole "the egocentric principle,"<sup>46</sup> seeing in Williams' improvisational method an abandonment of self to the radically autonomous powers of the imagination. The counterpull, however, has expressed itself as a desire to let in something,<sup>47</sup> uncensored, and to experience a direct sense of things "not in our imaginations but there, there in fact" (A, 362). Throughout a period in which "Purity" of Art was rigorously denied, the poles remain surprisingly inclusive and complementary, the tension of an individual work arising not from an overt contrast between the poles but from an intensified activity when both seek to express their presence.

Kora in Hell's sequence of passages improvised around a specific motif--the restoration of Kora's creative potential within each individual--reveals Williams' initial concern was to express as exemplar his own process of poetic creation and the exuberant energy it engendered. The sequence releases and expresses the poet in a vital celebration of that unbounded optimism central to American writing of the Nineteenth Century. The philosophical anarchism of Thoreau, Emerson and Twain, however, gives way in Kora in Hell to literary radicalism, tempered somewhat by the later addition of

prose passages and Prologue. These tempering processes whereby Williams had attempted to give his work a "public front" (6) had originated in the selective principles upon which the work had been formally realized. Compositional procedure reveals Williams' search for a re-alignment of personal and literary energies. In his Autobiography he recalls that he wrote something every night for a year with "nothing planned," putting down "anything that came into my head" (158). In this wider conceptual sense, Kora in Hell appears to stress the pole of pure creativity and to deny external reality any place in its open, democratic organization. The immediate reasons for creating so violent a denial of that public world have been fully discussed by Jesse D. Green and Michael Weaver but in essence they establish an emotional context of inner and outer frustration whose only possible resolution lay in the fullest possible release of energy. Clearly, however, that complementary impulse in Williams to let in the public world, to move beyond merely personal release and intimate self-exploration, began to reassert itself. The 365 entries were reduced to 27 and although the means by which each passage was created remains consistent, the rudimentary selective principle involved in Kora in Hell's final shape argues a more coherent structure than even Williams would admit. The final attempt to return Kora in Hell to the public world was expressed in the addition of a Prologue and in those prose notes--

paradoxically "more dense than the first writing" (5)-- which Williams intended as clarification of his initial vision. These "notes of explanation" confirm the poet, if only tenuously, in his sense of responsibility to the world of things. A final, perhaps more arbitrary attempt to modify his original gesture in denying "the hypocrisy inherent in consciousness,"<sup>48</sup> resulted in the poet's search for a public form. Williams borrowed from the 1795 edition of Metastasio's Varie Poesie the "arrangement of the notes each following its poem and separated from it by a ruled line."

Of his Prologue, Williams later said:

I felt I had to give some indication of myself to the world I knew; sound off, tell the world--especially my intimate friends--how I felt about them. All my gripes to other poets, are here in the Prologue. (IW, 42)

It was, however, not in what he said to his colleagues that aligned him with their collective experimentation in the arts, but in the means whereby such a statement was presented. If the impulse to attach a Prologue had in the first instance expressed a desire for immediacy of contact with the public world, the "arrangement" of materials transforms desire into obsession. Its "broken style" is at once assertion, justification and exemplar. In particular, Williams' utilization of and feeling for the inviolable integrity of his materials recalls strongly the transitional experimentation undertaken by the Cubists as they sought to renew contact they believed they had lost with external reality. Having sought release from public stereotype Williams began to reassert contact

with prose passages which actively evoked the context in which he wrote and lived.

Fragments of that reality, however, no matter how arbitrary their initial selection appears, are not ready-mades. Duchamp, as Hans Richter argued, had dispelled illusion by the use of logic. "In place of the illusion," Richter had said, "there is a vacuum with no moral or ethical attributes." The banal object declared by its very banality a nothingness which Richter interpreted as "being free from cynicism and regret."<sup>49</sup> Such a freedom was achieved by refusing artistic ego to intercede between object and spectator. Williams' use of found materials, however, attempts the incorporation of fragments within a compositional activity which whilst not modifying their individual integrity, at least demands their active participation within a new thematic continuity. Such elements do not declare a nothingness. On the contrary they articulate a precious world in which everything is fit material for art and where art and reality fluctuate in one single structure between extremes of ironic undermining and sentimental embrace.<sup>50</sup>

The primary attempt to avoid dangers of "graceful perfections" and maintain local contact manifests itself in Williams' use of the anecdote--the found data of experience--whereby fragments of personal living are metamorphosed into aesthetic problems raised and resolved by the poet. The



first section of the Prologue, for example, begins with a story about Williams' Mother which celebrates her energy and disregard for conventional morality. Within the organizational rhythms of Kora in Hell, however, his Mother becomes engaged in a series of alignments which characterize the longer structures of Paterson and which is especially marked in Book One where "The Delineaments of the Giants" are established in snatches of human contact--letters from a fellow poet, historical memoirs recalling David Hower, Sarah Cumming and Sam Patch--which constantly move the poetic into a specifically human relevance. Substantiating his own demands for the poem, Williams describes his Mother as "a creature of great imagination," whose indestructible virtue was "seeing the thing itself without forethought or afterthought but with great intensity of perception" (11). Implicitly, the anecdote confirms the poet in a context of creative activity where tradition is essentially located in fragments of a personal history. Immediately juxtaposed to the memory of his Mother are Williams' thoughts on Cubism, remembered and expressed from his conversations with Walter Arensberg. What results from such an illogical juxtaposition is a sense of artistic qualities which persist in the world and which Williams intends to tap in the structure of the improvisations. Thus, just as his Mother "by some such dark turns at the end . . . raises her story out of the commonplace," so it is, in Arensberg's view, the artist's

ability to "improvise novelty" which differentiated him from all other creatures. In the experimentation of Kora in Hell Williams sees himself as sustaining that tenuous thread of continuity the anecdotes establish. Williams thus involves anecdotes as the Cubists had involved wine-labels and newspaper lettering--to ground essentially abstract, aesthetic considerations in specific details of the artist's personal context and to confirm the relationship between the worlds of reality and art. Found materials, disturbed by removal from their original context, are re-located within the artwork's organization. "Meaning" results from a gradual accumulation in the reader's mind of correspondences between individual fragments working in juxtaposition. Isolated within his mind, Williams' memories of his Mother and of his conversations with Arensberg remain pieces of an incoherent personal world. In artistic juxtaposition, however, they each make a contribution to his general statement of poetic intent. "No ideas but in things," Williams has consistently argued and his poems record the gradual expansion of his original conception of "things" from the vivid realization of objects to the equally vivid realization of locale by the use of specific documents.

In rapid succession, for example, Williams cites remarks by Duchamp, remembers a visit Arensberg made to the home of that "old Boston hermit," argues for paintings created by men and women "without master or method," praises

primitive artists and delightedly restates Duchamp's alteration with the hanging committee at the Palace exhibition of 1917. Such fragments of Williams' remembered past embroil the poet in the immediate artistic context of outrage and confusion by establishing a series of alignments to justify the methodology of his own poetic structure. More specifically, the anecdotes reveal his intense admiration for craftsmanship in the arts and for the naive vision and direct sense of things expressed by primitive artists.<sup>51</sup> Of especial importance to my discussion of collage, however, is his celebration of those compositions which incorporate "real" fragments to destroy Art's obscurity. The hermit, for example, "paints the cigar-box-cover-like nudes upon whose fingers he presses actual rings with glass jewels from the five-and-ten-cent store," and Duchamp had chosen as his "composition" a pickax "which he bought and set up in his studio."

Williams brings his material into sharper focus by concentrating his attention on the work of Marianne Moore whose poems embody the very qualities Williams has admired in the other arts, particularly "freshness of presentation, novelty, freedom, break with banality" (13). The formal movement in this opening section of the Prologue has thus been a gradual progress from the personal to the poetic and the important establishment of an aesthetic context from which to judge his arguments with his contemporaries. These

are discussed in the second section where Williams is careful to allow his fellow poets the opportunity to speak for themselves, their letters standing presumably as unimpeachable testaments to their poetic commitment.

The second section discusses Williams' arguments with Pound, H. D., and Stevens. Williams' aesthetic position is established by implication, by their negative attacks upon him and by what the reader learns about Williams from their attacks. Having read Pound's letter, the reader understands Williams' concern with the direct treatment of the thing, his assertions of a local authority and his belief in an American language. Pound, in contrast, writes a throwaway literary style created out of his particular rejection of America and his cosmopolitan existence.

His argument with H. D. centres on the classic order of her poetry, its characteristic restraint which results in what Williams sees as "the desolation of a flat Hellenic perfection of style." In overwhelming exuberance the poet rejects restraint and the sterility to which it leads:

I'll write whatever I damn please, whenever I damn  
please and as I damn please and it'll be good if the  
authentic spirit of change is on it.

The vigour of the poet is a natural extension of Williams' argument in the Prologue's opening section and is in violent contrast to that language derived from "a science doing slavey service upon gas engines, from a philosophy tangled in a miserable sort of dialect" (16) he sees in the poetry

of his contemporaries. Having argued forcefully in defence of a robust and honest American voice, Williams moves quickly towards a justification of his own organizational technique. Importantly he applauds the principle of simultaneity which creates a continual present for the reader, a temporal zone which includes both past and present. In his letter to Williams, Wallace Stevens attacks the poet for confusing the reader by constantly changing the point of view. "To fidget with points of view," Stevens argued, "leads always to new beginnings and incessant new beginnings lead to sterility" (17-18). By refusing, however, to approach his material from a fixed poetic position, Williams celebrates the power of the imagination to stabilize diverse approaches to the object:

(the imagination) goes from one thing to another. 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.

Such a statement provides an interesting definition of the collage-poem, the essential structure of which is provided by the poet's search amongst his materials to locate that "one-thousandth part of a quality in common" (16).

The third section of the Prologue consists of Williams' own commentaries on his improvisations and provides, in specific terms, a poetic response to his fellow poets. The dance of the imagination, Williams argues, demands open poetic form. Indeed, it is by this very "brokenness of his



composition" that the poet:

makes himself master of a certain weapon which he could possess himself of in no other way. The speed of his emotions is sometimes such that thrashing about in a thin exaltation of despair many matters are touched but not held, nore often broken by the contact. (19)

Apparent instability, confusions and contradictions, result inevitably from the imagination's active dance. Such effects, however, prevent the mind of the reader from too tidy an assimilation of the poet's material. A poem, suggests Williams:

is tough 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. (19)

Within this context, both Prologue and Improvisations are related by the "broken-style" of their composition. The Prologue thus serves not merely to justify Williams' organizational method in abstract terms but to illustrate the method in the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated anecdotes and remarks. In the Prologue the individual stories retain their individual integrity whilst continuing to illustrate Williams' methodology. The third section, consisting of selected improvisations and clarifying prose notations, thus restates the main elements of Williams' poetic. More importantly, however, they make clear that Kora in Hell is concerned with the difficulties of making a poem, that the chaotic surface conceals a poet involved in that "agony of self-realization" which structures The Desert Music. Essentially, Williams is arguing, the unity of the Improvisations

is the result of the poet's obsession with the creative process, an obsession under which each improvisation serves to illustrate or discuss one aspect of that process. The prose of the Prologue thus fulfills an important function in Kora in Hell by making public the poetic commitment. Kora in Hell, I would argue, foreshadows Paterson in this use of prose to relate the imagination's private dance to the external world.

The fourth section illustrates my argument by discovering a personal metaphor for Williams' poetic commitment. Having established his insistence on scrupulous honesty in his relationship with Floss, Williams extends his remarks to his writing. "It is in the continual and violent refreshing of the idea that love and good writing have their security" (24). Indeed, Williams intends we see the Improvisations as an extension of the frankness of the husband:

I have discovered by scrupulous attention to this detail and by certain allied experiments that we can continue from time to time to elaborate relationships quite equal in quality, if not greatly superior, to that surrounding our wedding. In fact, the best we have enjoyed of love together has come after the most thorough destruction or harvesting of that which has gone before. (24)

The long paragraph on the work of Alfred Kreymbourg continues his ideas of the artist's "violent refreshing" function. The "transforming music" of Kreymbourg's poetry suggests obvious parallels to the powerful incantatory element in the lullaby of the Adobe Indian and in the Kandinsky idioms which Williams sets up as natural opposite to the stultifying line

of Eliot. In juxtaposition Williams places the Indian hag's lullaby:

The beetle is blind  
The beetle is blind  
The beetle is blind  
The beetle is blind, etc., etc. (27)

and Kandinsky's idioms from his Ueber das Geistige in der Kunst:

Every artist has to express himself  
Every artist has to express his epoch  
Every artist has to express the pure and eternal  
qualities of the art of all men. (27)

The contemporary artists with whom Williams identifies share with folk- and primitive artists the directness of articulation, the honesty of a statement made without artifice.

Against this Williams sets Eliot's "La Figlia Que Piange" which demonstrates:

just the right amount of everything drained through, etc., etc., etc., the rhythm delicately studied and--IT CONFORMS! ergo here we have "the very fine flower of the finest spirit of the United States." (27)

The Improvisations, in their brokenness of composition, are intended to replace the effeteness of Eliot's literary language with a brash American speech, and Eliot's sense of conformity with a muscular and irrepressible energy. By citing Maxwell Bodenheim and Charles Demuth in the final part of the Prologue, Williams informs the reader of those kindred spirits who have applauded the bravery of the Improvisations in this effort. With them he can insist that "Nothing is good save the new" and that out of their continuing experimentation in the arts there will be "an opening of doors,

though some of course will be empty, a break with banality, the continual hardening which habit enforces" (29).

Kora in Hell's improvised passages are not, importantly, finished poems but exuberant declarations of the poet's freedom to write and to improvise freely around the facts of external reality introduced into the sections by the prose passages. The need for the poet, Williams suggests, is to work from and to transcend that public world, to incorporate the specific details of his environment into a metaphor which unites public and poetic concerns. This need provides not simply the surface organization to the work but also its essential content. The free movement of the imagination, as the poet constantly affirmed, implicitly denies the restrictions of mechanical form but, mindful of the obscurity into which such freedom could lead, includes the factual base from which the poet has worked and from which the metaphor has evolved.

Williams characterizes the public world by its rigidity of thought and morality, by the conscious repression of emotion and by its resulting sterility. The prose passages, projections of that public world into the intimate meanderings of the poem, exude a similar precision and rigidity and expose to rational interpretation the dark side of that canal which the loitering poet wishes to explore and where the generative principle of Kora herself is to be found. The

improvisations refuse to acknowledge the possibility of so clear and uninvolved a perspective, celebrating rather the innumerable points of view from which any particular aspect of external reality could be approached. The world the imagination creates deliberately reverses the public view and sees the possibilities for new life in death, sees coherence in apparent disorder. The prose interpretation, for example, to section 111 makes explicit what the improvisations have immediately implied:

There is neither beginning nor end to the imagination but it delights in its own seasons reversing the usual order at will. Of the air of the coldest room it will seem to build the hottest passions. (15)

This world asserts a creative energy which thus renounces the causality of the public mind, that strict adherence to logical progression, and points instead to an organization which relates individual perceptions one to another by recurring themes. The abrupt and jagged movement of the improvisations themselves stresses that the reader must expect neither regularity nor formal rigidity in the presentation of these themes. What they rather release is a series of metaphors--the dance of the imagination, descent-ascent, the "quest" of a man's life--each of which gradually accumulates a widening cluster of associations. "Rolling up" meaning in this way denies the reader the stabilizing framework of classical mythology the title to the work would indicate. The resulting coherence, as James E. Breslin indicates, appears "fragmented, hidden, as creative forces are in the contemporary world, and



it must be resurrected by the imaginative activity of the reader."<sup>52</sup>

Kora in Hell, in form and content, articulates a bitter denunciation of the contemporary world and those poems which are an unfortunate reflection of it. Man's desperate refusal to acknowledge the "darker" side of his own nature and his equally petty attempts to maintain rigid control over his emotions reveal themselves in the voices of rationalization which constantly intrude into the body of the improvisations as voices the poet must answer. Williams conceives them thus:

kindly stupid hands, kindly coarse voices, infinitely soothing, infinitely detached, infinitely beside the question, restfully babbling of how, where, why and night is done and the green edge of yesterday has said all it could.

Kora in Hell, however, does take notice of the cycles of existence, does acknowledge the centrality of death to human experience and the constant possibilities for renewal which exist. Its coherent organization demonstrates a movement that is by no means a graceful progression but the irrepressible demonstration of the mind's activity in establishing its own correspondences amongst the fragments it collects.

To improvise thus involves the freeing of the mind from conscious restraints, from making "the usual unhappy moral distinctions" (18). The results of such a liberation manifest themselves in Kora in Hell's organization which

reflects the creative energy of the cycle of the seasons.

As Williams argues:

Why go further? One might conceivably rectify the rhythm, study all out and arrive at the perfection of a tiger lily or a china doorknob. One might lift all out of the ruck, be a worthy successor to the--man in the moon. Instead of breaking the back of a willing phrase why not try to follow the wheel through--approach death at a walk, take in all the scenery. There's as much reason one way as the other and then--one never knows--perhaps we'll bring back Euridice--this time. (11)

Kora in Hell, through its improvisational freedom, generates a creative energy which restores to a culturally sterile and wasted society the primal values, the principles of regenerations associated with Persephone. That there exists beneath the sterile surface of the public world a space in which essential human values can once more be asserted is a belief which informs the work of Williams' later maturity. In Kora in Hell it finds its most expressive outlet in the numberless interruptions, the irrepressible outbursts of exuberant energy, which punctuate the work. The "Whee!" and "Ah!" of the poet point to an enthusiasm and urgency which can be communicated in no other way.

Unity within the individual improvisations is exemplified by the movement of the first series:

I

1

Fools have big wombs. For the rest?--here is pennyroyal if one knows to use it. But time is only another liar, so go along the wall a little further: if blackberries prove bitter there'll be mushrooms fairy-ring mushrooms, in the grass, sweetest of all fungi.

## 2

For what it's worth: Jacob Louslinger, white haired, stinking, dirty bearded, cross eyed, stammer tongued, broken voiced, bent backed, ball kneed, cave bellied, mucous faced--deathling,--found lying in the weeds "up there by the cemetery." 'Looks to me as if he'd been bumming around the meadows for a couple of weeks.' Shoes twisted into incredible lilies: out at the toes, heels, tops, sides, soles. Meadow flower! ha, mallow! at last I have you. (Rot dead marigolds--an acre at a time! Gold, are you?) Ha, clouds will touch world's edge and the great pink mallow stand singly in the wet, topping reeds and--a closet full of clothes and good shoes and my--thirty year's-master's-daughter's two cows for me to care for and a winter room with a fire in it-. I would rather feed pigs in Moonachie and chew calamus root and break crab's claws at an open fire: age's lust loose!

## 3

Talk as you will, say: "No woman wants to bother with children in this country";- speak of your Amsterdam and the whitest aprons and brightest doorknobs in Christendom. And I'll answer you: 'Gleaming doorknobs and scrubbed entries have heard the songs of the housemaids at sun-up and--housemaids are wishes. Whose? Ha! the dark canals are whistling, whistling for who will cross to the other side. If I remain with hands in pockets leaning upon my lamppost--why--I bring curses to a hag's lips and her daughter on her arm knows better than I can tell you--best to blush and out with it than back beaten after.

---

In Holland at daybreak, of a fine spring morning, one sees the housemaids beating rugs before the small houses of such a city as Amsterdam, sweeping, scrubbing the low entry steps and polishing doorbells and doorknobs. By night perhaps there will be an old woman with a girl on her arm, hister and whistling across a deserted canal to some late loiterer trudging aimlessly on beneath the gas lamps.

The essential movement effected by the juxtaposition of the four passages is cyclical in that the reader is compelled to

pass through highly subjective statements to a passage of objective clarity<sup>53</sup> which returns him inevitably to the earlier passages in order to discover their meaning. Thus structurally the cyclical movement of the seasons is re-enacted. The process delineated by this means demonstrates Williams' belief that "The imagination transcends the thing itself" (24) and that the thing itself remains an integral part of that process.

Tension within the series is created by the conflict between the practical and moralizing public voice and the energetic speaking voice of the poet which attempts to answer it. Jacob Louslinger, whose very name suggests the loitering poet of the third passage, arouses in the poet's imagination the possibilities of renewal which redeems him from a sordid social reality. Rejecting the materialistic perspective from which he is publicly condemned--"Looks to me as if he'd been bumming around the meadows for a couple of weeks" (9)--Williams resurrects him metaphorically to point to those concerns central to his poetic commitment. The "Shoes twisted into incredible lilies" (9) celebrate the power of the imagination to effect so radical a transformation and stress the direct relationship between poetic "flowering" and intimate contact with the local ground. In the third passage the poet argues for the dark side of the canal, preferring to retain in his poems its mystery and irrationality rather than studying "all out and arriving at the perfection of a

tiger lily or a china doorknob" (11), a concept he articulates more fully in the second series of improvisations.

Williams creates internal coherence in his work by the insistent energy of his speaking voice which moves out imaginatively from certain images vital to his conception of the poem constantly widening the range of reference. This larger method of interrelating ideas is paralleled in the individual series by the cyclical movement demanded of the reader as he explores the relationships between four passages lacking causal connectives. The initial reading moves him inevitably through the passages in a strict 1-2-3-4 rotation sequence but the fourth passage--the prose interpretation--which frequently makes clear the poetics underlying the metaphorical investigations in the first three passages, compels him to undertake a less logical reading and to move at random through the four passages. Kora in Hell thus represents a vitally important stage in Williams' experimentation in formal organization of his works. In form and content Kora in Hell manifests a bitter renunciation of society and the sterile rigidity of its laws and minds. In his work, Williams renounces human logic by discarding the syntactical relationships between the elements of composition and creating a timeless space where morality and status are absent and where the only correspondence between men is that uncovered by the movement of the poetic imagination. Kora in Hell's improvisational energies render



absurd an entire social consciousness whose central metaphor is fixed literary form. Opening or "ventilating" literature, Williams had evolved an organization of relative flatness whose strength rested in the inter-relatedness of its disparate materials. Kora in Hell's newness was thus clearly related to the poet's vision of America as a Fallen World he must restore to its state of "garden-ness." In Paterson, Williams makes explicit his continuing sense of the relationship between poetry and politics by revealing, in the harmony of individuated parts, a new and honest "democracy" wherein all materials--people--could exist peacefully together. Kora in Hell's constant jumps reflect the beginnings of Williams' need to "connect things up." He had indeed compared his methodology in Kora in Hell to the superimposed planes of Stuart Davis' frontispiece to the book as "an impressionistic view of the simultaneous" (IW, 29). The principle of simultaneity evolved out of Williams' sense of fairness in the presentation of his materials--a fairness which became apparent in their juxtaposition and in the certain destruction of those formal mechanics which threatened to subordinate them to "meaning."<sup>54</sup>

Kora in Hell was for Williams a work of crisis. Like The Desert Music it marked a period of violent transition, informed by the poet's desperate efforts to renew his commitment to the art of writing. Whilst, however, such a commitment in the later poem leads Williams through his familiar

"agony of self-realization" to that moment of quiet affirmation which brings it to a temporary conclusion, his commitment in Kora in Hell resulted in a confrontation with a repressed inner self the poet had sensed but had previously been unable to release and express. Kora in Hell's declamatory tone, its conception as a strident literary manifesto, suggest that the definition of self Williams undertakes is accompanied by an ebullient feeling of relief, a literary response to that laughter and freedom he had earlier experienced in viewing Duchamp's "Nude." Williams, however, recognized in Spring and All that Kora in Hell's insistent declaration of independence from conventions of poetic form and taste, its mocking rejection of stereotyped precedents, inevitably courted the obscure. Unlike The Desert Music where inner and outer worlds are visibly reconciled by a journey substantiated in detail, Kora in Hell's plunge into self results in confusion, a confusion deliberately aggravated by Williams' compositional method:

The Improvisations - coming at a time when I was trying to remain firm at great cost - I had recourse to the expedient of letting life go completely in order to live in the world of my choice.

I let the imagination have its own way to see if it could save itself. Something very definite came of it. I found myself alleviated but most important I began there and then to revalue experience, to understand what I was at -

The virtue of the improvisations is their placement in a world of new values-

their fault is their dislocation of sense, often complete. But it is the best I could do under the circumstances. It was the best I could do and retain any value to experience at all.

Now I have come to a different condition. I find that the values there discovered can be extended. (SA, 116)

By letting "the imagination have its own way," he expressed dissatisfaction with conventional principles of artistic selection and organization and sought release not simply from the manifestation of those principles in stereotyped poetic forms like the sonnet but from the repressive selectivity of the conscious mind, perpetuator of public standards of taste and beauty. Kora in Hell was intended as an assault upon such standards, an imaginative dance around fragments of the external world to suggest relationships hitherto hidden from public view. Its suggestions were effected by abrupt juxtapositions which destroyed linear movement and compelled the reader to seek out that "buried coherence"<sup>55</sup> which removed the work from human laws of causality. Kora in Hell thus sought liberation from a repressive conscious mind not only for its creator but also for its reader, destroying his preconceptions, inviting him to see his world imaginatively re-created.

The explicit sense of release and relief which characterizes Kora in Hell dominates also Spring and All and The Great American Novel, both published in 1923. The later works, however, as I hope to demonstrate, reveal an organizational method in which energy is disciplined and in which refinement of the initial collage aesthetic and technique is clearly discernible. If Kora in Hell represents a vital

stage in Williams' rejection of fixed form, Spring and All, The Great American Novel and In the American Grain consolidate the movement, articulating a context in which "openness" is less a negative reaction against banality and more a positive affirmation of the imagination's power.

(iv)

The organizational difficulties raised by Kora in Hell and the Improvisational method remained with Williams throughout his life, driving him to the obsessional activity of the inquiries he made into their resolution in Paterson. The difficulties were essentially three-fold. Primarily, Williams sought to establish a relationship, at times a confrontation, between the personal poetic voice and that public prosaic voice which accosted him at every point along his doctor's arc. The second problem arose out of his realization that the "curriculum of knowledge" was endless, a veritable fourth dimension, and that each sliver of compositional material involved fine adjustment to the structure of his work. Corollary to such illimitability was the dynamization of fact whereby inert tokens of his culture were raised to metaphorical resonance, frequently of ironic thrust. The third difficulty which subsumed the other two, was the evolution of an open structure for the materials, flexible enough to assimilate any material accumulated by the poet in the constant search for fresh information--"news--about his environment.

These difficulties, explicitly stated and discussed by Williams in the very body of the structures he was



investigating, correspond with interesting similarities to the methodological problems raised by the collage activities of the painters. The collage impulse--"merzing" as Schwitters named it--involved the integration of materials and textures other than the accepted monotone of oilpaint. The primary tensions which structured the resulting compositions were those implicit in the visual and frequently literary confrontation between volumes of varying densities and between objects roughly brought into first intimacy by their juxtaposition in the work. Like the confrontation between poetry and prose, elements express art and non-art, order and fundamental chaos, in structures which fluctuate between the two. The result, confirmed for Williams by the creation of The Desert Music, is a structure which maintains a fine balance between both worlds, embodying a series of dimensions which polarize around the factual and the metaphorical.

Collage activity--essentially an activity of accumulation, integration and dispersal--also introduces the problem of the selectivity of the artist's eye. Selection inevitably implies the restriction of information not immediately relevant to the artistic vision. Collage seeks to create structures wherein all material can be accepted into the compositional rhythm and where found materials constantly reach back into the reality from which they have been taken to remind the spectator of an irrefragible actuality out of which the specific organization has emerged. The difficulties

Williams encountered in the preparation of Paterson point to a similar resolution of the problem whilst pointing also to the way that the basic collage activity can be refined to account for argumentative drive through the materials. Having accumulated so much information about Paterson, New Jersey, Williams' fundamental difficulty was to establish a flexible enough structure to allow for the foundation of two cities, created out of the same details, which would co-exist simultaneously in the poem. The city of Paterson, New Jersey and the city of the mind take root in the specific details of history and the poem moves at all points between fact and metaphor.

The third similarity between the painters and Williams in their collage activity rests in the openness of their respective compositions. As Linda Wagner confirms, Williams was concerned with the piece of work before him and his concern resulted in a structure of balances whereby overt "form" was replaced by an internal frame of tensions arising out of confrontations between materials.<sup>56</sup> The collage activity is thus one of constant adjustment, as materials are introduced, tested and assimilated into the composition or rejected from it. "Rolling up," the methodology of Paterson, involved Williams in exactly such a period of adjustment and frustration and led Williams to refer to his poem as "that impossible poem,"<sup>57</sup> impossible in that its final shape was but one of several permutations of materials

open to him. Paterson is consequently an expression of frustration. Like Wordsworth's The Prelude, as J. Hillis Miller reminds us, it is "a paradoxical work" in that its subject is "an attempt to account for the fact that the narrator has been unable to write the great work which turns out to be in the act of being written as he describes his failure to write it."<sup>58</sup> Like Pound's The Cantos and Whitman's Song of Myself, Paterson reflects its artist's preoccupation with the long poem "not as a form but as a process--a work with the capacity to grow and move."<sup>59</sup>

I propose in the following pages to discuss the three problems central to Williams' aesthetic of the 'twenties and 'thirties and to articulate a context in which Williams' activities and his development as a poet can be seen as an extension of his experimentation with literary collage.

# 1. Prose and Poetry

In Spring and All Williams argued a distinction between prose and poetry which, in its ramifications, justifies the methodology of that work and anticipates the organization of Paterson:

. . . prose has to do with the fact of an emotion; poetry has to do with the dynamization of emotion into a separate form. This is the force of the imagination.  
 prose: statement of facts concerning emotions, intellectual states, data of all sorts--fictional and other--  
 poetry: new form dealt with as a reality in itself.

The form of prose is the accuracy of its subject matter--  
how best to expose the multiform phases of its material  
the form of poetry is related to the movements of the  
imagination revealed in words--or whatever it may be--  
the cleavage is complete (133)

In its simplest contrast, prose is thus concerned with fact and expository statement whilst poetry is concerned with the energizing and ultimate transformation of that fact by the imagination. Williams specifically equates prose with representational art, "clever as may be in revealing new phases of emotional research presented on the surface" (134), and poetry with the paintings of Cézanne and certain of the primitives. Like the latter artists, poetry is not "BEHIND experience," it is "new, immediate. . . . It is experience dynamized into reality." Indeed what structures most of Williams' work is the very process whereby that experience is dynamized--a process which allow the reader to see the experiential data in its initial formlessness and to witness the gradual refinement of materials in the establishment of interrelationships. The overt intention is thus to destroy art's "beautiful illusion," revealing not only the finished work but the difficult process of discovery whereby it was achieved.

The tension created by the confrontation between prose and poetry informs Williams' longer works. Within the open structures such tension helps to allow the public and private levels of experience to exist simultaneously, each pursuing its own essential course and neither assuming



greater importance than the other. The city of Paterson, New Jersey, is a real city within the poem Paterson, its reality established by detailed fragments of its past and present. The collage of diverse materials the poet has brought into some sort of order--a collage of prose extracts from both historical and contemporary sources--establish a textural surface more consonant with the fabric of an urban world.

The restructured city's life stems directly from the individual perspective of the poet, a perspective which contrasts the original promise the territory held for its earliest settlers with its immediate grossness, a grossness directly attributable to the fiscal policies of its manufacturers. The prose thus serves to sustain the public world of Paterson, manifesting in the numberless voices who speak for the city, a texture and density which moves it beyond the immediate present of the poet. The city he uses for its metaphorical possibilities thus exudes a dimension the poet cannot manipulate. If the prose substantiates the public world of Paterson, the city, the poetic voice confirms that it also thrives as a city of the mind. This conception of the self as a city utilizes the very fabric of the outer world and transforms it into one or more aspects of Williams' aesthetic commitment.<sup>60</sup> Thus, economic blockages at the public level become metamorphosed into creative blockages at the private level. The process of metamorphosis,



however, leaves the public level intact, allowing the reader to glimpse the two worlds as simultaneously co-existent in the poem. What the poet's imagination effects with the fragments of reality the poet has assembled is open to the reader and the very process of transformation becomes an integral part of the work. An interesting example of Williams' need to ground his aesthetic considerations in the public world occurs in Spring and All. Having argued his distinction between prose and poetry at the theoretical level, Williams applies it at the social level to emphasize "the split that goes down through the abstractions of art to the everyday exercises of the most primitive type" (135):

there is a sharp division--the energizing force of imagination on one side--and the acquisitive--PROGRESSIVE force of the lump on the other

The social class with its religion, its faith, sincerity and all the other imaginative values is positive (yes)

the merchant, hibernating, unmagnetized--tends to drop away into the isolate, inactive particles--Religion is continued then as a form, art as a convention--

To the social, energized class--ebullient now in Russia the particles adhere because of the force of the imagination energizing them--

Between revolutionary and merchant, poetry and prose, there exists "The jump between fact and the imaginative reality" (135). In Paterson and The Desert Music Williams demands that his reader make this jump, a creative leap of difficult duration.

Whilst, however, the distinction between the two is

clear in Paterson, resolved at its metaphoric level as a contrast between the stone city and the eternally restless waters of the Passaic, in Spring and All (1923) and The Descent of Winter (1932), both works apparently the result of a similar confrontation, the distinction is far less clear. Indeed, as Williams' worksheets make clear, the poems of The Descent of Winter, like many of the poems collected in the 1934 edition, were originally written as prose. What both works strongly emphasize is the relationship between all forms of writing, establishing also a more specific context in which Williams' poems can be seen as a direct extension of the rhythmical movement of the prose. Not only does the prose articulate a poetics which justifies the very organization of the poems, but it expresses the vitality and energy of the speaking voice of the poet. The speaking voice, releasing immediate intimations of humanity, serves to ground the poems in an active colloquial idiom. The prose, for example, of Spring and All has the same function as the later documents of Paterson. It roots the poetic voice in the language and coarse energy of the immediate community. Whereas, however, in the later work there exists a clear separation between document and invention, in Spring and All the prose voice frequently intrudes upon the factual documentation Williams includes in the poem. The significance of Pío Baroja, for example, lies in his manifestation at a public level of those aesthetic concerns which attack Williams

at the personal.

Pio Baroja interested me once--

Baroja leaving the medical profession, some not important inspector's work in the north of Spain, opened a bakery in Madrid.

The isolation he speaks of, as a member of the so called intellectual class, influenced him to abandon his position and engage himself, as far as possible, in the intricacies of the design patterned by the social class--He sees no interest in isolation--

These gestures are the effort for self preservation or the preservation of some quality held in high esteem--

Here it seems to be that a man, starved in imagination, changes his milieu so that his food may be richer--The social class, without the power of expression, lives upon imaginative values.

I mean only to emphasize the split that goes down through the abstractions of art to the everyday exercises of the most primitive types--

there is a sharp division--the energizing force of imagination on one side--and the acquisitive--PROGRESSIVE force of the lump on the other

The social class with its religion, its faith, sincerity and all the other imaginative values is positive (yes) the merchant, hibernating, unmagnetized--tends to drop away into the isolate, inactive particles--Religion is continued then as a form, art as a convention--

To the social, energized class--ebullient now in Russia the particles adhere because of the force of the imagination energizing them--

Anyhow the change of Baroja interested me

Among artists, or as they are sometimes called "men of imagination" 'creators,' etc. this force is recognized in a pure state--All this can be used to show the relationships between genius, hand labor, religion--etc. and the lack of feeling between artists and the middle class type--

The jump between fact and the imaginative reality

The study of all human activity is the delineation of the cressence and ebb of this force, shifting from class to class and location to location--rhythm: the wave rhythm of Shakespeare watching clowns and kings sliding into nothing

In jumping from the fact of Baroja's life to that imaginative reality in Spring and All where the Doctor has become part of a larger, "literary" context, Williams has implicitly declared the basic impulse of collage--to make art's aesthetic

concerns one with its human root. In Williams' collage-art of the 'twenties and 'thirties, "the social, energized class" has its immediate artistic equivalent in seemingly fragmented works such as Spring and All, The Great American Novel and Kora in Hell. In these works, as in the political context of Russia, "the particles adhere because of the force of the imagination energizing them." Borrowing his imagery from the physics of Einstein and Whitehead,<sup>61</sup> Williams began to set his works into motion wherein the ideas, as Louis Zukofsky argued in "An Objective," "present themselves sensuously and intelligently and are of no predatory intention."<sup>62</sup>

## 2. The Curriculum of Knowledge

The confrontation between prose and poetry in Spring and All suggests a polarization of forces which informs all Williams' work. Like the noun-verb dichotomy in the poetry of e. e. cummings, prose and poetry represent the vital extremes of the writing spectrum, a spectrum which Williams encompasses in his development as artist. The distinction centres on what Williams, in Spring and All, calls "the curriculum of knowledge" (138). His essential premise is that "In any civilized society everyone should know EVERYTHING there is to know about life at once and always" (139). Such knowledge admits each member of that society into an awareness of the conditions upon which it exists and upon which he exists as an individual therein. The problem confronting



the artist who has at his disposal the articulate means by which such information can be communicated is how to disperse knowledge, and how to redeem it from inert factual statement and give it immediate relevance to his contemporary world. "Knowledge, / undispersed," as Williams argued in Paterson, is "its own undoing" (12). Certainly the individual has need of details, of details by which the precisely drawn background can begin to establish itself. However, as Williams warns, "The inundation of the intelligence by masses of complicated fact is not knowledge" (SA, 139). But it is just such knowledge the educators of contemporary civilization seek to impose upon the young. Whereas, Williams argues, "In other times--men counted it a tragedy to be dislocated from sense--Today boys are sent with dullest faith to technical schools of all sorts--broken, bruised" (140). The result of such an education is not civilization but "stupidity" (140). It is to liberate the mind of his reader and to release his own from any clinging remnants of an alien consciousness that Williams writes. It explains the ferocity of his initial attacks contained in Kora in Hell and Spring and All and The Great American Novel, violent reactions as these works were against the stereotypes perpetuated by the conscious minds of its "educators," and provides the essential motivation for the creation and organization of In the American Grain and Paterson. The latter works deliberately include fragments of the very context



they establish. At a national level or at a more immediate level in a sprawling New Jersey city, Williams confronted the problem of public ignorance by providing his sources as an essential primer for his reader. The lack of this vital information results in those "automatons" who populate

Paterson:

Who because they  
neither know their sources nor the sills of their  
disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly  
for the most part,  
locked and forgot in their desires--unroused. (14)

The problem of knowledge is its illimitability. Indeed, Williams believed that the "endlessness of knowledge" (139) was the widely-discussed fourth dimension. If knowledge is endless--for Williams "there is no end of detail that is without significance"--if new information constantly confronts the poet, the writing records the means by which the interrelatedness of objects in external reality is made manifest. Williams had, in Spring and All, praised Juan Gris' canvas for creating a structure whose interlocking planes created a geometry out of diverse objects. One thing, Williams argued, "laps over on the other, the cloud laps over on the shutter, the bunch of grapes is part of the handle of the guitar. . ." (110-111). And the interrelationships Gris effected had been established without coercion within the "excellent design" of the painting. At a visual level Gris' canvases elucidate precisely what Williams is attempting in the collage-structure of his longer works--to evolve

an elastic organization in which to suggest new relationships amongst matter whose visual or logical disposition is apparently arbitrary.

Knowledge, for Williams, meant useful information. "Inundation of the intelligence by masses of complicated fact," Williams insisted, "is not knowledge" (139). He attempted to break down fixed categorization of fact--those "dead dissections" (138)--by utilizing the power of the imagination. "All the information," Williams believed, "that is static in the liberal arts and sciences can, by intelligent understanding, be made active--loosed from the cupboard of dullness" (NOP, 295). The power of the imaginative process is communicated through the poetic voice, a voice which transforms the actual fragments detailed in the prose into metaphors of universal applicability. Williams was consistently aware of the need to move beyond the immediate factual statement and to attempt to communicate the significance of the isolated fact to the reader's own environment. The context in which such a metamorphosis takes place could be national as in In the American Grain, local as in Paterson, or personal as in The Desert Music. In each work, however, the essential movement remains constant. It is to attempt the interrelationship of apparently unrelated fragments of the poet's experience, fragments which if unsuccessfully assembled serve only to confirm the poet in his initial formlessness. Whilst the focus may narrow and

intensify, moving remorselessly from national through local to personal need, the intention and the organization such an intention engenders remain constant.

Williams faces the difficulties of imaginative dynamization in all his early works. In A Novelette and Other Prose, for example, his theoretical statements on the uselessness of dead categories is immediately followed by a series of images, each one complete in itself yet complementing all others and establishing a context in which the dry statement of Williams' intent can be viewed metaphorically:

A storm coming drives dead leaves. Well, what of it? It is that you are laboring in an old category so that it is impossible for you to see either the leaves or the storm. It is likewise impossible to draw a simple inference from these things and to come to a salutary conclusion.

Dogs by multiples follow a single bitch. Never have I seen two bitches together.

Frozen ground cracks open. A tree with a split that admits water will show fresh wood when it freezes.

A stone is darker when wet than when dry. Water falling free in the air is, however, white.

The pipe emits steam which, freezing, coats the roof with ice, which, melting runs from the roof edge and freezing, forms icicles there which, melting the water drips in the sun and catches the light as it falls.

It is necessary to put these things down not for scientific purposes, nor for their practical information nor for their originality or their wit.

Mercury shrinks with the cold, as water, when it freezes expands and floats.

When these things were first noted categories were ready for them so that they got fast in corners of understanding. By this process, reinforced by tradition, every common thing has been nailed down, stripped of freedom of action and taken away from use. This is the origin of trips to the poles, trips of discovery, suicides and the inability to see clearly. (295-296)

The images of Nature are not left as inert facts upon the surface of the work but carefully integrated into Williams' arguments on the destruction of the established patterns of thought and conduct. In each case, however, the image preserves its original integrity, its separateness established by the visual design of the passage.

As Williams gradually discovered, freedom from rigid categorization involved liberating himself from the repressive force of the conscious mind which imposed its tyrannical rule upon the individual. Allowing the conscious mind to dominate the creative process confirms the artist as but one more "traditionalist of plagiarism" (SA, 94), a copier, a poet of inertia. The poet's vital function, according to Williams, was "Not to attempt . . . to set values on the word being used, according to presupposed measures, but to write down that which happens at that time" (SA, 120). To attempt such an immediacy of communication led him to experiment in Kora in Hell with improvisations, writing down whatever came into his head in a deliberate attempt to retain in the language the poet's energy and convictions. The result was a work frequently obscure but always forceful and spontaneous, a celebration of Williams' identification of the year. The stream of consciousness, later given literal embodiment in the waters of the Passaic River, imposes further responsibility upon the artist. Like the Passaic, "the roar of the river / forever in our ears" (P, 28), the energy of

the inner, hidden self moves eternally just below the level of consciousness, threatening constantly to erupt as mere brutality if inadequately harnessed. The dangers implicit in its release, dangers which, in Williams' view, Whitman did not completely avoid, led Williams to see the writer's responsibility as perfecting:

the ability to record at the moment when the consciousness is enlarged by the sympathies and the unity of understanding which the imagination gives, to practice skill in recording the force moving, then to know it, in the largeness of its proportions. (SA, 120)

For Williams himself the perfecting of such an ability is, after the initial moment of release in Kora in Hell, the record of his development as a poet.

The collage of poetry and prose in Spring and All, The Descent of Winter and Paterson thus involves at a primary level a confrontation between the conscious and the unconscious voices. Clearly, however, the prose of Spring and All differs radically from the prose of Paterson. As Linda Wagner has argued,<sup>63</sup> Williams utilizes in his own prose the ramifications of that aesthetic position he has slowly evolved in his poetry. An immediate similarity is established in which the poems exist as areas of activity where the words and situations overwhelmed in the prose by argument, are brought into sharper focus and liberated from their initial fixity. Visually, the density of the prose textures appears to diminish the significance of the individual word; the spacing of the lines of poetry, however,



allows each word to exist intact, its integrity preserved. A particularly relevant example of Williams' intention occurs at the very close of Spring and All where the poet, having argued that poetry's liberation of the individual word was its essential characteristic, juxtaposes the prose statement and poem XXVII to illustrate without recourse to explicit statement the vital distinction he sees:

The word is not liberated, therefore able to communicate release from the fixities which destroy it until it is accurately tuned to the fact which giving it reality, by its own reality establishes its own freedom from the necessity of a word, thus freeing it and dynamizing it at the same time.

XXVII

Black eyed susan  
rich orange  
round the purple core

the white daisy  
is not  
enough

Crowds are white  
as farmers  
who live poorly

But you  
are rich  
in savagery--

Arab  
Indian  
dark woman      (150-151)

The visual patterning of the poem expresses its essential difference from prose for whereas "form in prose ends with the end of that which is being communicated" (SA, 140), form in the poem releases the individual word, establishing an organization which constantly fluctuates according to the

reading of the poem. Thus, in poem XXVII, a constant process of modification takes place in which the reader's syntactical expectations constantly shift. Within the poem, however, the "Black eyed susan" is both the flower, the density of whose colour separates it from the pallid flowers of the field, and a woman, the richness of whose warmth and personality separate her from the white "Crowds." Williams insists that both possibilities exist in the poem, allowing the reader to move at will between the natural world and man's relations with it. The process of modification also alters our awareness of the implications of a single word. "Rich," for example, which qualifies "Black eyed susan," suggests a depth of colour and thus quality in direct contrast with the white daisy. Whiteness, suggesting both thinness of spirit and physical poverty, relates Man to that world of inferior and superior beings, and "poorly" then subsumes both meanings of the world whilst establishing a strong contrast with the original "rich." "Rich," however, is further modified in the penultimate three lines: "But you / are rich / in savagery--" where the final word moves the reader into an area of human behaviour already implied in the vibrant colours of "orange" and "purple."

Thus, in his poems, Williams attempts to counter the assertiveness of his prose voice. The statements of the latter are constantly broken by the poem's visual order, an order which destroys any music extraneous to that communicated

by the order of the words themselves. That order frees the individual word from too rigid a place in the structure of the poem, allowing it full resonance. In a final statement in Spring and All on the distinction between prose and poetry, Williams argued:

I can go no further than to say that poetry feeds the imagination and prose the emotions, poetry liberates the words from their emotional implications, prose confirms them in it. (145)

The separateness of the individual words within the short poems points forward to the larger organizations of Paterson where documents replace individual words but where the emphasis on the preservation of integrity remains the same.

### 3. The Open Structure

Williams countered the spatial dislocation of experimental painting with temporal structures which playfully rejected literary "progress" and the conventions of narrative form. Kora in Hell's initial assault was expanded into deliberate parody in Spring and All and The Great American Novel where typography and thematic continuity embody a restless energy constantly at odds with discursiveness in art. Chapter XIII's heading is printed upside down, the chapter follows 19 and comes before VI--simple evidence that Williams rejects literary time for a concept of discontinuity.<sup>64</sup>

"What is time," Williams asked in The Great American

Novel, "but an impertinence?" (213), and his works from Kora in Hell to Paterson reveal organizational procedures which deliberately flaunt chronology and causality "to refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live . . ." (SA, 89). That "eternal moment," interpreted by Hillis Miller as the Here that is everywhere, is a temporal zone, where beyond accidents of birth and geography, the essential continuity of human consciousness can more fully be delineated. Like William Faulkner, in a novel such as Go Down, Moses,<sup>66</sup> Williams attempts to establish in the structure of his longer works an eternal present where past and present co-exist in tension and where the "oneness of experience" effects an "enlargement" in the reader as he evaluates himself and his environment against the worlds previous to him.

Williams' mockery of literary time demands a means of interrelating materials which is not dependent on the easy transitions of chronology but upon correspondences between fragments set in juxtaposition and uncovered fully only with the active participation of the reader. The ideas, for example, of The Great American Novel are communicated not by explicit statement but by individual images, set down side-by-side, in whose cumulative power a general concept is illuminated:

I'm new, said she, I don't think you'll find my card here. You're new; how interesting. Can you read the letters on that chart? Open your mouth. Breathe.





of time and the stability, courted by lesser writers, of events fixed in chronological time. Released from "fixedness," such events assumed relevance immediately applicable to poet and reader. Furthermore, Williams' flattening of time is an extension of his belief in things. Despite his urgent plea to see the things with clarity and intensity of vision, the structure of his longer works, particularly the way in which single poems are more and more frequently integrated into the comprehensive organization of a sequence or series of poems, suggests his growing realization that the thing exists in time as well as visual space. To know the thing thus involves an investigation into those historical impulses which have led up to its present form. The need to ground the object in its specific context--to know in detail the individual history of that object--leads clearly to the shape of Paterson where argument, things and source material are all intimately involved in the imagination's dance.

Flattening space had led the Cubists to consider more and more the specifically painterly nature of their canvases and to substantiate structures which, as their title of tableau-tableau confirms, were investigations into the difficulties of artistic composition. The subsequent concern with painting as form and content removed the structures further and further from the public world and denied the essential relationship between object and art, reality

and form, which Cubism had undertaken to explore. The introduction of non-art materials had served as counter-point to aesthetic involvement, rooting the composition in an environment and replacing the illusory space of perspective with a documented space of contemporary fact. The resulting shapes reflected not only the fact and the art but the creative process whereby the one had become transformed into the other. Similarly, Williams' own development reveals a movement from the rejection of literary time and the consequent flattening of temporal space to an awareness, beginning with Spring and All's inclusion of comments on the dangers of improvisation, that flattening denied the reader any entry into what had become a personal world of aesthetic self-justification. Williams had initially believed that the purity of the poems in Spring and All had effectively countered the manifesto-like drive which characterizes the work but the fragments of an unassimilated world, which begin to appear in Kora in Hell's prose and Prologue and in the advertising slogans of Spring and All's IX, suggest a growing need in the poet to ground his reflections in a time that is not the result of what McLuhan has called "a quite arbitrary pattern of sequences"<sup>67</sup> but of the inclusion in the work of stylistic fragments which evoke their original context in time. The difference between Spring and All, The Great American Novel and In the American Grain is that method whereby such TIME is evoked. In the first two

structures, anecdote and fact are paraphrased and modified by their inclusion into a compositional rhythm which is essentially "aesthetic"--an exploration of one or more difficulties of poetic process. In In the American Grain, however, where chronology appears to be as inexorable as traditional narrative progress, documents exude their individual reality in a structure which establishes not a history but a single temporal moment in which Williams and his roots in his country's pioneers--that process of alignment I have already discussed--are delineated against the incursions of their Puritan enemies. What finally emerges from Williams' works of the 'twenties and 'thirties is a growing discontent with verbal paraphrase and the evolution of open structures in which time is a dimension to each work substantiated by documentary fragments of earlier periods.

I have argued that Williams' organizational method in assembling Spring and All and The Great American Novel was in direct contravention of established literary conventions. Rather than renewing such genres as Poem, Novel and History, Williams parodied their peculiar obsessions. By playing with fixed elements of plot and character and significant event Williams mocked the singular logic upon which their literary existence was founded. Literature's specious "mechanics," which subordinated materials to causal functions and overt transitions, was broken down to ventilate the closed context of art. Materials, freed from fixity within the composition, remind us again of their original place in the larger world of reality and of Williams' concern with the integrity--the inviolability--of those fragments of his experience he works from. His parodies thus serve to remind his readers of his sense of art as serious game where the need for form and the absurdity of form exist simultaneously. The struggle to reconcile this paradox and the agony such struggle entails become in Williams' writing inseparable elements of structure.

If Williams parodies the mechanics of literature in Spring and All and The Great American Novel, he re-organizes

the mechanics of History in In the American Grain. For whilst In the American Grain retains the chronology of American History, the work does not equate chronology with "progress." The reader is not seduced by the evolution of Historical Time but is led into its "suspension." Here, outside time and its corollary of progress, literary as well as social, Williams seeks to establish a community of pioneers where a democracy of spirit exists beyond the inherent brutalities of society and those writers--"boilermakers"--who effect glib answers for it. In this "democratic vista" Williams explores the similarities between men, their common goals, their certain frustrations. In this ideal community, whose vision informs the writings of Emerson and Twain, Thoreau and Whitman, Williams aligns himself as artist with the central myth-makers of American History. As he cuts through the legends and distortions to arrive at their personal "truth," so he establishes a justification--and a demonstration--of his own poetic method. One with Daniel Boone in his acknowledged need to explore new spaces, to move out from the settled "literary" areas, Williams draws himself into a gathering of kindred spirits--Rasles, Poe--where all meaningful discovery is related to difficult pursuit.

The organization of In the American Grain is related to what Williams saw as the poetic and public condition of his contemporary world. In a foreword to the book, Williams



stated his method of exposing that world's debasement by juxtaposing it to its original promise:

In these studies I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which true character lies hid. In letters, in journals, reports of happenings I have recognized new contours suggested by old words so that new names were constituted. Thus, where I have found noteworthy stuff, bits of writing have been copied into the book for the taste of it. Everywhere I have tried to separate out from the original records some flavour of an actual peculiarity the character denoting shape which the unique force has given. . . . It has been my wish to draw from every source one thing, the strange phosphorous of the life, nameless under an old mis-appellation.

The documents thus express a need to cut through the fabric of romance and to answer those popular histories which perpetuate false myths and laud false myth-makers. They reveal Williams' efforts to explore the sources of America's social and poetic "brutalization" (105), probing beneath the false gods of alien cultures to uncover and name the native genius. The poet, in In the American Grain, seeks to substantiate a local energy created out of a local, factually substantiated, culture. For Williams the American:

wants to have the feet of his understanding on the ground, his ground, the ground, the only ground that he knows, that which is under his feet. I speak of aesthetic satisfaction. This want, in America, can only be filled by knowledge, a poetic knowledge, of that ground. Since this is difficult, due to the hardships which beset the emergence of a poet . . . the want goes for the most part unsatisfied in America or is satisfied by a fillgap.

Popular history has distorted America, offering only "heroes of antiquity" conceived by "emotional grandeur" (174) and consequently disregarding those simple pioneers who forged

a difficult relationship with the local ground. In the American Grain, in the generosity implicit in literal documents, manifests Williams' stand against:

The niggardliness of our history, our stupidity, sluggishness of spirit, the falseness of our historical notes, the complete missing of our point

by exposing "the hidden flame" (204)--that consistent essence of America which facts cannot affect and do not name.

More specifically, however, In the American Grain represents an early justification--fully substantiated by "objective" fact--of Williams' poetic voice whereby true and false ancestors are in continuous conflict. As Houston struggles to come to terms with an unyielding environment so Williams "trailblazes" or "pioneers" by implicit juxtaposition. Thus Williams' struggle to evolve an idiomatic voice for American poetry is one with the struggles of his true ancestors to root in the New World. And, as corollary, the false literature of the 'twenties finds its literary precursors in the false ancestors--those who tried to replace native energies with alien gods and cultures. In the American Grain's ultimate image of falsity is Christianity, its doctrinal presence most fully represented by the Puritans but most subtly conveyed by the very framework of In the American Grain which parodies Christian mythology. Thus the first chapter "Red Eric" uses the creation myth but inverts that myth to show Eric driven from his home-garden by the very coming of Christianity. And in an inversion of the story of

Cain and Abel, Freydis, Eric's daughter, is directly responsible for the murder of the brothers, Helgi and Finnbogi. As Man suffers under the mark of Cain so America suffers from the original sin of Christianity. As that sin grows, the hands of the Puritans laying its taint upon all succeeding generations, man's spirituality withers, materialism increases and language--as antenna of those values--grows pinched and mean. Williams' Christ is Aaron Burr, crucified by conventionally "moral" perspective, with "good" and "bad" driven into his hands and side. The bitter irony is further increased when Williams reminds us that Burr was at one time a theology student who, to be saved, "threw the whole mass of religious dogma from him." As Williams explains:

He's in myself so I dig through lies to  
resurrect him. (77)

Finally, Williams links Columbus' discovery of the New World to Noah's sighting of land after the Flood. The dove of peace is, however, replaced by birds of malice and destruction and throughout his voyage Columbus constantly reminds his Queen that his explorations are for "the great increase of God and his Church." But the "new Heaven and Earth" he uncovers displace that end and in it Christ's coming is displaced by "Advent of the Slaves," and "Descent" involves for Sam Houston neither a Christian nor Mythological Hell but a return to the land, to a knowledge of those local cultures which bloomed before the withered flowering of Christianity.

If motive and method are interwoven, the unity of the work is left to recurring images which relate individuals beyond the simple rush of history. To examine the use of motif in greater detail I shall examine the chapter entitled "Pere Sebastian Rasles," which, paradoxically, opens in Paris in 1916. The visit made by Williams to Paris stands both formally and imaginatively between the sad bigotry of "Cotton Mather's Wonders" and Williams' description of the warm humanity of the Catholic Missionary, Père Sebastian Rasles. Mather's writings represent the pinched obsequiousness of the Puritan conscience and provide a context, literary and spiritual, from which all Williams' works move. As the Paris visit was an escape from a more immediate but equally "brutalizing battle" with the "boilermakers in and about New York" (105), Mather's works are removed--estranged--by Williams from their safe historical chronology and made metaphor for a human condition which continues to prevail in the American 'twenties. The dynamization of such a document causes it to fluctuate between historical fact and present metaphor. The direction initially taken by the poet in his efforts to avoid that part of his National heritage was the direction taken by Eliot and Pound. In moving to Europe, however, Williams confirmed his imaginative sense of its restraint, recognizing in its people and architecture a classicism which would serve only to pervert his own energies. "I felt myself," Williams remembered:



with ardors not released but beaten back, in this center of old-world culture where everyone was tearing his own meat, warily conscious of a newcomer but wholly without inquisitiveness--No wish to know; they were served. (105)

His sense of being at variance with Europe is expressed implicitly in the conversational form of the chapter. Paris is represented by the "cultured tolerance" of Valery Larbaud with whom Williams impatiently speaks. Against the elegance of Larbaud Williams' speech appears naively enthusiastic but it is an enthusiasm which provides a necessary sense of the relationship between Man and his local ground. And it is this very relationship that Williams seeks in In the American Grain. Whilst, as Horace Gregory pointed out in his introduction, "one cannot divorce its theme from the voice that speaks it," In the American Grain is composed of many voices, each seeking a language to articulate their context. Williams later talked of his intentions, in I Wanted To Write a Poem:

The first chapter in the book, "Eric the Red," was based on a translation of a Norse saga, The Long Island Book. Obviously I couldn't imitate the Norse but I chose a style that was barbaric and primitive, as I knew Eric the Red to be. "The Voyage of Columbus" came next. I used the Columbus Journal, and I had the devil of a job making the chapter end with the discovery . . .

The tenochtitlan chapter was written in big square paragraphs like Inca masonry. I admired the massive walls of fitted masonry--no plaster--just fitted boulders. I took that to be a wonderful example of what I wanted to do with my prose; no patchwork.

.....  
"Ponce de Leon, Fountain of Eternal Youth" is lyrical, extravagant, romantic on purpose. (42-43)



"The Destruction of Tenochtitlan," in particular, carries on the conflict between the Indians, led by Montezuma, and the invading Spaniards, led by Cortez. The dignity of the native peoples, their felt and continuing relationship with their environment, is established in the evocation of their civilization:

Streets, public squares, markets, temples, palaces, the city spread its dark life upon the earth of a new world, rooted there, sensitive to its richest beauty, but so completely removed from foreign contacts which harden and protect, that at the very breath of conquest it vanished. The whole world of its unique associations sank back into the ground to be rekindled, never. (31-32)

Against this linguistic gracefulness Williams places the perfunctory militarism of Cortez:

The advance was like any similar military enterprise: it accomplished its purpose. Surmounting every difficulty Cortez went his way into the country past the quiet Cempoalan maizefields, past the smoking summit of Popocatepetl, until, after weeks of labor, he arrived upon the great lakes and the small cities in them adjoining Tenochtitlan itself. (29)

Similarly, Williams places the writings of Mather in simple juxtaposition to his own resurrection of Rasles:

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 make, who will fertilize, who will be like you 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. Pere Rasles, often suffering the tortures of the damned as the result of an early accident--fracture of both thighs, badly mended--lived with his village--alone, absorbed in them, LOST in them, swallowed, a hard yeast--<sup>68</sup> (121)

Rasles thus represents the full flowering of an American spirit which, whilst not Indian, assumes Indian-like characteristics in making a commitment to the immediate locale. For Williams, however, Rasles is source, a root in a National Past which the poet feels growing within him. As Catholic priest, as a figure in history consistently ignored or undervalued, Rasles stands against the withering spirituality introduced into the New World by the Pilgrim Fathers.

The language of Williams' description recreates Rasles' original energy and acknowledges him implicitly as sympathetic ancestor, veritable redeemer of the fallen new world garden. The original sin of America grew from the expulsion of Red Eric from family and homeland by Christianity. The settlement of this alien culture upon the Native peoples provided Spain, for example, with an excuse to rape. This first aggressive stage of Christian conquest ended for Williams with the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers who substituted a more insidious doctrinal violence for the overt physical forms of the Spanish. Whereas the earlier incursors into the body of America are named and are given some quality of character, the Pilgrim Fathers have no earthly leader and

are led by blind and unyielding faith. Whilst the early Catholics engaged the land in a conflict whereby each was in part ravaged, the Puritans, fleeing themselves, consistently interpose their God between the country and themselves. In the De Soto chapter, for example, the new world is conceived as woman, passionately communicating with her Catholic lover whom she alternately tortures and seduces:

But you are mine and I will strip you naked--jealous of everything that touches you. Down, down to me--in and under and down, unbeaten, the white kernel, the flame--the flame burning under water, that I cannot quench. (53)

The Puritans, however, cannot enjoy even so transitory a fulfillment and their obscene yearnings, repressed under doctrine, are fated to persist in the black unconscious of America. Williams makes this continuity clear by interrupting the account of the Mayflower sailing:

Their misfortune has become a malfeasant ghost that dominates us all. It is they who must have invented the "soul," but the perversion is for this emptiness, this dream, this pale negative to usurp the place of that which they really were destined to continue. (65)

It is particularly significant that Williams felt able to interpret the Catholic invasions in terms that create a relationship between their physical efforts and Williams' literary endeavours, whereas our vision of the Puritans stems essentially from the objective coldness of their own documents. Whilst Williams is not continually moved to condemn them, the literal use of their own documents removes them effectively from a sympathetic place in Williams'

argument. The cold prose of In the American Grain looks ahead to the cold clarity of Paterson's prose which efficiently kills the locale's wonder. Importantly, too, our knowledge of Catholic virtues can be gained from familiarity with any one of them--their most obvious representative being Père Rasles--whilst the Puritans remain faceless, without human personality. The Puritans have no leader. They were, as Williams in bitter irony points out, the "first American democracy," a democracy withering into mediocrity.

Rasles stands therefore as the apotheosis of Catholicism. In him Williams shows its advantages:

Catholicism gains in that it offers us ALLEVIATION from the dullness, the lack of touch incident upon the steady withdrawal of our liberty. (129)

This ability to TOUCH stands as the final criterion for Williams' view of History. He draws subtly to this single image all historical perspectives. So important is TOUCH to Williams that he sees:

From lack of touch, lack of belief. Steadily the individual loses caste, then the local government loses its authority; the head is more and more removed. Finally the center is reached--totally dehumanized, like a Protestant heaven. Everything is Federalized and all laws become prohibitive in essence. (128)

This emphasis on the image of "touching" results directly from Williams' concern for language and explains the methodology of In the American Grain. The use of the prose documents in the book is primarily an attempt to see their writers without the distortion of comment, free from

the dangers implicit in historical analysis. It demonstrates a determination to approach as closely as possible the true spirit of an age. The reader is compelled to touch his man and be responsible for his own judgment. The documents also reveal how closely the artist has assimilated the energy of his locale, how strongly his association with the ground has manifested itself. The true, literary ancestor, like the true American hero, creates an immediacy in his work which animates the very spirit of his locale. The artist, therefore, touches the ground in his use of language. He avoids, unlike the Puritans, cumbersome religious embellishments which stand in the way of what he has to say. He speaks with a maximum economy, absorbing himself in the essential task he has undertaken. To touch is to embrace passionately that task. This would explain, for example, why Williams refuses to allow Filson, Boone's autobiographer, to speak for his friend:

But when Filson goes on to declare Boone's loneliness "an interrupted scene of sylvan pleasures" it is a little too much to bear. Constant exposure to danger and death, a habitation which he states had been discovered by the savages, the necessity of such stratagems as the resort to the canebrake rather than to take the risk of being found in his cabin, have nothing of sylvan pleasures in them. Boone had too much strong sense to feel anything but patience amidst the scenes of his solitude. (135)

Boone's coarse vigour is ignored "by the silly language of his asinine chronicler" (135). The language makes no attempt to touch the heart of the woodsman. It prefers to create rhythms of style and life which reflected Filson's own



spirituality.

All ideas in In the American Grain relate essentially to Williams' concern with TOUCH. Their recurrence provides the work's continuity and intensifies at all levels the basic conflict between imposed and natural cultures. Each idea is exposed as an image to reveal a particular state of mind. Marriage, for example, is constant throughout the portraits. The Puritans, "bursting for lack of sexual satisfaction," and, "Unwilling to commit the sin of fornication," married to legalize their repression. Inside the official seal, they flagrantly violated the sanctity of the woman:

You know, I ask him, do you not, how other means being denied them, the Puritans ran madly to OFFICIAL sexual excess--during the long winters? It was a common thing for men to have had as many as seven wives. Few had less than three. The women dies under the stress of bearing children, they dies like flies under the strains and accidents of childbirth PLUS the rigors of primitive labors: carrying water, wood, etc., lugging brats up and down. (119)

Within so crippling a dogma passion degenerated into lust. Marriage, presumably for Williams the consummation of the image of touch, produced children but little love. Favorable marriages, however, can be made on earth and not in heaven. Burr's marriage reflected his whole disregard for stifling conventionality:

The Clintons, the Livingstons, the Van Rensselaers all had eligible daughters. Let young Burr marry one of them. Did he? It would have been a shrewd move if one were the man avid for political ascendancy. He married whom? A nobody, a widow of Paramus, New Jersey, older than himself and with two sons; unbeautiful, a scar on her face--but the most refined, courteous,

gracious creature he had ever laid his eyes upon. He loved these things, as in all he does, openly--in the teeth of the world. He found her an inspiration, one who opened his eyes to the blessed pages of literature, to the deeper values that he sought. . . . (200)

Each man is judged by his marriage which demonstrates his ability to give completely of himself. In the same way, Williams uses the Indian as a gauge by which to measure the American's sympathy with his past and his local origins. As with his other ideas, Williams' treatment of the Indian as image falls into three stages. The first stage delineates the main qualities of the Indian. The second stage records the reaction of his combatants to those qualities and the third stage shows their continuation into present-day America.

The Indian's characteristics arise naturally out of his intimate relationship with his territory upon which he structures his culture. As "the flower of his world" he reflects his locality. The qualities in this reflection are subtly evoked by Williams in "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan," where a flourishing civilization had emerged from:

the tribe's deep feeling for a reality that stems back into the permanence of remote origins. (33)

The tribe is stimulated too by

the realization of their primal and continuous identity with the ground itself, where everything is fixed in darkness. (33)

This "primary and continuous identity with the ground itself" is, of course, a further amplification of Williams' ideal of touch. He praises the Indians' directness, their lack of

fear and their "enthusiastic" savagery. On the other hand, he acknowledges their elegance and recreates it in dignified paragraphs:

The chief of Pacaha bestowed on him two of his sisters telling him that they were tokens of love, for his remembrance, to be his wives. The name of one was Macanoche, that of the other Mochila. They were symmetrical, tall and full; Macanoche bore a pleasant expression; in her manners and features appeared the lady, the other was robust. (53)

And their treatment of Hannah Swanton reveals an essential compassion and humanity.

Each hero, in his attitude towards the Indian, accepts or rejects their qualities. Thus Morton cannot be judged against a morality with which he could not concur, but only "upon the more general scene of the New World, in his relationship with its natives." The Puritans, for example, "afraid to touch" (119), treated the Indians with a cold correctness which Williams sees as "very ugly" (119). Their narrowing spirituality is manifested in the fact that "they cut the ground from under the Indian's feet." This act denies the very value of touch. In strong contrast Rasles moved amongst his tribe "TOUCHING his beloved savages every day," and seeking their companionship against the wilderness. Unlike the Puritans, he never attempted to suppress their energy, admiring their dedication, and enthusiasm. His religion could not condone such murders but did not impose its alien form upon the native culture. He becomes an ironic Christ figure for "These were his children." Rasles

demonstrates too his interest in their language, presumably like Williams, trying to understand them in their own terms. By contrast, the Puritan judged his Indian within a restraining Christian morality.

In the third stage Williams traces the Indian's personal qualities into the modern age. His deep concern to preserve the essential creative energy against puritanical attack leads him to emphasize the strong sense of continuity between past and present:

History, history! We fools, what do we know or care? History begins for us with murder and enslavement, not with discovery. No, we are not Indians, but we are men of their world. The blood means nothing; the spirit, the ghost of the land moves in the blood, moves the blood. It is we who ran to the shore naked, we who cried, "Heavenly Man!" These are the inhabitants of our souls, our murdered souls that lie . . . agh. (39)

And later he asserts:

I do believe the average American to be an Indian, but an Indian robbed of his world--unless we call machines a forest in themselves. (128)

But the Average American, the ground cut from under his feet by his Puritan heritage, has failed to discover the ground afresh. Modern America lacks the "shock and immediacy" of such a discovery. Instead "The characteristic of American life is that it holds off from embraces, from impacts, gaining, by fear, safety and time in which to fortify its prolific carcass--while the spirit, with tongue hanging out, bites at its bars--its object just out of reach." The Modern Indian, bred on religious fear, cannot reach out to touch his country.

He substitutes for spirituality the steady accumulation of money. It is part of Williams' purpose to disturb the American character in its deep complacency, to sharpen its sensibilities, to make it mindful of its past.

The main intent of In the American Grain, however, is to justify Williams' own preoccupations with language. For this purpose it establishes an American mythology which aligns frontier woodsman with literary pioneers. The emphasis remains upon the development of the language itself and explains why originally the work terminated with a chapter on Edgar Allan Poe. Poe is recreated as a mythic hero, an immediate precursor to Williams, in the line of creative succession which extends from Red Eric, through Montezuma, Morton, Rasles, Boone and Houston to Aaron Burr. Williams makes this relationship explicit and in this last chapter subtly unites his heroes:

His greatness is in that he turned his back and faced inland, to originality, with the identical gesture of a Boone. (226)

Poe is directly compared to De Soto and the inclusion of a line from the first chapter manifests a basic sympathy between Poe and Red Eric.

Williams' emphasis in his chapter on Poe is to suggest the correspondences which exist between the pioneer of the past and the writer of the present. It is also to state that in a leaderless democracy the writer must guide the



people. For in his search for language he moves towards an understanding of his locality and times. The very movement of In the American Grain points to Poe as the legitimate successor of the anti-puritan tradition in America, a line to be continued by Williams himself.

Lowell, Bryant, etc., concerned poetry with language, concerned it with the soul; hence their different conceptions of the use of language. With Poe, words were not hung by usage with associations, the pleasing wraiths of former masteries, this is the sentimental trap-door to beginnings. With Poe words were figures; an 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 . . . (221)

The initial thrust in the formulation of a new language came from Poe's anger with Colonialism and the "FALSE" literature it produced. He wanted to "destroy, to annihilate" this manifestation of Puritanism in exactly the same way Williams demanded a vision of history free from dogmatic Christian judgment. So vigorous a use of language reminds the reader of Burr's passionate nature and the relentless energy of Boone. But Williams' presence is also revealed in his own descriptions of Poe where short, stabbing sentences recreate his thrusting personality:

About Poe there is--  
 No supernatural mystery--  
 No extraordinary eccentricity of fate--  
 He is American, understandable by a simple exercise of reason; a light in the morass--which must appear eerie, even to himself, by force of terrific contrast, an isolation that would naturally lead to drunkenness and death, logically and simply--by despair, as the very final evidence of a too fine and serious devotion. (222)

Poe stands as the final flowering of the American spirit--"a

genius intimately shaped by his locality and time." He reiterates Houston's rejection of sophisticated society and the "smart language" it produced and returns to the ground. It is, in Williams' terms, "a new locality that is in Poe assertive; it is America, the first great burst through to expression of a re-awakened genius of place." Thus Poe strikes for originality, to awaken the New World in his poetry. "Disarmed, in his poetry the place itself comes through. This is the New World. It is this that it does, as if . . ." (232). In Poe and in Williams documents allow place to "come through"; the local is felt as an active presence in their respective works--something as clearly apprehended and touched as a woman.

I have already stated that In the American Grain traces the development of Williams' own voice, that his heroes establish a highly personal mythology from which Williams draws to substantiate his arguments on language. In addition, the Poe chapter synthesizes his own artistic methodology in the book by giving emphasis to Poe's method in his tales:

Of his method in the Tales, the significance and the secret is: authentic particles, a thousand of which spring to the mind for quotation, taken apart and re-knit with a view to emphasize, enforce and make evident, the method. Their quality of skill in observation, their heat, local verity, being overshadowed only by the detached, the abstract, the cold philosophy of their joining together; a method springing so freshly from the local conditions which determine it, by their emphasis of firm crudity and lack of coordinated structure, as to be worthy of most painstaking study -- The whole period America 1840, could be rebuilt, psychologically (phrenologically) from Poe's "method." (230-231)

This surely is the technique Williams himself adopts in his history. In the Poe chapter, for example, he juxtaposes his own energetic recreations of Poe's language to actual quotations from Poe's own writings. At times those quotations emphasize a specific point Williams has made. More frequently, however, the quotation retains its own existence, contributes to the more general discussion of language and exudes a strong awareness of its creator's character. In the same way John Paul Jones' account of his battles at sea projects one man's single-mindedness and enthusiasm in a detailed, disciplined log. In contrast, the only other unannotated document--Cotton Mather's itemizing of the witchcraft trials at Salem--shows that singlemindedness degenerating into severely limited vision. Through the use of prose documents Williams thus moves his readers into a deliberately personal relationship with his heroes, behind the façade of historical fact into a new reality where fact and imagination are subtly intertwined.

In the American Grain is thus a history of an American spirit in which documented fact is transformed into metaphor. The open organization, its use of literal fragments--the need to allow people to speak for and as themselves--and its creation of a specific Time and Space, move constantly toward revealing this spirit hidden beneath generalization and melodramatic legend. History, Williams argues, is not sequence or hero but a precise record of Man's betrayal or

encouragement of his human potential.<sup>69</sup> Moved, as in The Desert Music, by the individual's truthful and painful awareness of himself,<sup>70</sup> Williams struggles to realize only the human dimensions of the past demanding for his work that "it must stay open, it is all humanity" (189). Rather than "fabricating" metaphor Williams has discovered in the lives of real people details which resonate with specific metaphoric relevance to his own work. The strength of In the American Grain, like the strength of Paterson, rests in the clarity of that resonance which simultaneously permits people to be rooted in a specific context--to be literal, factual--and to come free of the specific in their larger metaphoric relevance.

To release metaphor Williams had to go back to source. This source is at once the spring of present reality and at the same time that Indian America dirtied by the coming of the Anglo-Saxons. "There is a source in AMERICA," Williams argued, "for everything we think or do," and without knowledge of sources, "we are nothing but an unconscious porkyard and oilhole for those, more able, who will fatten themselves upon us" (109). The struggle to reach source manifests itself in the very presence of documents which provide that initial information from which a more vital knowledge emerges. The average American, Williams believed, thought such knowledge arrived "out of the air or the rivers, or from Grand Banks or wherever it may be, instead of by word of mouth or



from records contained for us in books--and that aesthetically, morally we are deformed unless we read" (189). If "Literature" had a meaningful relationship with society it was in providing such reading material for its public. In In the American Grain and in Paterson the prose passages provide useful information whereby a "thousand automatons" of the poem Paterson can be roused from their deathly ignorance.<sup>71</sup> "Because," Williams argued, "the fools do not believe they have sprung from anything: bone, thought and action. They will not see that what they are is growing on these roots" (113).

Going back to source also had for Williams the importance of restoring America to its original promise, of redeeming a fallen world to its garden-innocence. He had gone back to investigate sources in the hope of renewing Indian-like qualities in the people. Actual history was consistently in opposition to America's promise. The original hope or "dream" is shown in active conflict with its degraded present. Whilst this opposition structures In the American Grain it also informs the methodology of Paterson. In an early draft of the poem Williams considered it:

A fragmentary sort of poem in four parts, strung together with notes and comments for what may come of it; a design to off-set the shortsightedness and indifference of the present age--a near Paradise what with plenty staring us in the face on all sides--by defects of a different order.<sup>72</sup>

In its very organization--those "defects of a different



order"--Paterson confirms the premise established by In the American Grain and implicit in the central image of Kora in Hell that there exists in Man a creative potential which waits only to be tapped. Paterson, Doctor/Poet, moves in his work to investigate the sources of America's creative strength, undertaking a difficult and frustrating "quest" to distinguish between its true and its false ancestors and thus to provide himself with active precedents for his own poetic activity.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup>Williams argued consistently for the "real" as opposed to the traditional fabrications (SE, 232) of the artist.

<sup>2</sup>I discuss the importance of The Wanderer more fully in Chapter Five where I examine, in particular, its significance as precursor of Paterson.

<sup>3</sup>The dominant image--explicit in Kora, implicit in Spring and Novel--is the figure of Persephone, embodiment of that creative source within all men which waits only to be tapped.

<sup>4</sup>SE, 232.

<sup>5</sup>SA, 88.

<sup>6</sup>Williams' concept of *claritas* is explored by A. Libby, "'Claritas': William Carlos Williams' Epiphanies," Criticism, XIV (Winter 1972), 22-31.

<sup>7</sup>His "correspondence files," Weaver argues, "were a living museum of the spoken idiom, which he drew upon in Paterson." The American Background, 80.

<sup>8</sup>A parallel to this in collage would be the use of materials that were faded on incorporation into the canvas or that weathered as the canvas aged. In this way time / reality / change became an active element of composition.

<sup>9</sup>I have explored the aesthetics of the social-banal in Chapter Three.

<sup>10</sup>Williams' poem begins where his experiences began--in the sad lunch window of Lee's Restaurant.

<sup>11</sup>"Syntax in Rutherford," from "Ghosts and Benedictions," Poetry, 113 2(1968). Reprinted Williams, ed. Charles Tomlinson, 306-312.

<sup>12</sup>Jack Spicer manifested a similar compulsion in "Letter to Lorca," After Lorca (1957) when he stated:

I would like to make poems out of real objects. The lemon to be a lemon that the reader could cut or squeeze or taste--a real lemon like a newspaper in a collage is a real newspaper. I would like the moon in my poems to be a real moon, one which could be suddenly covered with a cloud that has nothing to do with the poem--a moon utterly independent of images. The imagination pictures the real. I would like to point to the real, disclose it, to make a poem that has no sound in it but the pointing of a finger.

.....  
But things decay, reason argues. Real things become garbage. The piece of lemon you shellac to the canvas begins to develop a mold, the newspaper tells of incredibly ancient events in forgotten slang, the boy becomes a grandfather. Yes, but the garbage of the real still reaches out into the current world making its objects, in turn, visible--lemon calls to lemon, newspaper to newspaper, boy to boy. As things decay they bring their equivalent into being.

<sup>13</sup>Linda Wagner, in The Prose of William Carlos Williams, talks of this identification of Man and Speech. See, in particular, her chapter "The Unity of Williams' Art."

<sup>14</sup>I feel strongly that Williams' voice is more literary than he himself would acknowledge. Part--possibly only a small part--of his reasons for including prose into his compositions is to remind himself of that reality upon which he is basing his speech.

<sup>15</sup>I have explored the implications of this aesthetic in Chapter Three. My stress here remains on the spatial/syntactical relationship.

<sup>16</sup>Williams talks favourably of active surface disjointedness in Novelette. See Imaginations, 275.

<sup>17</sup>Such a condition implies a rigidity of tone at a poetic level and a rigidity of categorization of knowledge at a public level. See the image of University in Paterson, 44 and 46 where its "clerks" are "spitting on fixed concepts like / roasting hogs."

<sup>18</sup>Williams' praise, for example, of Brueghel stems from the artist's ability to translate traditional motifs into local idiom.

<sup>19</sup>Clearly a corollary of Williams' constant cry "NOT to COPY Nature."

<sup>20</sup>See "Liberated! Igualidad! Fraternidad!" (CEP, 134).

<sup>21</sup>See "Della Primavera Transportata Al Morale" (CEP, 57).

<sup>22</sup>The theme and thus form of all his major works.

<sup>23</sup>Nash, in "The Use of Prose in Paterson," talks of prose functioning in counterpoint.

<sup>24</sup>Williams' cry in Kora in Hell to "make it new" initiated his arrival into the 'twenties.

<sup>25</sup>SA, 91.

<sup>26</sup>See, in opposition to my view, Breslin's notion in William Carlos Williams that Williams was attempting to renew the significance of the individual genre.

<sup>27</sup>The sources for such "roughness" are innumerable. Bram Dijkstra's view is that it is an extension of his work and association with the American Immaculates. Mike Weaver argues that it derives stimulus from Kandinsky's "On the Spiritual in Art."

<sup>28</sup>Literary progress is deliberately parodied in the disruptions of Spring and the reversed chapters of Novel.

<sup>29</sup>Williams asks in Novel "What is time but an impertinence?" (213).

<sup>30</sup>In Novelette he had stated: "so all things enter into the singleness of the moment and the moment partakes of the diversity of all things" (282).

<sup>31</sup>In IW Williams talked of his desire to keep the poems "pure" without typographical tricks of any kind. Prose thus becomes equated with all manner of metrical, social and human impurities.

<sup>32</sup>See, in particular, the opening chapter of Novel, Imaginations, 161.

<sup>33</sup>Williams' objections to the novel genre are more available to us through the work of McLuhan in, for example, From Cliché to Archetype. See "Public as Cliché," 173.

<sup>34</sup>Williams specifically states this problem in Spring and All, 133.

<sup>35</sup>In Spring and All he agrees with Anatole France's description of art as "lie" (117).

<sup>36</sup>SA, 138.

<sup>37</sup>The aesthetic implications of poem as newspaper are more fully explored in Chapter Five.

<sup>38</sup>Hans Arp, Dadaland. Quoted by Richter, Art and Anti-Art, 25.

<sup>39</sup>"Some Memories of Pre-Dada; Picabia and Duchamp," The Dada Painters and Poets, ed. Robert Motherwell, 259.

<sup>40</sup>Williams made frequent use of this word in his early writings. See, in particular, A, 158; GAN, 163; SL, 46.

<sup>41</sup>Quoted by Calvin Tomkins, Ahead of the Game, 29.

<sup>42</sup>Art and Anti-Art, 91.

<sup>43</sup>The Blind Man, 1 2 (May, 1917), 5.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted by Tomkins, Ahead of the Game, 44.

<sup>45</sup>Hieroglyphics, 34.

<sup>46</sup>The Continuity of American Poetry, 335-348.

<sup>47</sup>See, in particular, Jesse D. Green's essay on Kora, "The Opening of the Poem as Field of Action," Contemporary Literature, XIII, 3 (Summer 1972), 295-314.



<sup>48</sup>Marcel Raymond, From Baudelaire to Surrealism, quoting Rivière, quoting Freud.

<sup>49</sup>Art and Anti-Art, 54.

<sup>50</sup>This sense is particularly acute in the works of Kurt Schwitters discussed in Chapter Five. A contemporary sense of this preciousness, albeit of necessity, is shown by Ivan's sense of things in Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch (Bantam Books, 1970).

<sup>51</sup>As I have argued in Chapter Three, collage is essentially a folk-art device.

<sup>52</sup>William Carlos Williams, 54.

<sup>53</sup>Linda Wagner describes the internal movement of each series as being from "physical observation to much more subjective reactions," Prose, 24. More directly relevant, however, are her remarks that Williams by such juxtaposition is "freeing himself from the demands of a truthful or factual observation" (24).

<sup>54</sup>James Breslin argues that "Just as recurrence in Nature makes time a "liar" and brings life out of death, the reflexive movement of the prose subverts any linear advance and creates a living moment, filled with many perspectives and voices." Williams, 60.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>56</sup>See, in particular, "The Unity of Williams' Art," from The Prose of William Carlos Williams.

<sup>57</sup>SL, 230.

<sup>58</sup>"The Still Heart: Poetic Form in Wordsworth," New Literary Studies, 11, 2 (Winter 1971), 297-310.

<sup>59</sup>Joel Connarroe, "A Local Pride: The Poetry of Paterson," PMLA, Vol. 85, 111 (June, 1969), 548.

<sup>60</sup>See, appropriately, the earthquake of Paterson, Book 1 which is both historical fact and a metaphor for a momentary crack in the poet's own consciousness which allows him to release Persephone. Paterson, 51.

<sup>61</sup>The background to Williams' borrowing of imagery from Physics is fully detailed by Michael Weaver, The American Background. See, in particular, Weaver's relation of John Riordan's essay "The Theory and Practice of Precision Poetry" to Williams' work, and the proposed collaboration of the two on a "Modern Prosody" (43-52). A detailed examination of Whitehead's relevance to the roots of "openness" in modern American literature is contained in The Open Decision, Jerry H. Bryant: The Open Decision: The Contemporary American Novel and Its Intellectual Background. The Free Press, New York, 1970.

<sup>62</sup>"An Objective," Prepositions (London, 1967), 26. The stress on "of no predatory intention" is mine.

<sup>63</sup>The Prose of William Carlos Williams. See, in particular, Chapter One "The Unity of Williams' Art."

<sup>64</sup>The concept of discontinuity is fully explored by Roger Shattuck in "The Art of Stillness," the penultimate chapter of The Banquet Years.

<sup>65</sup>Poets of Reality, 300.

<sup>66</sup>The entire novel goes to explain the opening page of prose statement--a page in which man is seen at one single moment of his life. The historical, social, and political/racial confrontations which define that one man at that one moment become the "meaning" of the Novel. Louis Zukofsky had similarly argued that "properly no verse should be called a poem if it does not convey the totality of perfect rest." "An Objective," Prepositions, 21.

<sup>67</sup>McLuhan, From Cliche to Archetype, 203.

<sup>68</sup>The obvious influence of Lawrence in this passage is commented upon by Donald Davie who also argues that:

English prose has never got nearer than this to approximating to the rhythms and contours of excited speech. Lawrence, I think, even in Studies in Classic American Literature, never went so far.

"The Legacy of Fenimore Cooper," Essays in Criticism, IX (iii, 1959), 234.

<sup>69</sup>Alan Holder argues that a "pattern of failure or incompleteness persists." "In the American Grain: William Carlos Williams on the American Past." American Quarterly, XIX (111, 1967), 267.

<sup>70</sup>See, for example, his attitude to the honesty of the stripper in The Desert Music who knows "she's / part of another tune" PB, 115.

<sup>71</sup>See, in particular, Paterson, 14.

<sup>72</sup>Unpublished manuscript in the Buffalo collection.

CHAPTER FIVE  
"the Merzbild"



(i)

The experiments in "writing" Williams made in the composition of Kora in Hell, Spring and All, The Great American Novel and In the American Grain consolidated that break with the "stupidity" of his literary and cultural heritage he had initiated in Al Que Quiere, and in the course of which established "openness" as primary methodological context. Having dynamized such genres as Novel, Short Story, History and the concept of a volume of poems<sup>1</sup> into organizations consonant with the coarser energy of self and environment, Williams evolved works whose essential characteristic was their dimensionality. The dimensions consistently reflect the central relationship in all Williams' work--the relationship between the aesthetic and cultural, between the personal and poetic levels of experience. What Williams created in each structure was thus a balance or series of balances between levels in which "openness" came to express a methodology where neither level predominated and in which structure was effected by the tension implicit in the confrontation between art and reality. "Opening" the poem was for Williams, in a period of frustration and despair, an immediate contemporary extension of the original New World experience--Adam once more naming his Garden.<sup>2</sup>

The dimensionality of Williams' longer works is



implicit in the collage aesthetic and technique. Whereas the collage-artists extended the spatial dimensions of painting in oils by incorporating Time as an active element of composition in their use of worn, yellowing materials, Williams explored structures in which literary time was discarded for a stronger sense of time's spatial orientation, or, more simply, for a sense of the relationship between Time and Space. Specifically, as in Chapter 9 of The Great American Novel and in the conceptual framework of In the American Grain, Williams began to examine Time's relations with PLACE, the focus for which intensified from the macrocosmic concept of America to a primarily local insistence in a New Jersey city, existing as microcosm to the Nation. Paterson, in particular, reveals documents whose very details express the relationship of place to time and time to people. The poem's greatness exists in this revelation to the reader of what I would call "inhabited space," of a time and place intimately and inextricably related to the personal history of individuals.

Williams' work indeed manifests that manic compulsion of all collage-artists--to assemble and include as compositional elements things used and discarded by people. Snatches of a specifically American idiom, recovered from historical document or personal letters written under pressure from his work as doctor, share with newspaper clippings, bus tickets, labels and book illustrations, an immediate surface of an art with its roots in a familiar reality

and a sense, often ironic, of the process whereby that banal ground is transformed into art, into an inhabitable space. Paterson is in this context a poem for voices,<sup>3</sup> the very textures of which speak for Williams' obsession with the spoken idiom and that process of "rolling up" whereby that idiom, fragmented but expressive of great energy, became art. The long poem Paterson records explicitly the poet's confrontation with the fragments he had collected and his long and "impossible" (SL, 230) struggle to piece them together within a new, rhythmic organization.<sup>4</sup>

To understand the conceptual framework and "impossible" birth of Williams' major work, it is necessary to see the poet in light of this century's collage activity. Specifically I propose to examine the life and constructions of the German collage-artist, Kurt Schwitters, the development of whose Merz aesthetic and technique, particularly as it manifested itself in the environmental Merzbau and in the artist's manic compulsion to collect and utilize found materials, offers an interesting and illuminating context in which to view Williams' own poetic development. Whilst it is not my specific intention to offer an exegesis of the entire poem, I intend to see Paterson's structure in the light of a building methodology which owes a great deal to Williams' initial intimacy with painters and painting. As I shall argue, the initial collage impulse which expresses itself in the structure of the shorter poems leads inevitably to the

creation of a structure without end, an open structure capable of receiving and revealing any found materials.

Schwitters was born in 1887, in Hanover, Germany.<sup>5</sup> His formative years were spent against a family and cultural background of severely bourgeois proportions, its initial artistic expression in the Kunstakademie at Dresden where Schwitters studied from 1909 until 1914, after two semesters in his home town. Despite the fervour of Dresden's climate of experimentation in the arts, its most important manifestations in the Die Brücke exhibition of 1910 and the founding of Der Blaue Reiter in 1911, he returned to Hanover apparently unmoved in his allegiance to the Academy and "an entirely conventional painter of landscapes, still lifes, portraits, and genre subjects."<sup>6</sup> Following his return, however, Schwitters moved gradually away from imitation in painting, freeing himself more and more from the "literal reproduction of all details."<sup>7</sup> Although he recognized that mere copying "proves to be detrimental to the force of logical consistency in the elaboration of an expression,"<sup>8</sup> he had nevertheless come to realize that painting's interdependence of compositional elements is "a matter of harmonizing elements one with the other in form and color."<sup>9</sup>

The record of Schwitters' liberation from accurate copying is a brief, compressed history of contemporary movements in art. As Williams had deliberately explored

literary possibilities of Impressionism and Cubism, Schwitters moved similarly through broadly three fashionable stages before the gradual creation of his own personal style of creative activity. He moved from early Impressionistic landscapes, through mountain landscapes under the influence of the Expressionist painters of Die Brücke, to formal abstractions painted after the Cubists (Appendix 3, Figs. 1-4). In 1919, however, Schwitters created the first of those structures to which he later gave the generic title of "Merz,"<sup>10</sup> by incorporating scraps of paper, corrugated cardboard, tin foil and paper lace into the composition and painting over (Appendix 3, Figs. 5-6). This preliminary experimentation with compositional textures, in which individual fragments do not stand fully revealed, leads quickly to the quintessential Merz pictures in which materials are glued, or nailed together nakedly. In their naked presence Schwitters begins that exciting interplay between geometric crystallization of form and banal, humorous materials (Appendix 3, Figs. 7-8) whose ironic tension structures all his subsequent building.

Schwitters' interest in the activity of Merzing grew logically out of his intuition that "creating artistic form is synonymous with the artistic devaluation of the constituent elements as things in themselves, a phenomenon that has nothing to do with the material utilized."<sup>11</sup> Opening his compositions to make use of whatever materials were at hand, he was continuing his preoccupation with the



impersonal, objective elements of painting. "Since the material does not matter," Schwitters argued in the periodical Merz in 1923, "I take whatever material I like if the picture requires it." He argued further that:

Because I balance different kinds of material against one another, I have an advantage over oil painting, for in addition to evaluating color against color, line against line, form against form, and so on, I also evaluate material against material--wood against burlap, for example. . . . Every artist should be permitted to put together a picture out of nothing more than, say, blotting paper, as long as he knows how to give it form.<sup>12</sup>

Merz thus expresses Schwitters' consistent preoccupation with form and rigorous formal evaluation of materials. That the materials themselves establish a surface of playful chaos is an assertion that collage, in opposition to representational art, asks that chaos be an integral part of any artistic structure, and that a fluidity of fragmented forms replace art's traditional stasis.

Despite its formal origins, however, collage came more and more to speak "the language of revolution and anarchism, of agitation and shock,"<sup>13</sup> expressing in manifesto-like tones a sense of artistic and thus human liberty. If the initial anti-aesthetic impulse collage released was somewhat muted, in Merz it was explicitly declared. As Schwitters argued, "Merz stands for freedom from all fetters, for the sake of artistic creation."<sup>14</sup> The freedom he discovered in the act of assembly, however, was not occasioned by lack of restraint but by what he regarded as "strict



artistic discipline."<sup>15</sup> If the Merz surface revels in the incongruity of juxtaposed materials and in the energy released by alogical relations, the stress within the composition remains on that artistic activity whereby the elements are "formed," "balanced," and fully "evaluated." In an article in Der Sturm, published in 1927, Schwitters strongly articulated the collage aesthetic of "rolling up" materials to create structures of artistic process, whose immediate manifestation is the release of creative energy. In a statement which bears an interesting relationship to Williams' realization in Paterson that "There is no direction," Schwitters wrote "There is never a deliberate goal other than the consistency of the conception in itself. The material is definite, has rules, dictates directions to the artist, but this the goal does not do. It is this consistency that governs and guides the creation."<sup>16</sup> In the Merz buildings of 1921-2 (Appendix 3, Figs. 9-12) and in the improvisational surface of Kora in Hell, form results directly from the consistency of the conceptual framework.<sup>17</sup>

What results from Schwitters' formal experimentation is a statement of creative process in which materials, dynamized by the new structural organization of which they are a part, exude a sense of art's arbitrary order-in-chaos, ironically celebrated. The irony emerges in Schwitters' lyrical compositions where sadly torn papers, delicately pastel, flutter against one another, straining to counter

overt sentimentality. Like Williams whose grimly ironic vision acted as defence against too spontaneous and simplistic a vision of things-as-they-are, he moved gradually toward structures in which sentimental embrace of his world was more and more held in check by the intellect. Declaring constantly that "The only thing that matters in a work of art is that all the parts should be interrelated, evaluated one against the other,"<sup>18</sup> Schwitters evolved building methodology which, in the rigour of selection and assembly, denied the vitality of found reality and stressed rather the geometry of construction. Importantly, however, denial could not preclude completely the sense of a world beyond that of art, a larger, coarser energy which struggled against refinement within the artistic structure. The materials Schwitters used thus became, as Schmalenbach suggests, "a means of conjuring up reality" and the Merz pictures themselves became "a Song of Songs celebrating the reality of life--a familiar and ordinary but all the more sublimated reality, thanks to the artist's presentation."<sup>19</sup> As Williams discovered in "The Great Figure," banality assumed magical proportions through such a redemption and sublimation.

The clearest point of similarity between Williams and Schwitters exists, however, in their attitude to their materials. The two artists, whilst not the first in their respective media to introduce "extra-artistic" materials, were nevertheless the first who made "exclusive, uninhibited

and expression-laden use"<sup>20</sup> of secondhand materials. As Williams declared all experiential data fit for poetry, so Schwitters actively celebrated everything discovered in his daily reality. The constructions of both artists document their makers' constant confrontation with an unrefined actuality. If, as Weaver confirms, Williams was "a collector of verbal specimens," a collector who preferred the "telling, personal idiom of those around him"<sup>21</sup> to the self-consciousness of literary authorities, Schwitters was "manic, almost kleptomaniac, in his obsession with the waste materials of everyday life, with the meanest left-overs, from which he fabricated his pictures."<sup>22</sup> He collected and organized streetcar tickets, theatre tickets, worn scraps of paper, driftwood, old nails and rusty tincans in much the same way that Williams incorporated into his poems advertising slogans, recipe ingredients, ice cream parlour menus, hospital signs and visionary fragments glimpsed from the street such as numbers on firetrucks and neon SODA signs. Their artistic response to such materials was either to present them in their nakedness or to juxtapose and thus sublimate them.

"Nakedness," however, implies a naive view of artistic composition, contradicting the artists' belief in the active evaluation of his materials. As Williams revealed in In the American Grain, the apparent objectivity of the historian, in the naked use of document and fact, belies the artifice of the part such honest fragments play in the organization of

the work. Cotton Mather's own words do condemn him because the pinched literary style reveals a narrow, closed human perspective but the condemnation is strengthened by Williams' juxtaposition of that "honest" document to the generosity of Rasles and Morton. What begins as an attempt to use Mather's account of Witchcraft in a specific attack on Puritan vision becomes transformed by such juxtaposition into an indictment of a way of life for which Mather stands as ultimate metaphorical embodiment. By such a methodology the consistency of conception is confirmed and the propagandist impulse informing the conceptual framework greatly accentuated.

"Naked presentation" of materials and their artistic sublimation derive from the same basic impulse--what Schwitters called the "estrangement" of compositional elements. The principle of "estrangement" is central to the collage aesthetic, embracing the removal of found elements from their "customary function or even their customary inconspicuousness" as well as their introduction into the new context of the art-object.<sup>23</sup> What the material signified before its use in a work of art was to Schwitters "a matter of indifference so long as it is properly evaluated and given artistic meaning in the work of art."<sup>24</sup> Once accepted into the picture materials "lose their individual character, their own special essence (Eigen-gift), by being evaluated against one another; by being dematerialized (entmaterialisiert) they become material for the picture."<sup>25</sup> Such intention, however, was constantly

modified by the life of the materials themselves, a life originally incorporated because the fragment could not be assimilated by any other means without destroying its individual essence. Art's traditional illusion, supported by perspective--Williams' "clever drawing"--is replaced by a collaged reality where materials appear to fight against containment (Appendix 3, Fig. 13).

For Schwitters, as for Williams, collage represented a means to artistic freedom, a method of organization which subverted the representation of physical surfaces. For both artists the collage impulse suggested a surface of chaotic playfulness, inducing an anarchy to destroy traditional stasis. Such apparent disorder, however, belied the intelligence and methodology which released the materials with such spontaneity. In an unpublished manuscript, dated 1926, Schwitters argued an artistic context which aggravated this popular misinterpretation of the collage-artist's function:

At first I tried to construct new art forms out of the remains of a former culture. This gave rise to Merz painting that made use of every kind of material, manufactured pigments no less than junk from junk piles. In this way I rode out the revolution enjoying myself thoroughly, and pass as a Dadaist without being one.<sup>26</sup>

Revolution, however, remains the special atmosphere in which to examine the work of Schwitters and Williams. Whilst a Dadaist label cannot adequately describe the work of two artists whose especial strength was in the reintegration of a fragmented world and an active, if occasionally ironic,



assertion of artistic presence, certainly a Dadaesque spirit informs the work of both artists. In collage, Williams and Schwitters evolved a medium which provided a provocative line of tension between art and reality, expressing a clear disregard for literary time and pictorial space in a two-dimensional surface arena where depth is suggested by the materials themselves. The excitement and jubilantion felt by both artists in their release from a First World War finds immediate reflection in structures bursting with creative energy, in which materials exuded a life the artist could not finally control. Within so revolutionary a context the immediate suggestion is that the artist has ceded a certain amount of control to allow his materials to speak for themselves and to allow the accidental--what Williams saw as "the irrational"<sup>27</sup> in life--a place in the composition. What Merz effected was the preservation and transcendence of the accidental. Rejecting fixedness at human and artistic levels of activity, collage speaks for subversiveness, coming about, as Schmalenbach points out, "intuitively and improvisationally; it was not yet subjected to open principles of order that had hardened into doctrine."<sup>28</sup>

If Merz evolved in response to Schwitters' refusal to paint, it continued as his fundamental method of building pictures because it proved flexible enough to accommodate varying stylistic changes. The small collages of 1918 grew quietly out of Schwitters' recognition that "restriction to

a single material is one-sided, small-minded"<sup>29</sup> and that painting as pure activity could no longer express Schwitters' sense of his world. As he wrote to explain his Merz-pictures:

I could not, in fact, see any reason why one should not use the old tickets, driftwood, cloakroom numbers, wires and parts of wheels, buttons and old lumber out of junk-rooms and rubbish heaps as materials for paintings as well as the colours that were produced in factories. This was, so to speak, a social conception, and from the artistic point of view a private enjoyment; but it was above all a final consequence. . . .<sup>30</sup>

The Merz impulse--to collect, assemble and evaluate--manifests itself in simple rubber-stamp drawings, in the Merz pictures of 1919-1921, and in the structures after 1924 when the liveliness of materials was subdued under a puristic, formal language. Despite the cold and objective character of Schwitters' constructivist phase, the activity of Merzing remains constant and wherever found materials were incorporated into his compositions something of their individual presence came through. In a 1925 building, for example, "Relief in Blue Square," "crudely nailed together boards with massive pieces of wood mounted on them, allow geometry--which here too makes its statement--to be overlooked."<sup>31</sup> Indeed the work is organized about the tension existing between the thoughtful geometry of the compositional method and the worn solidity and age of the wood itself. The tension exudes a subtle irony as the structure suggests the artist's arbitrary efforts to assimilate and order mass (Appendix 3, Fig. 14).

Schwitters' later collages, however, are marked by a more methodical building where the individuality of the materials is carefully incorporated into structures but distorted a little by being shaped to fulfill the artist's demands. In collages where the "artist's will prevailed over the happy accident,"<sup>32</sup> the spontaneous play of materials is checked, for example, by pasting rectangular pieces of paper over the whirl of streetcar tickets. As Schmalenbach argued:

Whereas the earlier Merz drawings look as though the materials composed the collage themselves, by virtue of the forces inherent in them, now the intellect sits in judgment over the materials and ordains their place in the composition.<sup>33</sup>

The elements of composition are thus subordinated to the rhythm of the completed organization or, at the very least, appear subordinated for the process of composition has remained essentially unchanged from the earlier collages of 1918. What has changed, however, is the artist's growing desire to have greater control over his materials. Similarly, Williams' methodology in Chapter 9 of The Great American Novel is basically the same as his method of building Paterson. What has altered over the intervening twenty years is that Williams gained greater and greater control over his assembled fragments. Working in In the American Grain, Kora in Hell and The Great American Novel by simple juxtaposition, they express a similar primitive thrust to that manifested in Paterson, whilst in the longer work their transformation

into a specifically metaphoric function is revealed in that poetic voice moving remorselessly amongst the collected fragments to seek out some possible organization. The tensions, in other words, existing between particular fragments are thus dictated by the artist and not left to the intelligent seeking of the reader. This situation Williams recognized, and, as the working papers for Paterson make clear, one he attempted to rectify by destroying the more overt transitional statements and restoring to his materials more of their individual presence and immediacy of expression. This constant need to allow materials to speak for themselves is an essential aspect of Schwitters' Merz. Even during the severity of his concrete phase when associative materials were reduced to pure function and when colour and texture were equally subordinated, "when, nevertheless, some correction was needed, the artist did not sacrifice what was alive in the picture, to the rule of compositional law; rather he sacrificed the law to preserve what was alive."<sup>34</sup>

What Schwitters and Williams thus share is a fascination and excitement with socially insignificant pieces of their world and a manic compulsion to build structures in which refuse is transformed into art. The work of both artists manifests a similar sense of the preciousness of the world, in which all material is fit for art and the understanding that art is a literal extension of an environment which demands inclusion in it. The redemption or renewal



was for each artist ironically realized, as though preciousness might descend to mere sentimentality and for each the inclusion of fragments of actuality introduced into their respective buildings a series of playful tensions between the fundamentally abstract nature of their conceptual framework and the intensely literal presence of the pieces they introduced. For Schwitters and for Williams the artistic structure pulsed with this confrontation between the artistic--harmony of line, colour and texture--and the real--those compositional elements which refused absorption in the picture. They remained for both artists "pieces of refuse and still kept their venom, that is, their own language and offensiveness. They retained their peculiar charm of being objects-in-themselves."<sup>35</sup> What results from so basic and humorous a confrontation between two worlds are structures whose fundamental characteristic is their dimensionality. Layers of pasted paper and documents of a retrieved past speak of dimensions in specifically human levels of experience and in destroying pictorial space or literary time effect a stronger relationship between art and people. This is why Schwitters called Merz in part a social conception (Appendix 3, Figs. 15-17) and why Paterson remains in essence a study in sources whereby art reaches out to educate a community. Although in the work of both artists the compositional stress remains on the formal evaluation of elements, the discarded materials speak of a public world's waste in literal and



metaphoric terms. The Merz building of Schwitters and the collage-works of Williams are structures whose dimensionality allows two distinct worlds of art and reality a tense co-existence within the compositional frame.

The collage impulse manifests itself similarly in the work of both artists, existing basically as a compulsion to collect discarded materials, tram tickets or fragments of conversation, and in the manifestation of the power such materials wielded over both artists. Freed from uselessness or from banality, objects took on the character of fetishes, magical objects in their de-materialization. More importantly, however, the collage impulse leads both artists to the concept of a Gesamtkunstwerk or union of all the arts wherein the need to Merz is expressed in environmental terms. Schwitters' merzing led him inexorably into actual space, the inhabited space of his three homes in Hanover, Lysander, and Ambleside. This projection back into the public world is the simple result of denying the spectator's eye access to an illusory interior space. Having deliberately flattened the pictorial plane, dimensionality was attained by returning the probing of the imagination to the literal world. Williams had effected a similar movement in the building of Paterson. He had denied his readers access to a literary time--that "progress" he so much abhorred--that he was compelled to return them to a specific, factual past where they would inhabit a common emotional space.

Whereas Williams constructs the building Paterson that housed his own life and delineated the relationship between that life and the lives of the community, Schwitters built his Merzbau. Paterson and Merzbau, considered by their respective creators as their life-work, exist as inevitable extensions of the primary collage impulse and grow by gradual accretion wherein initial levels of poetic experience are layered over with freshly assembled materials. Both structures expanded as their makers continued to respond to their immediate environment, uncovering new information which demanded inclusion into the basic structure.

Described by Schmalenbach as a "fantastically pullulating spatial structure of Dadaistical constructivistic conception,"<sup>36</sup> Schwitters' Merzbau applied the collage principle to the architectural environment in which its artist worked and lived. Whilst Schwitters was compelled by War to create three separate structures out of three locales, each structure manifests a similar obsessive need to make sense of its locale and to create order out of those innumerable fragments of personal experience which make up the artist's daily world. Such a meticulous assembly of fragments serves to confirm Schwitters in his need to locate himself within the social dimensions of each world. The Merzbau space was known as the K.d.e.E. or Kathedrale des erotischen Elends (Cathedral of Erotic Misery), whereby Schwitters deliberately evoked the communal structures of the Middle Ages. Those

people whose help he ironically acknowledged in his Cathedral were friends whose hair and urine found their way into shrines. More seriously, however, the Merzbau as Cathedral does suggest that sense of an art growing directly out of the artist's interaction with his community, a natural extension of his living there. Although there were three separate structures--in Hanover, Germany; Lysander, Norway; and Ambleside, England--the simple impulse of interaction with the immediate locale remains unchanged. By looking at the activity of Schwitters in the construction of his environmental structures and comparing it to the building procedures of Williams, I intend to establish a context in which to understand the methodology of Paterson, in particular the changes in Williams' sense of its direction and the "impossibility" of finishing the poem.

The Hanover Mer<sup>3</sup>bau began as a "column"<sup>37</sup>--one of the specific ways in which Williams saw Paterson<sup>38</sup>--four feet in height which expanded beyond the room in which it initially took form to fill two stories and the basement of his house. The building process was thus one of continuous growth in which materials at hand were incorporated into a composition of endless dimensions. Fragments of a daily, ordinary environment were elevated by Schwitters to sacred relics and the small rooms of his house were accordingly transformed into a single place of worship--A Cathedral. In the Merzbau, mementoes of the artist's friends were raised to mystical status.

Locks of hair, even bottles of urine and pencil stubs were "displayed" in separate grottoes like shrines of the saints, to be eventually covered and absorbed by further building. They serve as building material in the same way that Williams had utilized letters from personal friends, fellow poets and historical presences--to raise what is available to metaphoric levels and to allow what is assembled to speak for the artist. The collage activity whereby the artist's personal life provides immediate material for the pictures he makes terminates only when such material is no longer available; when, for example, he is either incapacitated like Williams of The Desert Music, or when he dies. What remains central to the careers of Schwitters and Williams is their consistent and determined efforts to make sense of their lives, to organize structures in which the most banal data of experiential reality are transformed into ways of seeing and appraising the world. The Merzbau and Paterson actively extend the aesthetic, abstract considerations of their respective artists physically into the public world, by penetrating their spectators' limited sense of time and space.



(ii)

In 1944, two years prior to the publication of Book One of Paterson, Williams communicated to Wallace Stevens the sense of frustration he was experiencing in the organization of his materials:

I'm working at my trade, of course, harder than ever, but also gradually maneuvering a mass of material I have been collecting for years into the Introduction (all there will be of it) to the impossible poem Paterson. (SL, 230)

Paterson remained a difficult and frustrating experience for Williams largely because the increasing quantity and variety of the material he accumulated made constant new demands upon him. As he read and uncovered more and more information about his immediate environment--information which to Williams dispelled the burden of legend obscuring its "reality"--he realized with hostility the complete inadequacy of conventional ways of expressing it. The prevailing sense of difficulty and the slowness of compositional growth is nonetheless tempered consistently by the poet's very persistence in establishing a formal definition of his materials in the course of which he would once again confirm himself poet. Despair and determination, the desire to submit to the overwhelming problems his materials created and the equally vital need to define himself and his community in a resolution of those difficulties without recourse to a brutally coercive



"poetic" form characterize the voice of Paterson. Indeed the very difficulties of the creative process become an integral part of the poem, their working out an implicit rejection of the "finished" poem.

The problems Williams confronted in assembling Paterson were essentially those imposed upon him by the collage impulse--how to make public the artist's aesthetic meditations and how to create a flexible organization whereby public and poetic dimensions of poetic experience would exist simultaneously. This formal dilemma begins in the long accumulation of materials, and continues with Williams' assumption of "openness" as primary literary and human value. It is, however, aggravated fundamentally by the very magnitude of its conceptual framework as the poet attempts to build a city of the mind by transforming documents with specific relevance to the public world into metaphors of aspects of the creative process. For Williams saw Paterson as his "magnum opus" (SL, 163), a showcase for "just what I have always been trying to do" (SL, 214). In its conception and composition it was intended as a "keg-cracking assault" (SL, 214), the consummation of his violent attacks against Authority, embodied here in the University, and against mindless allegiance to alien forms. At public and poetic levels Paterson method of organization is a direct reply to their demand always for some "neo-classic recognizable context" (SL, 239). In its insistence upon the individual integrity of its fragments, in

the visual and textural confrontation between prose and poetry, in its method of assembly whereby public and poetic dimensions share equal validity, Paterson manifests a collage activity of political proportions.<sup>39</sup> In destroying the concept of pejorocracy,<sup>40</sup> Williams defines a local government which functions by the mutual interdependence of its component parts. What the structure rejects in the inextricability of its form and content is the imposition upon its members of an external authority.

The organizational problems began over thirty years before the publication of Book One with the publication of The Wanderer in 1914. In this poem, by Williams' own admission the initial impulse out of which Paterson evolved, the poet is required to renew his vital contact with his environment and to celebrate the bleak and sordid reality in which he lives rather than a nebulous world furnished only by the imagination. In answer to his agonized question--"How shall I be a mirror to this modernity?"--the poet learns the necessity of painful immersion in experience, symbolized by the waters of the Passaic River. The poem thus establishes both the symbolic topography which in its broadest application structures the longer, later poem and the responsibility recognized by the poet to articulate his environment. Williams' immediate response to his sense of poetic responsibility is the gradual collecting of materials which, within an adequate building, would begin a definition of locale.

The "maneuvering" of the assembled mass of material into a shape expressive of Paterson and its environs subsequently preoccupied Williams. His poetic response to Eliot and Pound took shape with agonizing slowness over a long period of time.

That the final selection rejects a vast amount of material, that, as Joel Connarroe points out,<sup>41</sup> the work sheets for Paterson are sometimes more coherent than the completed poem, implies strongly that the published form evolved as the result of the poet's search amongst his materials and that the poem grew organically out of those relationships Williams recognized as he began the difficult process of sifting and assembling. The sheets of reworked materials and particularly the final broad revision made by Williams prior to publication of Book One suggest a deliberate paring away of initial impedimenta and a denial of transitional statements. Whilst the reader was by this process drawn further into a study of his sources, the documents were freed more and more from within Williams' argument and allowed to exude nakedly that original presence and context in which they had been discovered. In the working sheets, as Linda Wagner remarks, "it is as if Williams is writing more or less as he thinks, putting it all in, so that he can find his own way through the bewildering mass of material."<sup>42</sup> The nature and quantity of that mass manifests Williams' basic intent to create a structure sufficiently elastic to allow the public

world of the city and the poet's inner world to exist simultaneously within the poem. Every fragment incorporated into the final poetic form relates both to the cityscape and to Williams' poetics. "Estranged" and re-constituted with the new organizational rhythms like real objects erupting inside a pure world delineated by oils, the materials constantly widen the significance of the work, projecting it remorselessly back into the public domain whenever it threatens to fall prey to an overpowering aestheticism.

If the initial difficulties in making the poem originate in the sheer quantity of accumulated material and the poet's deliberate refusal to approach that material with any preconceived form in mind, the more obvious problems arise from the assumption of "openness" as a prime literary and human value. The inevitable extension of the open poem is similar to that of any collage activity--that a work can only be finished at the death of its creator. Whilst he lives and responds to his world it continues to reflect the changes in his awareness of inner and outer contexts. Within such a "quest"--Williams' definition of his poem in the preface to Paterson--the materials become metamorphosed into aspects of the creative process and articulate in form and content the physical and emotional response of the poet to their inter-related reconciliation. The theme of Paterson is the difficulty, in darker moments the impossibility, of satisfying such a response. As James Breslin argues, "Paterson is by no



means a finished work, its parts rolled up into a fixed order at several removes from immediacy."<sup>43</sup> The poem, he continues, is the act of creation, recording the consciousness of the creator. Thus, originally conceived as four books, Paterson inevitably grew into five, with fragments of a sixth book discovered among Williams' manuscripts after his death.

The fundamental problem, however, Williams confronted in assembling and integrating his documents was the very magnitude of his original conception of the poem. Like Schwitters' Merzbau it was intended as a final resolution of a search to "find an image large enough to embody the whole knowable world" (A., 309) about the artist. Linda Wagner argues that it was the culmination of Williams' years to struggle "to convey his world in total."<sup>44</sup> And Paterson, whether it marks the culmination of that quest or a vitally important stage in a formal definition of self which leads to a more satisfactory conclusion in The Desert Music, does manifest the poet's attempt to organize within a coherent whole the innumerable slivers of experiential reality he had sought to make clear in his shorter poems. The Paterson structure seeks to house such environmental glimpses<sup>45</sup> in a conceptual framework whereby their consistent interrelationships can be identified and the poet's focus in time and place intensified. That the fragments erect a temporal entity confirms my argument that Williams' need in the longer work was to create a sense of



poetic alignment with the past, whereby the construction of the poem and the creation of Paterson's community became fused in the reader's imagination. Thus more and more, as Louis Martz points out, "as the books of Paterson appeared, all Williams' writings began to look like by-products, the result of practicing . . . for the central work of his career."<sup>46</sup> Paterson was clearly intended as a poem "to encompass his world."<sup>47</sup>

The image which Williams explored as projection of his inner world was a city, specifically the city of Paterson, New Jersey. In utilizing the city-construct Williams is not only making use of its architectonics to suggest the inter-relatedness of things and lives but also defining those relationships temporally. Kevin Lynch, exploring this point in The Image of the City, argues that:

Like a piece of architecture, the city is a construction in space, but one of vast scale, a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time. City design is therefore a temporal art, but it can rarely use the controlled and limited sequences of other temporal arts like music. On different occasions and for different people, the sequences are reversed, interrupted, abandoned, cut across. It is seen in all lights and all weathers.

At every instant there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting, to be explored. Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequence of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences.<sup>48</sup>

Lynch's sense of the city as temporal art and of the inter-relatedness of things, people and time is essentially the image projected by Williams whereby the endless curriculum

of knowledge is brought under urban, and therefore modern, focus.

In selecting Paterson as city, Williams is confirming his consistent emphasis on the local ground, defining once again "root man in root place."<sup>49</sup> Paterson exists as both macrocosm and microcosm in the structure, compressing into an immediate and knowable image the larger movements of a Nation and enlarging the aesthetic dimensions of the poet's experience. In evolving the poem out of a collage activity Williams has created a specific view of Time, creating a temporal unity in which an eternal present articulates and justifies every pressure upon the poem's persona in terms of the examples of History. In thus arguing:

. . . the city  
the man, an identity--it can't be  
otherwise--an  
interpenetration, both ways.

Williams continues his bitter struggle with Eliot and Pound. Displacing borrowed mythology by a specifically local history and Gods by historical personages rooted in a specifically (and less than ideal) American city, he sought continuity in History which offers with a greater sense of human endeavour examples of moral and poetic purpose to the questing poet. Consequently, Paterson, as Williams states in his Author's Note to the first four books:

is a long poem in four parts--that a man in himself is a city, beginning, seeking, achieving and concluding his life in ways which the various aspects of a city may



and every man  
                   who wants to die at peace in his bed  
                                   besides. (PB, 161-162)

The desire to give his fellow citizens that news runs throughout Williams' development as poet. What changes is his gradual realization that literal fragments of the community can be expanded to contain information useful to "men." Michael Weaver has related Williams' methodology in Paterson to the growth of the documentary style in film and literature and certainly the context confirmed the poet in his incorporation of prose into the body of his work.<sup>51</sup> But the collage impulse is a persistent activity in Williams and his use of actual documents is an inevitable extension of his experimentation in The Great American Novel and Spring and All, and of his many critical writings in which a stylistic confrontation between prose and poetry evoked for Williams the conflict central to his creative process.

In Williams' poem of fact<sup>52</sup>--what he called in his unpublished introduction to the Book of David Ruth a "news-paper"--the prose passages are dynamized, a process which transforms the past into a necessary means by which to comprehend the immediate present. For, as Williams believed, "never by any chance is the character of a single fact ever truthfully represented today." He continued to argue that "If ever we are to have any understanding of what is going on about us we shall need some other means of discovering it."<sup>53</sup> The "other means" meant specifically the poem whose



facts finally removed art from mere preciousness, returning it to the coarser reality of city life. Consequently, to counter Sankey's argument, there are no descriptive passages in Paterson.<sup>54</sup> It is part of the poem's form and content to utilize without waste or mutilation that material available to the poet. Within the poetic structure the prose serves to move the aesthetic dimensions backwards and forwards through historical time, making Williams' intentions in the making of his poem one with the wider implications of opening up the New World.

The prose of Paterson thus functions in the same way as the individual chapters of In the American Grain which record not simply a factual history of America but the development at a personal level of an experiment in "writing." In the earlier work Williams had renewed the significance of the past by reconstructing it stylistically and in the quality of language, particularly in its exactness, had revealed the extent of each individual's fall from the potential Williams recognized in all men--that potential for creativity conventional morality sought to repress. In In the American Grain Williams' personal voice is seldom permitted to speak. When it does, as in his conversations with Larbaud in Paris,<sup>55</sup> it breaks out unrestrainedly, embarrassing the poet with its primitive and undisciplined power. Without recourse to explicit direction from an omniscient authority the argument evolves by stylistic implication and



juxtaposition. And just as each individual can only be fully realized in a style which is a direct extension of personal energies, so Williams seeks out a language for clear articulation of self and environment. It is this search for language to redeem or bring to life the discarded potential of America which moves amongst the prose passages of Paterson seeing those stylistic ancestors who have also tried to come to terms with their locale. What the prose allows for in Paterson are bursts of poetic energy which gain intensity from their juxtaposition to periods of flatness. The prose thus serves to prevent that dissipation of energy Poe came to expect as the inevitable consequence of reading a long poem.<sup>56</sup> Acting in what Nash termed "counterpoint," the prose permits the characteristically American vitality of Williams' voice to retain its initial intensity and direction. Paterson is essentially a poem for voices in which a community is made vocal.

The voices which speak throughout the poem express both the literary and colloquial energies Williams explored in the creation of his individual voice. The prose passages are thus in every way a study in sources, historical and poetic. And the relationship between what are more appropriately referred to as "the prose voices" and the poet's own uneven speech rhythms is established at the public level in the central metaphor of Paterson the city cut by the waters of the Passaic River, to whose insistent flow the inhabitants

pay no heed. In their elemental opposition they manifest that conflict between the active and passive principle which at one level e. e. cummings had established as the verb-noun dichotomy. Like cummings whose essential poetic was the verbalization of nouns, Williams is obsessed with the process of dynamization, whereby an inert presence is transformed into usefulness. In Paterson the function of the river's flow is to accentuate that potential energy which, released and disciplined, is capable of so vital a transformation. The flow thus moves constantly amongst the passive fragments of a sleeping city providing the inhabitants with a sense of creative activity which they too can utilize in resuscitating their fallen world. In purely formal terms this literal stream of consciousness provides that "thin thread" Williams hoped would remain despite the apparently random surface beneath which it operated. "I took," Williams stated, "the river as it followed its course down to the sea; all I had to do was follow it and I had a poem" (IW, 82). Each book thus takes its "consecutiveness"<sup>57</sup> from that section of the river's flow it parallels, moving from source--"the clouds resolved into a sandy sluice"--to ultimate "dispersal and metamorphosis" in the sea. And in its course Williams utilized the cyclical motions of the river as metaphor for the direction his poetics leads. For the river is integrated with the poet's dispersal motif whereby fragments of a specifically local ground are collected, organized and made applicable to

the general. It is in the wide range of this local extension, as Williams stated in a letter to Horace Gregory, that the general can be "tested for its one unique quality, its universality. The flow must originate from the local to the general as a river to the sea and then back to the local from the sea in rain" (SL, 225). The process by which local becomes general, by which prose becomes a vital part of a poetic process and by which a city is awakened to the creativity dormant within its stone ear, gives Paterson its essential organizational rhythm. Presumably Williams implies this in a letter to Wells in 1950 when he writes that:

the poem to me . . . is an attempt, an experiment, a failing experiment, toward assertion with broken means but an assertion, always, of a new and total culture, the lifting of an environment to expression. (SL, 286)

The prose thus grounds the poet's aesthetics in a social context and that context in its peculiar past. And it is out of specifically local impulses that Williams' poetic voice evolves, sharing with the environment of which it is an attempted extension a recurring loss of energy and direction. It suffers similarly from blockage, attributable at a public level to the commercial exploitation of Paterson's original "wonder" and at a personal level to that "exiling one's self from one's self" (P, 59) which characterize the creative process, leading to those moments of frustration and despair Williams communicated in his letter to Gregory and throughout the length of Paterson:

There is no direction. Whither? I  
cannot say. I cannot say  
more than how. The how (the howl) only  
is at my disposal (proposal): watching--  
colder than stone . (28)

Without a specific "goal" the poem's meaning remains the  
"agony of self-realization" itself. Thus, like all Williams'  
major work, Paterson's essential characteristic is its  
abstractness and the function of the prose is to establish a  
public front to a self-reflexive work of art.

The emphasis on his materials' naked presence as factual statement results primarily from Williams' insistence on the real. Aware of the dangers of "romanticizing," of fabricating a false significance for those "heroes" with whom he dealt, Williams sought documents whose literal inclusion would counter the dangerous fabric of romance. In his essay "The American Background," published in 1934, he discussed the difficulty of exploring and redeeming from neglect his ancestry:

When the first courageous drives toward a realistic occupation of America slackened, men like Boone, Crockett and Houston had to be accounted for. It is not hard to fabricate a melodramatic part for them. The hard thing is to make the understanding of what they were appear integral with the history, effective in a direct understanding, of what men have become today. Presented historically because of their picturesqueness or a legendary skill with a gun, actually the cultural place these men occupy is the significant one. And if it always seems easier to romanticize a thing than to understand it, it is because very often it is more convenient to do so. Especially is this true when to romanticize a thing covers a significance which may be disturbing to a lying conscience.  
(SE, 140)

The poem as document thus attempts to allow the past to speak



for itself and consequently to retain what Williams saw as "the mystery of the thing" (SL, xviii). Here, however, a basic paradox manifests itself for the prose, written "under stress, under LACK of a satisfactory form," clarifies and destroys the very mystery it seeks to articulate. And it is this mystery or historical presence existing beyond the prose, mutilated unthinkingly by historians, which Williams sought to redeem in that poetic voice coursing the public stone. Williams indeed utilized the very function of prose--its process of clarification--to reveal an energyless public world. Prose dulls the reading mind, establishing irregular periods of flatness to serve as counterpoint to his own moments of elation and exuberance. In A Dream of Love (1948), Myra is soothed by the Doctor's speeches in prose whereas his poems disturbed her. In replying "Yes, darling. Anything you say--just so that you keep talking so beautifully," Myra provides an interesting observation on Paterson. His retort that "You always fall asleep when I'm telling you anything of importance to me--or reading to you,"<sup>58</sup> serves to confirm Williams' intention to disturb the possibility of such composure. It is thus interesting to compare the factual description of Mrs Sarah Cumming with her metaphorical transformation in the poetry whereby she is made an immediate extension of the poet's own suicidal thrust to make sense of experiential reality. The prose extract destroys the mystery of her original leap and of her individuality:



Mrs Sarah Cumming, consort of the Rev. Hopper Cumming, of Newark, was a daughter of the late John Emmons, of Portland, in the district of Maine. . . . She had been married about two months, and was blessed with a flattering prospect of no common share of Temporal felicity and usefulness in the sphere which Providence had assigned her; but oh, how uncertain is the continuance of every earthly joy. (P, 23)

Restrained within a narrowly functional prose style

Mrs Cumming's presence remains inert, described without being dynamized. The process of transformation which attempts to see her actively is undertaken by the poet in a passage where hesitant probing for relationships in and amongst the words approximates her own immersion in the difficult Passaic waters:

Stale as a whale's breath: breath!  
Breath!

Patch leaped but Mrs Cumming shrieked  
and fell -unseen (though  
she had been standing there beside her husband half  
an hour or more twenty feet from the edge).

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

both silent, uncommunicative

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 not well:

Clearly!  
speaks the red-breast his behest. Clearly!  
clearly! (P, 31)

If such deaths are to be made a living part of history, if Sam Patch and Mrs Sarah Cumming are not to remain "both silent, uncommunicative," it is the poet's function to redeem them

from uselessness within a new organizational rhythm which accentuates their metaphorical possibilities.

What the passages establish primarily, however, is that metrical identity or continuity Williams sought in the confrontation between poetry and prose. Arguing that prose and verse are both "WRITING, both a matter of the words and an interrelation between words for the purpose of exposition," he defended an art made deliberately impure by the incorporation of prose "NOT an antipoetic device" as his detractors have consistently stated. Williams argued that:

Poetry does not HAVE to be kept away from prose as Mr Eliot might insist, it goes ALONG with prose and, companionably, by itself, without aid or excuse or need for separation or bolstering, shows itself by ITSELF for what it is. IT BELONGS there, in the gutter. Not anywhere else or wherever it is, it is the same - the poem. (SL, 263)

Declaring all material fit for inclusion in "the poem,"<sup>59</sup> Williams made clear his own view of the distinction between prose and verse. "There are to be," Williams announced prior to publication, "completely worked up parts in EACH section--as completely formal as possible: in each part well displayed. BUT--juxtaposed to them are unfinished pieces--put in without fuss--for their very immediacy of expression. . . ." In thus arguing a metrical continuity between them Williams is stressing his belief that prose "can be a laboratory for metrics." Whilst "lower in the literary scale," it nevertheless "throws up jewels which may be cleaned and grouped." The tension that structures Paterson is therefore

that which results from a simple paradox. If a metrical continuity exists between prose and poetry then a formal discontinuity also exists. In Book One, for example, Williams establishes the primary manifestation of the work's female principle:

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. Pearls at her ankles, her monstrous hair spangled with apple-blossoms is scattered about into the back country, waking their dreams--where the deer run and the wood-duck nests protecting his gallant plumage.

The prose passage in juxtaposition concerns David Hower, "a poor shoemaker with a large family," who uncovers the actual Pearls which serve as one of the locale's natural wonders.

Immediately, however, exploiters moved in:

News of this sale created such excitement that search for the pearls was started throughout the country. 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.

Prose clarifies the mystery of the verse, explicating the text in a desultory way by examining the meaning of "Pearls at her ankles" and by giving examples of "her monstrous hair." Just as the natural wonders are destroyed by commercial interests, so the evocation of place in verse is boiled open by the factual distortion of prose.

The relationship between prose and poetry is thus

established in Paterson as both extension and refinement and confrontation. And it is the very ambivalence of Williams' attitude toward his found materials which struggles to structure the work, creating an eternal moment where the two forces appear at rest under pressure. Whilst the prose attempts to define a meaning to the poem in terms of a literal reality, the poetry moves the poem back into an essentially abstract reality. The zone by this means "invented" allows a dimensionality to the materials, a sense of a world perpetually beyond the immediate boundaries of the art-object which calls out for an ordering of its fundamental profusion. The overt lack of complete assimilation thus becomes not a limitation of the poem but its essential strength, establishing a world which operates beyond the poet's control, a stable centre around which the imagination can begin its "dance." This conception of a framework in which art and reality both reside is central to the collage aesthetic where an ultimate stability is denied to either dimension.

What destroys the stability of the poem's surface is both that thematic discontinuity effected by juxtaposition and that ironic tension which results from so implicit a "touching."<sup>60</sup> The final methodological procedures emphasize verbal activity and dynamization--the flow of the poet's speech--of those factual presences which contain ideas. In his preface to Book One, Williams announced his concept of dynamization by utilizing as basic linguistic element of his



composition the phrase "rolling up," thus stressing the making rather than the simple repetition of ideas by "Minds like beds always made up" (13). Such a repetition Williams leaves to those poetic dogs who ran out on their country "after the rabbits" or to those who, remaining at home, stayed blind to their country's poetic potential to "Dig / a musty bone" (11). The poem exists for Williams as a constant search--metaphorically embodied as that "quest" for beauty which opens the preface--amongst his materials and the reconciliation he tentatively establishes by their interrelatedness. "The theme / is as it may prove" (30) to a poet called upon to respond always to environmental stimuli and who has accepted that the poem involves always:

an agony of self-realization  
bound into a whole  
by that which surrounds us. (PB, 109)

The "rolling up" of Paterson and the poem as self-realization are thus complementary to one another, the making of the poem one with the travelling and making of the self. The form and substance of Paterson extends inevitably from this sense of poetic activity. The very principle of accumulation--that "rolling up" of knowledge out of particulars--is metaphorically transformed into a segment of an arc in one man's existential cycle. "Rolling up out of chaos" the poet and the poem he writes--the fabulous city he constructs in the mind--share "an identity--it can't be / otherwise--an / interpenetration, both ways" (12). Thus interrelated with the natural seasons, the seasons of the imagination and the evolutionary process



itself--"shells and animalcules / generally and so to man, / to Paterson" (13)--the poem's basic form assumes that cyclical movement from particulars, by way of accumulation and evaluation, to dispersal, which characterizes the rhythmical activity of external reality. What Paterson, in its intense self-reflexiveness, is about is the struggle to achieve form as a human being whose fundamental responsibility to his community is as poet. It is Williams' sense of the need to undertake that sense of obligation and his own awareness of the ludicrousness of such a function that dictates the physical shape of his longer works where, abnegating a little control over his materials, he implicitly makes a statement as to his felt position as poet. Conarroe, in conclusion, has argued that:

The answer to Mr. Paterson's search . . . does not lie in some truth that he finally discovers after a tortuous pilgrimage--in some clinching answer that will help us live. The truth, rather, lies in the quest itself: "The dream / is in pursuit!" It is the manner in which the poet shapes his experience, and not those necessarily fragmentary answers (which may or may not comprise part of the intrinsic movement), that verifies the poem's authenticity and gives it permanence.

Moving amongst the fragments of his city, attempting their reconciliation, Williams brings himself out of chaos, "rolling up" compositional elements into a structure which celebrates wholeness.

"Wholeness," however, substantiates Williams' entire methodological and aesthetic procedures, implying that necessary integration of divorced elements which characterizes

the condition of Paterson-city and Paterson-poet and the estrangement of material from material. In Paterson Williams' primary intention is to reveal methodologically that principle of integration whereby community and self can locate within themselves the secretly repressed areas of potential creativity Williams had initially explored in Kora in Hell. Bringing into focus the interrelationship of past and present--that disarray of temporal fragments--the poet attempts metaphorically to bridge the distance between Paterson, male-city and Garrett Mountain, female-park which co-exist in a state of unbearable tension, exacerbated by the ceaseless activity of the Passaic waters between them. The thrust of Book One is this very process of bridging, of marrying together the divorced sides of poetic and public selves--to reconcile the stone city and the flowering park, its polarities founded in a "cosmology of elemental opposition."

The restraint Williams exercised in the elaboration of thematic dimensionality manifests itself in the limited range of emotional tone and imaginative energy. Book One in conception and execution is an introduction to those Giants within. The many aspects of self whose embodiments people the city-world move relentlessly between the designated extremes, providing the Book with its peculiar density of interrelated materials and with its accompanying sense of their manipulation. The prose fragments, paraphrased, cut, re-distributed, lose their nakedness of revelation, returning

constantly not to that intimation of a world beyond but to their confinement within the argument. Despite its apparently "unfinished" surface, Book One is organized within an organizational rhythm of extreme tidiness and the collage impulse to include any material is subdued in the poet's preliminary attempt to substantiate his environment in its entirety.

In his Autobiography, Williams argued that "the practice of letters concerns the whole man no matter what the stylistic variants may be" (71), and the lifeless condition of Modern America, people and poetry, stems from the very incompleteness of its inhabitants, their essential energies dominated and repressed by that puritanical morality he had traced and discussed in In the American Grain. Conceptually similar to the marriage of energy and reason in Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell, in which man's childlike and creative energies are confronted and released in an apocalyptic vision, Paterson's linguistic architecture bears a strong similarity to Williams' contemporary, D. H. Lawrence, whose prose treatises, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious, express a sympathetic view of the division existing in modern man. Lawrence, like Williams, saw the dynamic life-force stifled by "idea-driven"<sup>62</sup> controls, and the mind--"a gangrene"<sup>63</sup>--denying direct expression of the individual's inner needs and breeding consequent repression:

The ideal mind, the brain, has become the vampire of modern life, sucking up the blood and the life. There is hardly an original thought or original utterance possible for us. All is sickly repetition of stale, stale ideas.<sup>64</sup>

Strongly reminiscent of the stale whale's breath which establishes the stench of conventional perspective in Paterson, the "stale, stale ideas" are a gross misrepresentation of man's sensual response, rendering him one of those "thousand automatons" who populate the city in New Jersey. For both artists there remains foremost the vital marriage of the two centres of control in man before his writing can manifest the flowering of his individuality. By returning to the earth, by restoring to man his capacity for emotional response, by insisting on the local ground, man may rediscover the impulsive energy and vigour which, at a poetic level, will manifest itself in a proper articulation of environment.

Paterson, the poet-city, is attempting such a return. His mind exists metaphorically as a New Jersey city, built on rock, out of stone and retaining the passive characteristics of its building materials. A "Giant" like Blake's "Giant Forms," Paterson is a mythic myth-maker, bestowing physical presence and life on his imaginatively created "dreams" and struggling to satisfy that wild and sensual aspect of self which finds expression on Garrett Mountain. Between the two flows the Passaic River which in its broadest application embodies the life-force itself in the enormous, amoral energy for which the poet must find a direction.



Representing at a sexual level an image of seminal fluid-- "The multiple seed, / packed tight with detail, soured, / is lost in the flux" (12)--the river is the flow of consciousness which, emerging out of memory and moving relentlessly toward infinity, kindles the poet to activity. Inevitably, in the activity of discipline, the violence of frustration and despair manifests itself unmodified in the poem. Most importantly, the river for Williams is neither consistent in its flow, nor predictable in its effect upon the community and the excellence of the poet's methodology is its direct expression of creative and destructive energies in inextricable relations. In Book One, for example, the slaughter of eels by "the hoodlums and men" is at once a manifestation of public mutilation of locale and the emergence into the body of a personal activity of a poet's outburst against his community--a cry of rage and anger that is conveyed in the formlessness of a prose fragment because it lacks the discipline and directedness to articulate the intensity of feeling.

The consummate image of poetic energy is, however, embodied in the Passaic Falls. A sexual climax, a "descent,"<sup>65</sup> a dispersal and metamorphosis of river waters, the Falls comb out the river, suggesting the poet's own function to comb out the tangled strands of experience, separating out their formlessness so that each strand may be apprehended in its individuality. In the image of the Falls, Williams imaginatively conceives a single moment where past and future



become one with the present, a bouyant moment of displacement, reintegration and dispersal. The noise and activity of the river, reaching climax in the weightless Passaic Falls, provides that essential "consecutiveness" to the poem's organization which Williams hoped would remain despite the disjointedness of compositional method. The "unimpeded thrust" through the materials lays emphasis on what Merle Brown, in a criticism of Wallace Stevens, called "the forceful current in the process of being transformed"<sup>66</sup>--the act of placing materials one against another and of effecting their temporary reconciliation. "The thing that matters in art," as Pound argued:

is a sort of energy, something more or less like electricity or radioactivity, a force transfusing, welding, and unifying. A force rather like water when it spurts up through very bright sand and sets it in swift motion.<sup>67</sup>

In Pound's image of bright sand set in motion by a swift current of water is the activity which perhaps best characterizes the methodology of Paterson, an activity which begins with the reading and primary selection of local materials, continues with their placement within an organizational rhythm which activates their initial context and concludes with a determined effort by the poet to allow the reader a place--although not too easy a place--in the creation and evaluation of the art-object. The river of poetic transformation, as Williams recognized, contained the energy to immerse poet and reader in an experiential flux and either to celebrate the temporary order gained by the poet in

assembling his materials or to drown both in mere formlessness. In Book One of Paterson Williams appears at great pains to control the river, binding it within a polarization of forces whose subsequent release toward the close of Book Two has disturbed critics in their approach to the poem.

(iii)

Book One establishes the epic combatants--the poet and his immediate locale which cries out for satisfactory articulation. Firstly, the poet:

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! Eternally asleep, his dreams  
walk about the city where he persists incognito. Butter-  
flies settle on his stone ear. Immortal he neither  
moves nor rouses and is seldom seen, though he breathes  
and the subtleties of his  
                  machinations  
drawing their substance from the noise of the pouring  
                  river  
animate a thousand automatons. Who because they  
neither know their sources nor the sills of their  
disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly  
                  for the most part,  
locked and forgot in their desires - unroused. (14)

The verse paragraph's spatial design isolates the elements in opposition. Williams organizes the contending forces as the machinations of his thoughts and the river which embodies a constant activity of consciousness, both seeking substantiation through language. The thoughts of the questing poet, however, evolve from historical precedent which finds expression as prose. Based on an imposed culture, the thoughts are stale, lacking the Passaic's essential energy and newness. Following the course of the river, the poet seeks to effect a direction and discipline to its amoral activity which would unlock the poet's desires and permit marriage between self and locale.

Secondly, the locale:

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.  
Pearls at her ankles, her monstrous hair  
spangled with apple-blossoms is scattered about into  
the back country, waking their dreams--where the deer run  
and the wood-duck nests protecting his gallant plumage. (17)

The Valley of the Rocks and Garrett Mountain Park represent the entire, knowable, natural world, where sensuality impells Man beyond the dubious limits of Puritanism--that Female Principle the offending Christians had mutilated in In the American Grain. The conflicting images "Pearls at her ankles, her monstrous hair" evoke images of the virgin-whore of Book Five and begin the unravelling of metaphorical possibilities which interrelate the numerous and diverse images of the poem. Hubert, in Many Loves, explained the poet's technique thus:

to  
give the word a metaphorical twist by the position it assumes, the elevation it induces--without pictorial effects--by the force of its meaning; a similarity to daily speech, the miracle being it sounds so, but the awakening experienced is proven otherwise, changed to raise the spirit to a full enjoyment.<sup>68</sup>

Sister Bernetta Quin points to the repetition of key words and phrases as suggesting:

the echo usually connected with the scene of a waterfall, even hinting at the narcissistic theory which the very word Paterson crystallizes, perhaps also paralleling that stutter which is descriptive of contemporary effort to use the language.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, for example, Williams allows pearls to stand as ikon of natural beauty and richness whose rape embodies the poet's

public theme of economic exploitation and his aesthetic concern to manifest such beauty methodologically. Williams' search and David Hower's search for "rigor of beauty" is constantly thwarted by an environment whose sole criterion is usefulness. David Hower, one of Williams' thoughts, manifests an early example of the poet's failure to combat his context, a failure implicit in the alien nature of his community's language and culture. The fight against such repressiveness confronted Williams throughout the making of the poem. In a letter to Babette Deutsch in 1947, Williams stated that:

In Part or Book 11, soon to appear . . . there will be much more in the same manner, that is, much more relating to the economic distress occasioned by human greed and blindness--aided, as always, by the church, all churches in the broadest sense of that designation--but still there will be little treating directly of the rise of labor as a named force. (SL, 259)

The making of the poem is inextricably related to the manufacture of a new society. Mrs Cummings' fall or leap into the Passaic waters takes place soon after her marriage to the Church and Sam Patch, having attempted to bridge a similar distance--between city and mountain--by retrieving the wooden pin of an early bridge, turns his efforts to purely commercial gain and inevitably dies, his place of death far from his local ground. In each case the failure represents a manifestation of Paterson's own determination to seek release from the growing sense of frustration within so restrictive a cultural environment.





as they wilt and disappear:  
 Marriage come to have a shuddering  
 implication

The initial attempt to reconcile language and idea is by relating object to object through words and phrases which ignore formal differences--"stylistic variants"--to consider essential similarities.

Thus, for example, Williams unites in his imagination Garrett Mountain Park, the first wife of an African Chief and two "half-grown girls" celebrating Easter by emphasizing the "monstrous hair" of the first, the "monumental hair" of the second and the "clear hair" of the third. This concept of the shared characteristic serves to unify the various manifestations of Book One's Female Principle whilst the qualifying word assesses the respective sexuality in the repressed mood of the poem. The Park, coming continually into flower but unfulfilled, stands in direct contrast to the human world of Paterson whose two girls suggest a first innocence before estrangement in a commercial world:

Two -  
       disparate among the pouring  
 waters of their hair in which nothing is  
 molten -

two, bound by an instinct to be the same:  
 ribbons, cut from a piece,  
 cerise pink, binding their hair: one -  
 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 -

The movement of the hair in the wind, like the coital thrust of Lawrence's snake, brings the latent sexuality between city and mountain to the surface of the poem. It is a movement shared by the wind and, more particularly, by the eels and it is the exploitation of the latter by Paterson's inhabitants which marks the death of a further attempt by the poet to "marry" his locale whose riches, exposed to light, are inadequately harvested:

By nightfall of the 28th, acres of mud were exposed and the water mostly had been drawn off. The fish did not run into the nets. But a black crowd of people could be seen from the cars, standing about under the willows, watching the men and boys on the drained lake bottom--some hundred yards in front of the dam.

The whole bottom was covered with people, and the big eels, weighing from three to four pounds each, would approach the edge and then the boys would strike at them. From this time everybody got all they wanted in a few moments.

That sense of satisfaction, implied by the last line of the prose extract, is however not shared by the mountain herself. Thus, in a strain of bitter irony the natural and unnatural worlds of Paterson's dimensionality are related by supposedly shared characteristics which serve merely to emphasize their differences. The University and Mountain Park, for example, are both likened to green buds, tightly curled. The system of stone, however, embodied here in the University's English Department, remains:

a bud forever green  
tight-curved, upon the pavement, perfect  
in juice and substance but divorced, divorced  
from its fellows, fallen low -

Divorce is  
the sign of knowledge in our time,  
divorce! divorce!

As the waters gather above the city to hurl their waters furiously against Paterson's side, as they interweave in bewildering permutations, Williams interrelates the diverse elements of his world. And Book One's fundamental purpose is to stress the poet's ability to effect this and the frustration implicit in the creative process. The atmosphere of poetic frustration is re-created as one of sexual repression where the epic combatants seek to reveal the unfathomable promise of their springtimes--"a sort of springtime / toward which their minds aspired / but which he saw, / within himself--ice bound." The sexual potential of the natural world promises a full flowering of the individual:

the uppointed breasts  
of that other, tense, charged with  
pressures unrelieved .  
and the rekindling they bespoke  
was evident.

Paterson's desires, repressed by social mores, degenerate into destructive prosaic tendencies within himself:

The mixture ran into the woods and took the general name, Jackson's Whites. . . . New Barbadoes Neck, the region was called. Cromwell, in the middle of the seventeenth century, shipped some thousands of Irish women and children to the Barbadoes to be sold as slaves. Forced by their owners to mate with the others these unfortunates were succeeded by a few generations of Irish-speaking negroes and mulattoes. And it is commonly asserted to this day the natives of Barbadoes speak with an Irish tongue.

The passage too makes clear the puritanical strain emanating

from the name of Cromwell and England which has led to forced marriage and the inevitable failure of language.

Williams relates the theme of repressed sexuality in Paterson to an excremental theme which Paterson, in a dull explication of the poem, calls "unjustifiably vulgar":<sup>70</sup>

And derivatively, for the Great Falls,  
PISS-AGH! the giants let fly!

The ability to piss and crap effusively on trees and bushes which flower in spite of such attentions distinguish Man and the dogs prevailing in the poem. Whilst the poet mocks the propriety of his fellows, punning execrably:

What a bunch of bums! Afraid somebody see  
you?

Blah!

EXCREMENTI!

- she spits.

Look a' me, Grandma! Everybody too damn  
lazy.

the Park is ravished "torn by / the wild workers' children  
tearing up the grass, / kicking, screaming?"

Ironically, it is the Factory, employers of those workers whose children tear up the Park, which perpetuates this theme:

On the embankment a short,  
compact cone (juniper)  
that trembles frantically  
in the indifferent gale: male -  
stands rooted there.

The purple berries of the juniper are transformed by the Factory into a medicinal diuretic, thus utilized to encourage the workers in their incontinence, rivalling in debased form



the effusive quality of the Great Falls and the poet's own stream of consciousness. Book One of Paterson thus delineates the overwhelming differences between Man and Nature which inhibit the poet in his efforts to create. The act of creation is related inextricably to the sexual and excremental activities of Man. The elements which organize blockages to those natural acts are invariably linked to an economic system of which the University and Factory are primary manifestations. The first book thus abounds with attempts by the poet to be himself in what is becoming, despite the rigidity of the initial delineation, the poem of his life. Inevitably, however, the attempts, thwarted by systems of ideas persisting from the past, are doomed. And the book, charged throughout with frustration and despair, ends in terror as the mind cracks for a brief moment to allow Williams his glimpse of "Earth, the chatterer, father of all / speech. . . ." Reminded again of his responsibilities to articulate adequately that Pater to whom he is Son, Williams attempts to move beyond the system of blockages he has established in Book One.

The critical success of Book One resides basically in the exclusiveness of this thematic and methodological polarization of forces. Randall Jarrell, for example, believed that after the publication of the first Book "Paterson has been getting rather steadily worse," descending ultimately into that "Organization of Irrelevance (or, perhaps, the

Irrelevance of Organization)" into which a raw reality consistently intrudes. Rawness, for Jarrell, is particularly identified with Credit and Usury, "those enemies of man, God, and contemporary long poems."<sup>71</sup> His high praise for Book One which established the critical precedent for its evaluation and reception is, however, the result of that exclusive and elemental opposition between the two contending forces, extensions of which find clear metaphorical consolidation in the prose fragments. Reacting favorably to the "unfinished" quality of its compositional surface, Jarrell is responding nevertheless to the very tightness of its conceptual framework whose consistency provides an internal frame for integration of its disparate elements.

It has been my contention in this thesis that the context of collage activity I have established provides for a critical evaluation of the Books of Paterson which is a direct extension of the materials themselves, the artist's utilization of any materials appropriate to make public a primarily aesthetic argument. Whilst agreeing that Book One has a consistency of argumentative impulse which differs considerably from the rhythms of the later Books, I disagree that those later volumes reveal a falling off in quality, and suggest that they rather reflect the gradual enlargement and elaboration of the fundament<sup>al</sup> structure delineated in Book One. Manifestations of male and female principles permeate the work, creating a surface of abundance--the seeming chaos

of a profusion of diverse details--which is internally structured by the Giants of Book One. The further Books of Paterson express the poet's growing realization that his assembled materials consistently move back to the metaphoric possibilities implicit in Paterson and Garrett Mountain Park, and that any material can be mined for its peculiar contribution to the argument.

What I have tried to substantiate is the fundamental impulse of the collage-artist to make sense of his world by accepting, embracing and incorporating its literal presence into his more controlled artistic environment. There, in a mesh of conflicting presences, art and the chaos out of which it is formed begin their ironic dance, expressed fundamentally in the opposition between surface confusion and internal consistency, between the banality of the materials assembled and the magical world they evoke in their new context. The essential impulse in the collage-activity remains, however, the recognition that any material, adequately de-materialized and re-constituted, can by disclosing its own precious sense of identity establish that dimensionality to an art-work whereby an inhabited space testifies to a world beyond the limitations of art. What is finally established is a context of energies where the coarseness of materials acts in constant counterweight to the refining processes of the artistic act. The excellence of Paterson lies always in the intimacy of relations Williams has noted between the two worlds of Doctor

and Poet and in the recognition that every scrap of experiential data is capable of transformation into an aspect of the creative process itself. Always, in Paterson, the aesthetic dimensions of the poem appear as one with its social, economic and political levels, substantiating a work in which the poet as individual speaks to his environment of a consistent world view where openness is prime value. In Paterson the sense is always of a poet who walks with difficulty between or astride the outer and inner worlds of his own life, who meets both in a structure celebrating the density and completeness of an apparently fragmented human experience.



## NOTES

### CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup>Spring and All is specifically an attack upon the traditional conception of a volume of poems by attempting to introduce the very process of creation in the juxtaposition of prose and poems.

<sup>2</sup>This image and its roots in the American literary imagination is explored in Noble's Eternal Adam and the New World Garden, Charles Braziller, New York, 1968.

<sup>3</sup>As "poem for voices" the prose may be said to act in counterpoint. See Nash, "The Use of Prose in Paterson."

<sup>4</sup>Williams declared his purpose early in Paterson:

a mass of detail  
to interrelate on a new ground, difficultly:  
an assonance, a homologue  
triple piled  
pulling the disparate together to clarify  
and compress: (30)

<sup>5</sup>I wish to acknowledge my large debt to Schmalenbach, Kurt Schwitters, New York, 1967. Werner Schmalenbach's thorough detailing of both biographical and aesthetic dimensions of Schwitters' life has proved invaluable.

<sup>6</sup>Schwitters, 74.

<sup>7</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>9</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Schmalenbach discusses the significance of the term Merz and quotes Schwitters' own words of explanation:

I called my new way of creation with any



material "MERZ." This is the second syllable of "Kommerz" (commerce). The name originated from the "Merzbild," a picture in which the word "MERZ" could be read in between abstract forms. It was cut out and glued on from an advertisement for the KOMMERZ- UND PRIVATBANK. This word "MERZ" had become part of the picture through being attuned to the other part of the picture, and so it had to stay there.

Quoted by Schmalenbach, Schwitters, 93.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>12</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>15</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>17</sup>The importance of this statement to the structure of Paterson is discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>18</sup>Schwitters, 97.

<sup>19</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>21</sup>The American Background, 80.

<sup>22</sup>Schwitters, 89.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>25</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>27</sup>Williams argued for the place of the irrational in his works in a letter to Sister Bernetta Quinn, August 23, 1951. His first "instruction" was to "leave a place for the irrational." (SL, 308)

<sup>28</sup>Schwitters, 123.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 144.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>35</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>36</sup>Catalogue to Schwitters' Retrospective Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1962.

<sup>37</sup>The origins of column and the implications of columnar art are detailed by Schwitters in Merz 21. erstes Veilchenheft (1931), quoted fully by Schmalenbach, Schwitters, 130.

<sup>38</sup>Williams saw Paterson as a "column" (P, 10), a conceptual idea picked up by Peterson, An Approach to Paterson, and used by him to signify a column of men.

<sup>39</sup>The political context in which Paterson was written is intelligently substantiated by Mike Weaver, William Carlos Williams: The American Background. Roger Seamon also discusses the conception of the long poem as "social document" in "The Bottle in the Fire: Resistance as Creation." Merrill Studies in Paterson, Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, Columbus, Ohio, 1971.

<sup>40</sup>I borrow this term from Charles Olson who used it extensively in The Maximus Poems to signify the inarticulate and leaderless mob who manifested so peculiar an inversion of the democratic ideal.

<sup>41</sup>"The Preface to Paterson," Journal of Contemporary Literature, X (Winter, 1969), 39-53.

<sup>42</sup>Prose of William Carlos Williams, 158.

<sup>43</sup>William Carlos Williams, 171.

<sup>44</sup>Prose, 151.

<sup>45</sup>Kenneth Burke had called William the "master of the glimpse." "Williams 1883-1963," New York Review of Books, 1, 2 (1963), 45-47.

<sup>46</sup>The Poem of the Mind, 133.

<sup>47</sup>Wagner, Prose, 152.

<sup>48</sup>Quoted by Sister Macaria Neussendorfer, "William Carlos Williams' Idea of a City," Merrill Studies in Paterson, 98.

<sup>49</sup>See I Wanted to Write a Poem, 72-73.

<sup>50</sup>"The Bottle in the Fire," Merrill Studies, 32.

<sup>51</sup>The American Background, 115.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>53</sup>Unpublished Manuscript, Buffalo Collection.

<sup>54</sup>A Companion to William Carlos Williams' Paterson, 19.

<sup>55</sup>See, in particular, IAG, 109.

<sup>56</sup>"The Poetic Principle," Selected Writings of Edgar Allen Poe, Penguin Books, 1967, 499-513.

<sup>57</sup>Williams has particularly stressed this word in NOP where he had argued:

The compositions that are smoothed, consecutive are disjointed. Dis-jointed. They bear no relation to anything in the world or in the mind. (11)

<sup>58</sup>ML, 203.

<sup>59</sup>See, for example, the interview incorporated into Paterson, 261-262.

<sup>60</sup>Touching merges two distinct levels of Williams' work--the technical and the metaphoric. The first touching is achieved by juxtaposition and the second by that reaching out to the immediate ground which is the prerequisite for writing a poem.

<sup>61</sup>Another attack on Pound and Eliot.

<sup>62</sup>Psychoanalysis, 118.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>65</sup>The descent-ascent motif in Paterson is perhaps most strongly recognized in Book Five. See my discussion of this book in the conclusion.

<sup>66</sup>Wallace Stevens: The Poem as Act (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1970), 14.

<sup>67</sup>Selected Essays, 72.

<sup>68</sup>Many Loves, 9.

<sup>69</sup>"On Paterson, Book One," reprinted in William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, 116.

<sup>70</sup>An Approach to Paterson, [

<sup>71</sup>"A View of Three Poets," Partisan Review, XVIII (1951), reprint in Williams Carlos Williams, ed. Charles Tomlinson, 173.

<sup>72</sup>See Mike Weaver's discussion of the organization of abundance, The American Background, 114. Williams had used the concept himself in 1952 when he argued:

The basic idea which underlies our art must be,



for better or worse, that which Toynbee has isolated for us: abundance, that is permission, for all. And it is in the structure of our works that this must show. We must embody the principle of abundance, of total availability of materials, freest association in the measure, in that to differ from the poem of all previous time. It will be that sort of thing, if we succeed, that shall give us our supreme distinction.

"The American Spirit in Art," Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Second Series, 2(1952), 57.



# CONCLUSION

"a field of small flowers"

(i)

Williams' conception of the poem as a "field of action"<sup>1</sup> reaches its apotheosis in Paterson, Book Five. Its dominant and unifying motif is the Cloisters Tapestry at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art which provides a symbolic fabric or "field of small flowers" in which a unicorn hunt and its mythic implications are carefully detailed.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the unicorn lies wounded, whilst the poet's "Kingself" lies close to death, the small flowers carefully individuated within the composition, express for Williams an important sense of the world's ability to renew itself. By what the painter Ben Shahn termed "evocative juxtaposition,"<sup>3</sup> Williams justifies the existence of this later section of Paterson, an existence created out of the poet's need to continue his life's work and out of his realization that there could be no resounding conclusion--except in the indifference of Death<sup>4</sup>--to the creative process unravelled by him. The poet walks, if only in his memory or imagination, a perpetual field of small flowers whose treasures, whilst abundant, are not in themselves valuable or "significant." But they constantly make manifest the potential of Man, amongst whom Williams centrally locates himself, and of the world external to Man, to move beyond decay and dying into a higher innocence, achieving that "initiation"<sup>5</sup> back into reality

Williams argued was the result of any "descent." This ascent is thus a return, Persephone-like, out of hell back into the world of the actual, out of despair and desperate frustrations into a new sense of community with those fellow mortals he had felt an inevitable estrangement from. The purpose of Paterson, Book Five is to demonstrate the process--to provide the cartoon<sup>6</sup>--whereby ascent is achieved, particularly when the first four books have taken as their substance the descending flow of the river and its obvious implications of a flux that cannot be stopped, and only with difficulty controlled. Paterson, Five is thus a poem of affirmation and a statement of survival<sup>7</sup> in which the imagination continues to see beauty and articulate it in certain measure even though the body has grown old and fails. "You'd think," Williams wryly said, "the brain / 'd be grafted / on a better root" (252).

Williams' conception of the poem as tapestry is the simple culmination of his efforts to connect things up. Juan Gris had talked of the painterly fabric in "On the Possibility of Painting," printed during the 'twenties in the transatlantic review, and Williams had made use of the analogy in his attempts to define the appearance of a similar fabric in the poetry of Marianne Moore. "The interstices for the light and not the interstitial web of the thought concerned her. . . ." "The effect," he continued, "is in the penetration of the light itself, how much, how

little; the appearance of the luminous background" (SE, 128). Williams' use of Gris' terminology is an early confirmation of his acceptance of collage technique and aesthetic and an important stage in the evolution of Paterson Five where the poet locates himself at the bright centre of the tapestry, crossed, to utilize Gris' phrasing, "with one set of threads as the representational, or abstract element, and the cross-threads as the technical, architectural, or abstract element." Threads and cross-threads, Gris argued, "are interdependent and complementary, and if one set is lacking the fabric does not exist."<sup>8</sup> Warp and woof are more simply translated as prose and poetry whose effected interweaving creates that artistic tapestry Williams opposes to the "age of shoddy."<sup>9</sup> Even here, however, this motif--the survival of art in its active confrontation with the economics of greed<sup>10</sup>--has its origins in the local ground, having immediate reference to Paterson, the city and Paterson, the poem. In Book Two Williams had stressed SUM's particular manufacture of cotton goods, juxtaposing their mindless labour to the craft traditions of the area:

. . . . . The prominent purpose of the  
Society was the manufacture of cotton goods.

Washington at his first inaugural  
wore  
a coat of Crow-black homespun woven  
in Paterson . . . . . (91)

Weaving, as craft and manufacturing industry, embodies the two sides to all Art which Williams begins to establish as

conflicting principles--negative and positive poles--between which emerges a structuring tension. The tapestry of the Cloisters Museum represents for Williams the quality of art an entire community can pursue when its communal sense of purpose and direction is not undermined by the profit motive. Book Five is a direct reply to shoddiness and a challenge to "the heavy breathing pack" (273) to cease their remorseless pursuit and goring of beauty and to perceive in the organization of the poem--as that organization is objectively explicated by Williams' use of the tapestry--a sense of communality, a pride and belonging within the camaraderie of artists. Addressing specifically those men who have assumed the most degenerate characteristics of "the age of shoddy," who are themselves "shoddy, driven by their bosses, inside and outside the job to be done, at a profit" (266), Williams exhorts them to see in Art not ennobling gesture or heroic act but practical systems of self-government. Williams asks in Book One "Who are these people" who "walk incommunicado" (18), without an awareness of those formal possibilities which beset the poet at both a literary and social dimension. He had talked in the second section of Book One of:

. . a mass of detail  
to interrelate on a new ground, difficultly;  
an assonance, a homologue (30)

and in the tapestry he discovers a methodology which adequately expresses the interrelationships of details whilst providing the shoddy men with a meaningful means of production.



Tapestry embodies the same understanding of communal effort as the building of a medieval cathedral like Chartres.<sup>11</sup> Working from a fundamental cartoon and "All together, working together," the worker-artists express at a public level a sense of integrality that their creation speaks of at an artistic level. Paterson is drawn by such an example of community to:

to avoid  
the irreverent--to refresh himself  
at the sight direct from the 12th  
century what the old women or the young  
or men or boys wielding their needles to  
put in her green thread correctly beside  
the purple, myrtle beside holly and the  
brown threads beside: together as the  
cartoon has plotted it for them. (270)

The tapestry thus speaks of an equable co-existence between, on the one hand, the public world of town and guild economics, of the relationship between men and their work and that between individual members of society and their commonly assumed functions, and, on the other hand, art and the search for the elusive permanents--Love, Beauty, Truth. In its dimensions--the process of the weaving and the scene woven--the validity of Paterson's collage aesthetic and technique is affirmed; public and private levels of poetic experience are established as vital concomitants; the weavers and those areas designated to them are carefully individuated; the poem-tapestry flowers into an active and substantiated alternative to the deathly governments of SUM.

In its detailing of

A WORLD OF ART  
THAT THROUGH THE YEARS HAS

SURVIVED! (244)

Paterson asserts not only a poet's wonder and sense of self-affirmation in giving himself so totally to his Gesamtkunstwerk but also his commitment to the interrelationship of two worlds--"la réalité! la réalité!" (244) and "art alone" (247)--whose separate identities he insisted on maintaining. Paterson Five, following the blockages and failures of the earlier books, celebrates Williams' ability to walk between the two worlds in a "field of small flowers" which is at once the woven background to the Unicorn hunt and at the same time the literal background to Dr Paterson's life. The poet moves at will in and out of the artistic and the actual levels of his experience, discovering through his movement a sense of their parallel and complementary natures. In his visits to the Cloisters, for example, he is at pains to record the individual personality of the flowers which "seem crowding to be in on the act":

the cranky violet  
                    like a knight in chess,  
                                    the cinque-foil,  
yellow-faced -  
                    this is a French  
                                    or Flemish tapestry -  
the sweet-smelling primrose  
                    growing close to the ground, that poets  
                    have made famous in England,  
                                    I cannot tell it all:  
slipper flowers  
                    crimson and white,  
                                    balanced to hang

on slender bracts, cups evenly arranged upon a stem,  
                     foxglove, the eglantine  
                                     or wild rose,  
 pink as a lady's ear lobe when it shows  
                     beneath the hair,  
                                     campanella, blue and purple tufts  
 small as forget-me-nots among the leaves.  
                     Yellow centers, crimson petals  
                                     and the reverse,  
 dandelion, love-in-a-mist,  
                     cornflowers,  
                                     thistles and others  
 the names and perfumes I do not know. (274-275)

The care Williams has expressed in the visual and rhythmical placement of the flowers reflects an order he recognized in the organization of the tapestry itself. The woven flowers, Williams argues:

                                    fill in the detail  
 from frame to frame without perspective  
                                     touching each other on the canvas  
                                     make up the picture: (274)

The results of seeing and understanding the conceptual government manifest in the flowers' relationship to one another--an overt declaration of collage principles, based on the law of juxtaposition--offers to Paterson an order which he is able to use in assembling the stray elements of his own life. In "The Idea of Order at Key West" Ramon Fernandez and "I" had perceived a similar order in the separateness of the singer's song and that formless sea she sang against. Stevens indeed concludes his poem with a vision of the two moving back to a tentative civilization--the fishing village--and extending into their own formless lives the principles of form the song or work of art had given to them.<sup>12</sup> In Book Five of Paterson, however, the conclusion of the Stevens' poem is

integrated into the process of the work, setting up an organization whereby the two antagonists--order and chaos, poetry and prose--can exist simultaneously.

The organization of the Cloisters' tapestry thus informs the life of Paterson and the flower motif integrates the disparate thoughts of the poet. For Paterson, of course, "Flowers have always been his friends" (269), expressing in their thrust from root to petal a generative principle Williams applied to poetry. This is again confirmed in Book Five where the "flowers-friends" relationship is juxtaposed to:

Though he is approaching  
death he is possessed by many poems.

And, more specifically, poems are small flowers, serving to complete the poet's and his community's awareness of the background fabric against which their Unicorn hunts take place. Importantly Williams locates " . the unicorn against a millefleurs background, . " (268) immediately after fragments of his literal reality in old age:

. . . tending his flower  
garden, cutting his grass and trying  
to get the young  
                    to foreshorten  
their errors in the use of words which  
he had found so difficult, the errors  
he had made in the use of the  
poetic line:

The act of tending garden and the act of making poems suggest a basic rage for order which is more fully articulated in the poet's government of Book Five and in his reference to Allen

Ginsberg's Sunflower Sutra (248).

It is thus by means of a unifying motif such as flowers that Williams relates the world of art to his daily world of Paterson. Beginning baldly with the factual statement: "There is a woman in our town" (255), the poet, in one important example, begins to transform her literal presence into an active element or thread in his own composition. What attracts the poet, despite her being "flat bellied / in worn slacks," is her very ordinariness. Indeed the poet's ability to perceive beauty in the tired and banal--"her / face would attract no / adolescent"--provides him with one of the consolations of old age. Like, however, the earlier manifestations of "the beautiful thing," the glimpse of beauty is fleeting and she disappears into the crowd. What stays with the poet is:

An inconspicuous decoration  
made of sombre cloth, meant  
I think to be a flower, was  
pinned flat to her  
right

breast. . . .

The "decoration of sombre cloth" in its shape as flower constantly triggers in the memory of the poet a relationship with a larger tapestry where beauty survives. The flowers in the museum remind Dr Paterson of that beauty, felt but not grasped, which he had consistently attempted to express. Whilst individual memories are subsumed by the cycles of decay and death, it is that certainty uncovered in change



itself--as that certainty is declared in artwork--which allows Williams to interject:

So through art alone, male and female, a field of flowers, a tapestry, spring flowers unequalled in loveliness. (247)

This marriage of male and female principles to generate a creative energy of wholeness, which had been the poet's purpose in delineating the Giants of Book One, is ironically realized in the ordinariness of the woman in Book Five whose flower says "she was a woman" but who otherwise "was dressed in male attire" (256). This indeed illustrates the function of the literal details in Book Five which is actively to undermine that larger conception of art sustained by an unthinking public. For this reason the hermaphroditic union is seen in a woman whose feet "were small," an adjective ironically linking her with those small flowers abounding in the Cloisters Tapestry.

Williams, as he weaves a tapestry out of the literal details of his own experience, is deliberately building a formal organization with specific political implications. If, for example, a poem by e. e. cummings is by structure the work of a philosophical anarchist--fragments related by the intensity of the "i"--Williams' poems move toward a concept of ideal democracy and their function, implicit in the earlier work, explicit in Paterson, is to educate. Presumably Williams shares the view of Luis Borges in, for example, Labyrinths where individual "stories" posit examples of

totally fabricated worlds which have been gradually accepted by authorities as real and whose completeness of fabrication or finish has proved so attractive that they gradually displace reality.<sup>13</sup> This usurpation of the host by a parasitic culture is a political statement on the dangers of, for example, Fascism where a model of perfect inclusiveness is imposed upon reality and made to fit. Williams' poetic life is dedicated to active confrontation with such models which cut off the crab's claws to push it cleanly into a box. The enormous value of the poem Paterson lies in its active opposition to murder at literary and social levels by demonstrating, in the mutual interdependence of its constituent parts, how disparate elements--people--can work together to create a unified being. Williams includes a letter from Edward Dahlberg to stress the dangers of tyranny in whatever dimension of human experience it has filtered into:

I am quite sure too that people only have the kind of government that their bellies crave. Furthermore, I cannot cure one soul in the earth. Plato took three journeys to Dionysius, the Tyrant of Syracuse, and once was almost killed and on another occasion was nearly sold into slavery because he imagined that he influenced a devil to model his tyranny upon The Republic. Seneca was the teacher of Nero, and Aristotle tutored Alexander of Macedon. What did they teach? (267)

It is appropriate, perhaps, to ask "What did Williams teach?" and what were the means whereby education was effected. The answer is implicit in the collage aesthetic with its stress on individuated elements and their harmonious interaction within a unified field--a field which actively seeks out the

banal and ordinary so as not to lose important contact with literal reality. If art's order is to serve as a viable political alternative it must seek to organize what already exists and not impose upon that existence some quite alien form. This latter was the policy of the Puritans in In the American Grain, of the "traditionalists of plagiarism" in their use of the sonnet and of SUM in the imposition of alien economic controls upon the townspeople of Paterson, New Jersey. Against their "perfections" Williams offers a coarse energy which deliberately denies traditional conceptions of "finish," whose very imperfections awaken what Robert Duncan called "intimations of human being." Art's order, avoiding the dangerous sterility of, for example, Stevens' jar upon a hill in Tennessee,<sup>14</sup> remains always in contact with Man, with the life of the senses, and with the natural cycles of ceaseless change in which Man is located.

It is for these reasons that Williams establishes in Book Five of Paterson a context of art and artists wherein the location of the self and of its efforts to pursue government can be accomplished. It is an epic cataloguing of forces drawn up in battle. Paul Klee, Dürer, Da Vinci, Picasso, Juan Gris, Ben Shahn, Gertrude Stein embody principles of artistic intent that Williams incorporates as metaphor into his own organization. Just as Schwitters had made a shrine--albeit ironic--out of his friends' urine, so Williams activates the examples of his favorite artists to build a similar

cathedral of individuated shrines. What their varying focuses serve to emphasize is their ability through art to renew love in a world characterized by indifference or brutality. For Williams, the image of art's compassion is

. . . the Jew  
                   in the pit  
                                 among his fellows  
 when the indifferent chap  
                   with the machine gun  
                                 as spraying the heap .  
 he had not yet been hit  
                   but smiled  
 comforting his companions  
                   comforting  
                                 his companions (260)

and the result of a confrontation with art is refreshment--to sleep "like a baby / without / liquor or dope of any sort!" The means by which Art effects its purpose--the very substance of the first four books of Paterson--is articulated by Williams in his use of Peter Brueghel's painting of the Nativity. The painting, one of a sequence Williams had "translated" in Pictures from Brueghel, celebrates Christ's Nativity in the local context of flemish peasantry and, in Williams' view, demonstrates the artist's "resourceful mind," dissatisfied with the painterly conventions of religious art, attempting to renew the meaning of birth and love for his immediate locale. What Williams saw was Brueghel's:

. . . alert mind dissatisfied with  
 what it is asked to  
 and cannot do  
  
 accepted the story and painted  
 it in the brilliant  
 colors of the chronicler (PB, 6)



The artist's position as chronicler involves the function of creative historian--reading the past for signs of the present--and the capacity to read without bias. Peter Brueghel, Williams reminds us, saw the birth of Christ "from the two sides: the / imagination must be served - / and he served / dispassionately" (P, 265). Dispassion thus involves the power and breadth of the imagination to see from more than one point of view--to fidget if necessary with points of view so that the rich complexity of the situation may be realized.<sup>15</sup> Brueghel allows contending forces equal value within the painting, setting the innocence of a "Baby / new born" in opposition to the "savagely armed men / armed with pikes" (263). What results from such a confrontation is a stasis that Williams had earlier remarked "from a chrysalis / has stretched its wings" (260), a stasis that represents the presence of love in the world, that refuses to see the ultimate defeat of death and inhumanity but counters that latter presence with the continuing power of Man to renew himself. Christ's Nativity must always take place within the world of men and that world is, by implication, imperfect.

Brueghel's painting expresses a further important aspect of Art in making relevant to the immediate community the lessons of history. Christ's Birth owes its significance in the painting not to its religious values but to its manifestation of a continuing human absorption in birth and renewal, in the capacity of Man to regenerate himself.<sup>16</sup>



Williams, in the final section of Book Five, relocates the Nativity within the present century, stressing a similar opposition of beliefs with changed adversaries. The armed men are transformed into "the more stupid / German soldiers of the late / war"; the baby Christ becomes as unreal as a picture of a baby "from an illustrated catalogue / in colors" (263) and the Flemish poor fuse silently and inevitably with the poor of Paterson, New Jersey. Whilst the points of reference change, the elemental oppositions persist. Art's organization is to achieve that moment of stillness, that created and creative stasis which is not an expression of dismay because of the existence of such opposites but an expression of exultation--sometimes quiet as in the concluding lines of The Desert Music and frequently noisy as in Williams' recognition in Paterson Five of Art's SURVIVAL. This Blakean energy,<sup>17</sup> generated by the confrontation of opposites, is established in the initial "Delineaments of the Giants" as a Male-Female: City/Park dichotomy. The explicit purpose of Paterson the poem is to effect a "marriage" between the two, to establish the harmonious interaction of contending forces. What characterizes the second, third and fourth books is the abundance of failures--their predominant image in "divorce"--who people the poet's efforts. Book Five's change of tone from the earlier works is in the main based on the recognition that opposites must co-exist within one organization, that "marriage" involves more than the establishment of the peaceable

kingdom wherein Man and the animals lie down together, and that the poem's achievement rests more in the delineation of opposites than in their ultimate reconciliation. Thus prose and poetry co-exist in a literary organization where frequently--as in the conflict between Pound's letter on economics and the refined voice which precedes it (253-255)--their juxtaposition sparks conflict and tension.

The opposition of contending forces, however, is larger than the prose-poetry confrontation, structuring the very conceptual framework of Book Five. Williams had consistently argued throughout his career against that formal insistence which limited an artist's vision to a single dimension of human experience. The sonnet, for example, twisted human speech to make it conform to its preconceived pattern; the novel as literary genre reduced the texture of time by an emphasis on "progress" and pursuit of plot;<sup>18</sup> the history had dedicated itself to the thickening of legend and the evasion of truth.<sup>19</sup> Such forms, Williams argued, distorted reality by imposing upon it simplified and thus more attractive versions of the "truth" and in the process seduced their readers from more immediate social responsibilities. The purpose of a collage organization, like its manifestation in Paterson Five, is--deliberately--to evolve a textured reality, complex, difficult to realize in its entirety, in which all elements of human reality are simultaneously present.

In such an organization past and present constantly jar against one another, moving in and out of the reader's consciousness as they had moved in and out of Williams' in, for example, his Autobiography. As past and present collide so they establish a fabric in which opposites are located. In Book Five the virgin is related inextricably to her whore-self, the "blameless beasts" (261) are brought to recognize "the great beast" as Hamilton named the people, descent is one segment of a circle which includes ascent, decay gives way to spring, death to love and renewal. Facts confirm the presences, root them within the community of Paterson, substantiate their timelessness. The collage impulse to incorporate fragments of literal reality within the art-frame stems from this larger, more generous need to locate life's generalizations within an immediate human context. Whilst the artist's purpose is the dispassionate presentation of such factually documented opposites whereby the reader is able to make up his own mind, such nakedness does not manifest itself in Paterson. As in In the American Grain, the poet has an argument which grows by the accretion of more and more examples throughout the poem. What saves Paterson from propagandist manipulation of source materials is the collage decision to include into his work the specific voices of his enemies--Hamilton, Pound, the historians whose prose voices destroy the wonder of events--and thus to preserve an apparently unbiased body of information allowing his opposition

the opportunity to reply. In this sense Paterson, as poem for voices, represents the democratic thrust for freedom of reply. Such a reply, however, whilst naked in its presentation, is consistently undermined by its juxtaposition within the poem's organization. However dispassionate is the supposed vision of Paterson's doctor-poet, the vision is controlled by an active intelligence which has sifted its information, sorted sides and woven them into an integrated fabric.

What Williams clearly seeks, however, in the contention of equal opposites is a moment--an eternal moment--in which time stands still, in which human conflicts are stated and once stated are subsumed by larger categories of innocence / experience, birth / death. Paterson Five thus celebrates the immortality of Art for a poet who must acknowledge a failing body, and an immortality through Art for a post whose life has been expressed as a commitment to it. The first four books, during which the poet has followed the course of the Passaic and taken that course as the essential structural motif of his poem, lead reader and Dr Paterson from source to sea. But, as Williams is at pains to point out, the sea--a "sea of blood," of "indifferent man"--is NOT / our home" (236). It is for the poet the sea of "death" where Death is specifically associated with "praise," reputation, the acquired respectability of a literary figure. When Book Four ends the poet has resisted the temptations of the "nostalgic / mother in whom the dead, enwombed again / cry



out to us to return," (236) and has turned inland again in another, probably equally futile, attempt to locate within himself the source of the consciousness-stream. Where he turns toward--Camden--and what his companion is--a Chesapeake Bay Retriever--are clearly less important questions than the implications of his return. Dr Paterson rejects the death of the imagination the sea promises and renews his quest which, as he had stated in his preface to Paterson, is the initial concept upon which the poem had been created:

Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will you find  
beauty when it is locked in the mind past all remon-  
strance?

The quest, artistically expressed as a continuing poem, contains within its energies an important defence against those temporal cycles in which man is locked.<sup>20</sup> Book Five celebrates the power of Art to break out of such patterns of human response, even when it is most acutely aware of the serpent Time which "has its tail in its mouth/AGAIN!" As Williams understands, the declared purpose of Book Five begins with a realization that:

The (self) direction has been changed  
the serpent  
its tail in its mouth  
"the river has returned to its beginnings"  
and backward  
(and forward)  
it tortures itself within me  
until time has been washed finally under:  
and "I knew all (or enough)  
it became me . " (271)

To counter the cyclical flow Williams, paradoxically,





Whilst the poet at the close of Book Four had gone back to his source, Book Five makes it clear that such a return is based not on repetition but on a human need for natural structures, the pursuit of which leads to self-knowledge. The diagrammatic progress of the poem is thus that of the gyre or spiral, following which Dr Paterson never returns to exactly the same spot twice.<sup>21</sup>

It is my contention that Paterson Five is a celebration of the collage aesthetic and technique, a poem in praise of openness, a song which declares the integrity of the individual inviolable. Whilst the first four books grope toward "a plan for action to supplant a plan for action" (P, 10) and whilst they record the stumblings and blockages that form an inevitable part of the poet's creative activity, they express, in constantly repressed energy, his desperate frustrations with his inability to marry language to locale. In Book Five, after a period of 8 years following the publication of Book Four, the repressions and despair find their release in confirming Williams' purpose in building Paterson. The very organization speaks for its function to educate by moving the human dimension of Paterson's voices into social and political levels of experience and for the creation of a poem of textures whereby art and reality are inextricably interwoven. Consistently, as Book Five makes clear, Williams affirms the usefulness of art in maintaining active self-government and justifies the collage aesthetic and technique

by bringing literal reality into his poem and incorporating it--fact and metaphor--into his organizational rhythms.

What Paterson Five also affirms by unfortunate implication is the continuing nature of the collage impulse. Williams utilizes the work to justify the expansion of his original conception of the poem--his decision, in other words, to "take the world of Paterson into a new dimension . . . to give it imaginative validity"<sup>22</sup>--and to acknowledge the limitlessness of his task, a fact perhaps implied by his sense of the work as a "quest." What the work also declares is the simple realization of man's location within cycles of existence which constantly threaten him with dulling extinction and what it states is Williams' belief in man's capacity to start again, in his urgent need to make it new as he had once argued in Kora in Hell. "To start again" is to begin with the simplest facts and things and create for them a context wherein they are ultimately redeemed. And the start is always from a point in time and space distant from the beginnings of the previous circle. Perhaps the poem-as-sphere engenders no great knowledge, no discoveries as significant as those of Madame Curie--the radiant gist of birth and discovery--but something is gleaned in the experience of completing the circle, and the rigours of re-creating that circle prevent the poet from falling mindless victim to its insistentencies.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Williams includes Charles Olson's essay on "Projective Verse" in his Autobiography. There Olson talks of "composition by field" as the contemporary response to closed forms (A, 330). Jesse D. Green has related this concept of openness to Kora in Hell in her article, "The Opening of the Poem as Field of Action."

<sup>2</sup>Louis Martz has documented the implications of the Unicorn Hunt and its symbolic integration of the major themes of Paterson in "The Unicorn in Paterson," Thought, XXXV (Winter, 1960), 537-554. Martz explains Williams' use of a work by E. J. Alexander and Carol H. Woodward, The Flora of the Unicorn Tapestries (New York, 1947).

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by James Thrall Soby, Ben Shahn, 14.

<sup>4</sup>Against the indifference of Death Williams sets the dispassion of the artist. See, for example, his praise of Brueghel who saw "from the two sides," and who, in serving the imagination, "served / dispassionately" (265).

<sup>5</sup>In "The Descent" Williams had argued that:

Memory is a kind  
of accomplishment,  
a sort of renewal  
even  
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places  
(PB, 73)

<sup>6</sup>"Cartoon" is here used in the sense of a working sketch from which the masterwork is created. Paterson, I believe, is intended as just such a cartoon, its purpose, explicit in Book Five, to educate the young, and provide, in its very organization, a template for self-government.

<sup>7</sup>Few critics have progressed beyond this generalization about Book Five. See, for example, Sankey, A Companion to William Carlos Williams' Paterson, which itself falls short of accompanying the book.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted by Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, 200.

<sup>9</sup>Williams clearly intended to use shoddy in its technical sense to refer to the mass-production of cheap material. Thus it provides a very specific contrast to the love implicit in the means by which a tapestry is created.

<sup>10</sup>For an understanding of the "economics of greed," see Joel Connarroe, "You Can't Steal Credit": The Economic Motif in Paterson," Journal of American Studies, 11 (April, 1968), 105-115, and Guy Davenport, "The Nuclear Venus: Dr. Williams' Attack on Usura," Perspective, VI (Autumn, 1953), 183-190.

<sup>11</sup>It is important to remember that Schwitters conceived of his own Merzbau as a cathedral--a cathedral of erotic misery.

<sup>12</sup>The penultimate section of the poem reads:

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,  
Why, when the singing ended and we turned  
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,  
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,  
As the night descended, tilting in the air,  
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,  
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,  
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

The Palm at the End of the Mind, 98.

<sup>13</sup>See, in particular, the fiction "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" where the world is "articulated, coherent, with no visible doctrinal intent or tone of parody," Labyrinths, 7. The dangers of the created or invented world are implicit in those details which substantiate it--details which taken together create a unified whole far more real than the random nature of events in our own reality. "The world will be Tlon," Borges wryly predicts.

<sup>14</sup>In "Anecdote of the Jar" Stevens declares the ambiguity inherent in the creative rage for order--order as a necessary means of giving form to self and external reality and order as a dangerous imposition upon that reality. The jar which provides an initial focal point for the eye and thus establishes order for that eye in its wilderness world, is ultimately seen as sterile. "It did not give of bird or bush, / Like nothing else in Tennessee." Palm, 46.



<sup>15</sup>Stevens had complained of Williams' "fidgeting" with points of view in a letter which Williams incorporated into the movement of Kora in Hell.

<sup>16</sup>The emphasis in Williams' poem is on:

the downcast eyes of the Virgin  
as a work of art  
for profound worship (PB, 6)

<sup>17</sup>The parallels with Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell are manifest.

<sup>18</sup>Williams parodied such "progress" in The Great American Novel.

<sup>19</sup>Williams' answer to such evasions was In the American Grain which is not a history in a conventional sense but as Louis Martz argues, "a search in the memory of America to discover, to invent, symbols of the ideals from which Williams' life and writings have developed." "The Unicorn in Paterson: Williams Carlos, Williams," quoted in William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J. Hillis Miller, 78.

<sup>20</sup>For a discussion of the divisions of Quest as archetype, see Frye's Anatomy of Criticism.

<sup>21</sup>Charles Olson makes use of the same point in his poem "The Kingfishers," where, citing Heraclitus, he argues: "No man steps in the same river twice."

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APPENDIX ONE  
PAINTINGS BY PICASSO, ROUSSEAU, BRAQUE  
AND ERNST

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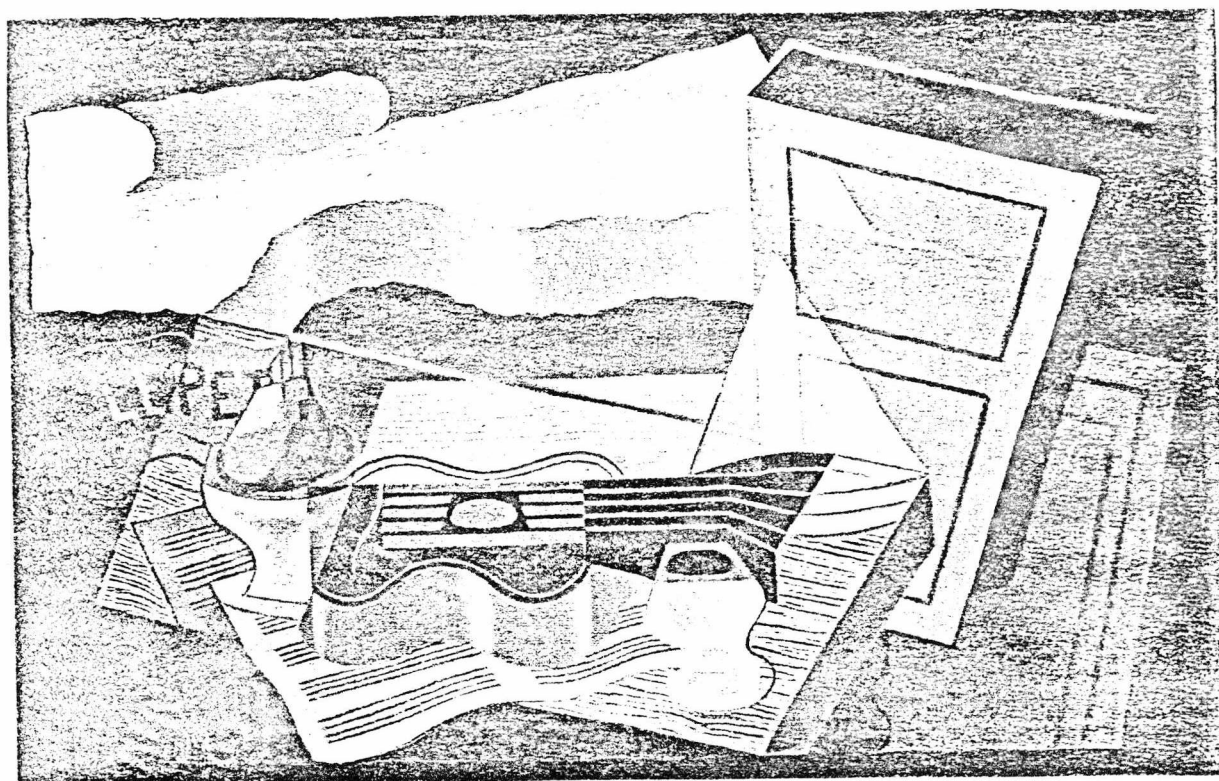


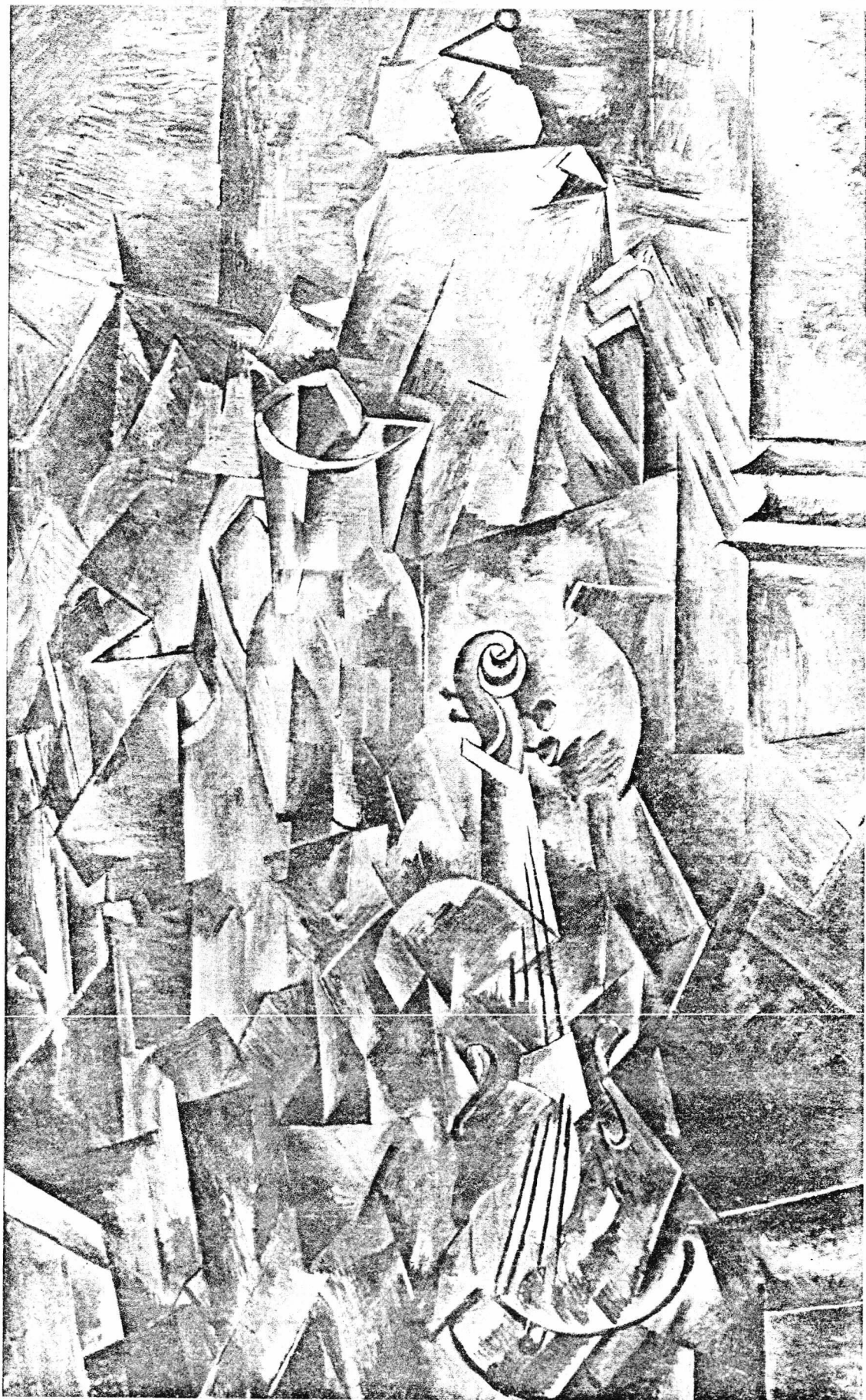


*Surprised! (Storm in the Forest), 1891*



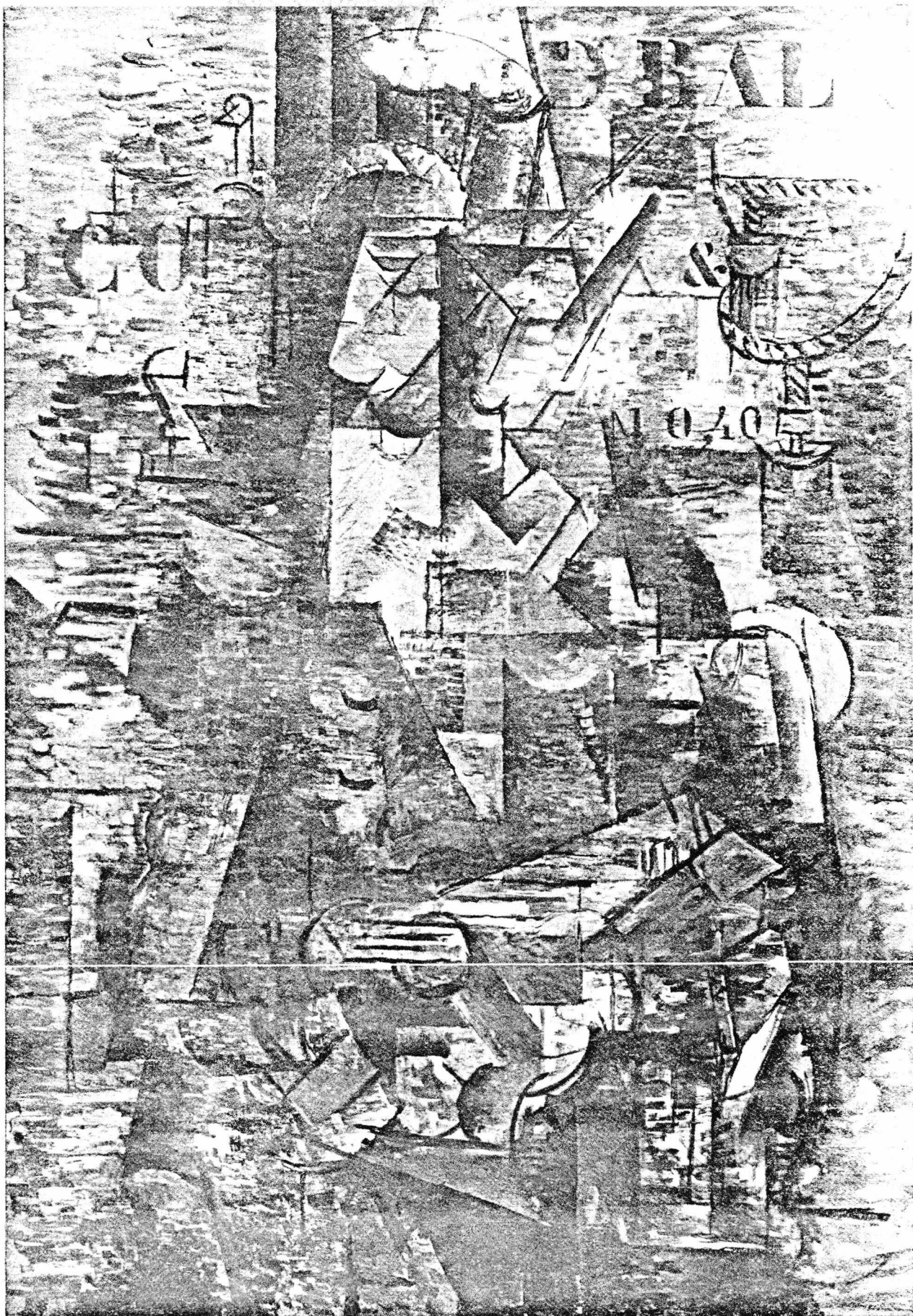


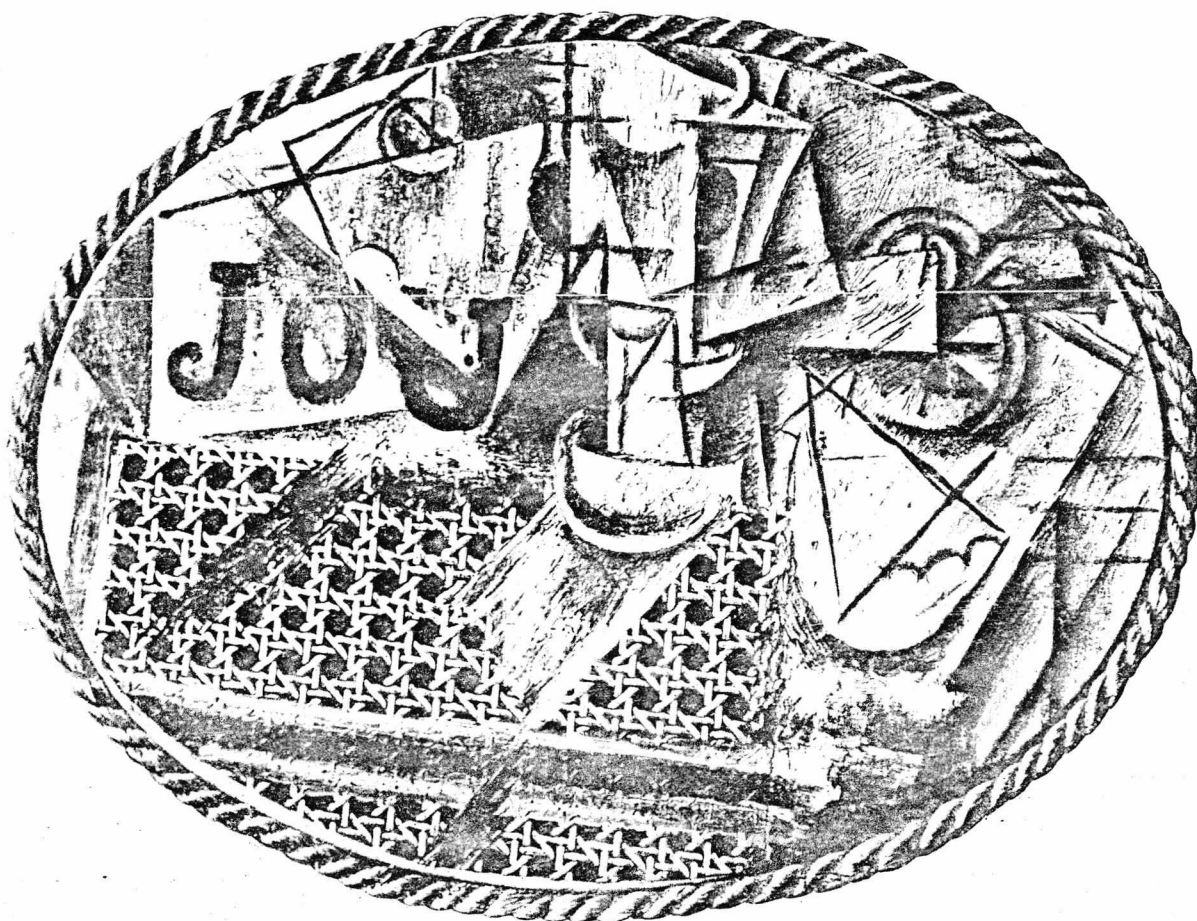




IX Georges Braque *Still Life with Violin and Pitcher* 1909-10



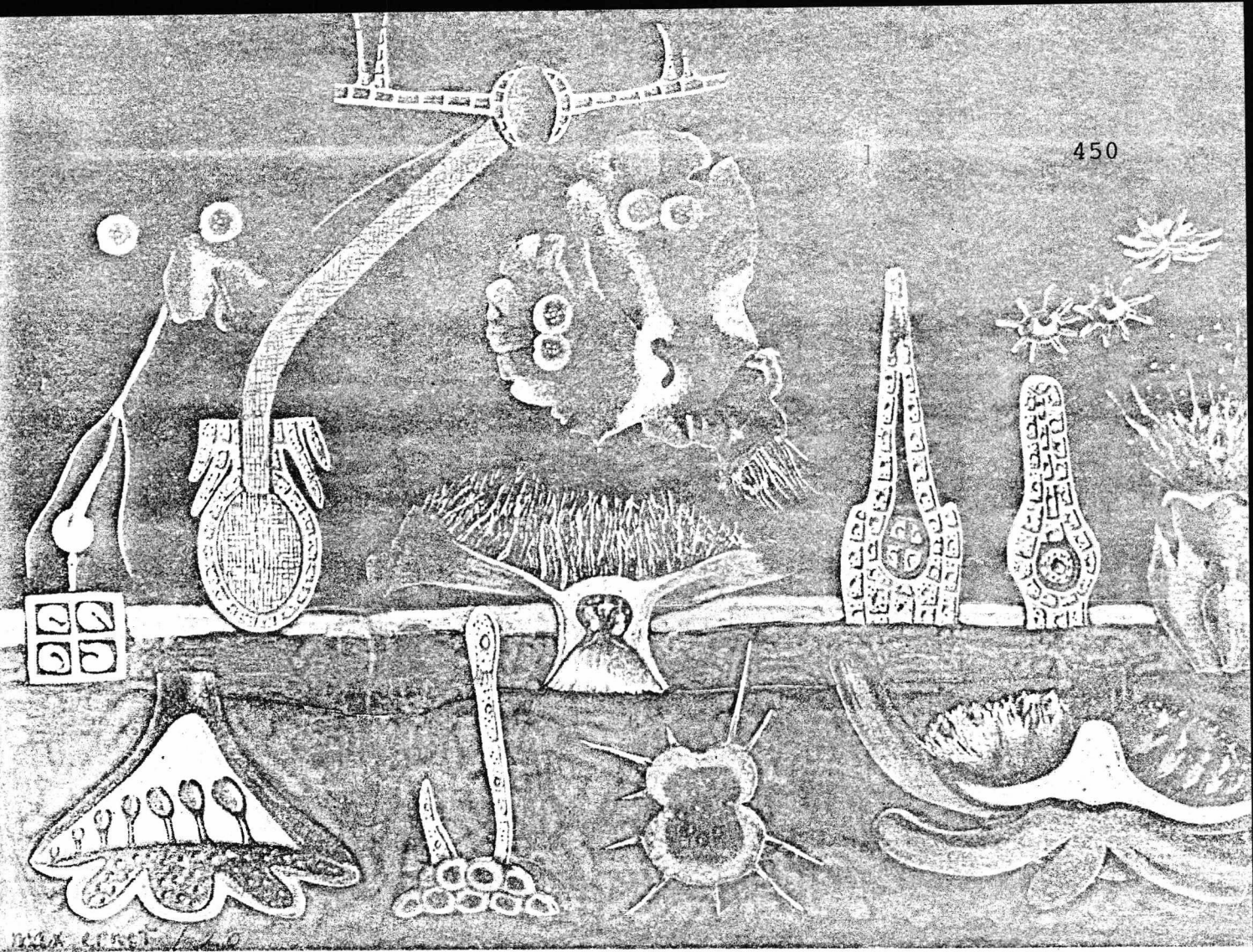


35 Georges Braque *Soda* 1911

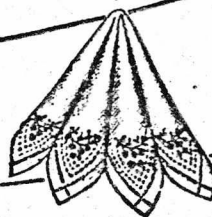
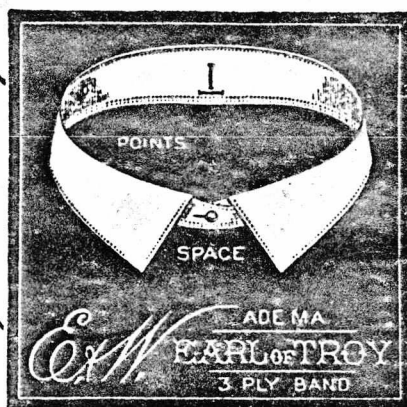
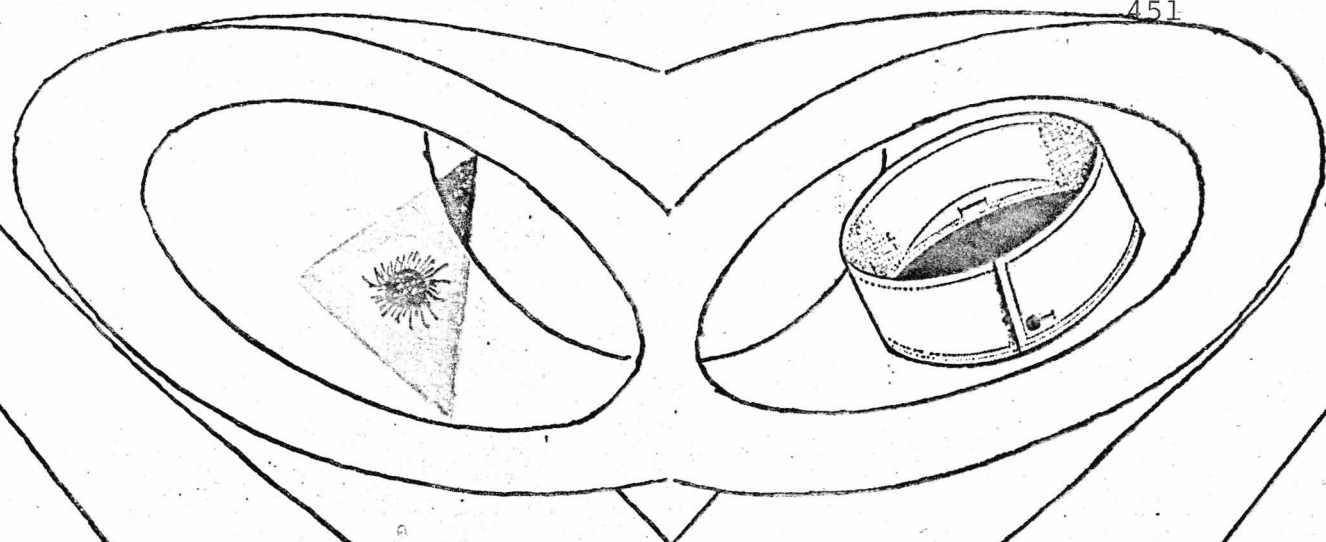




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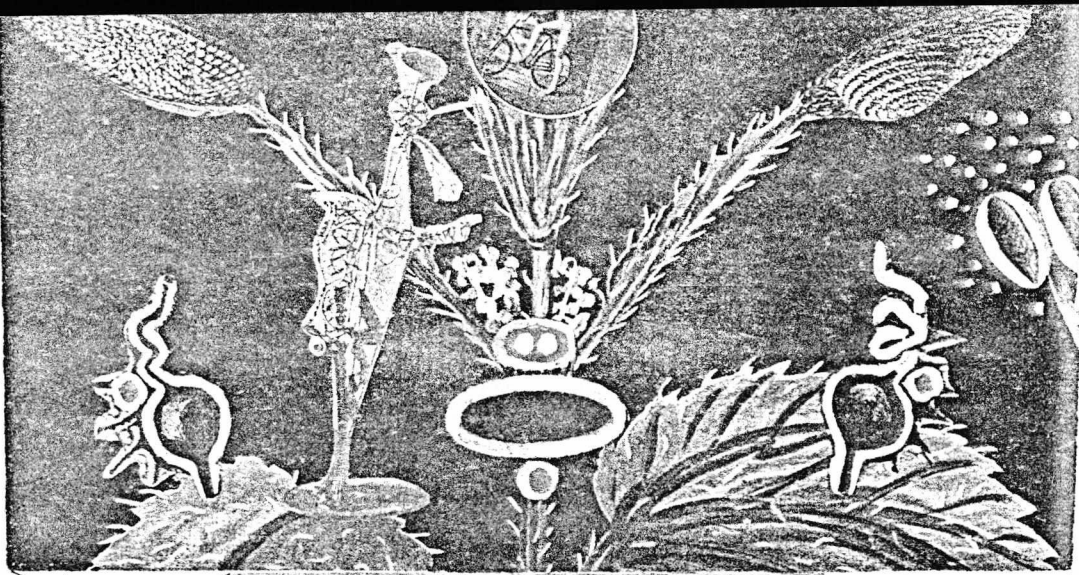


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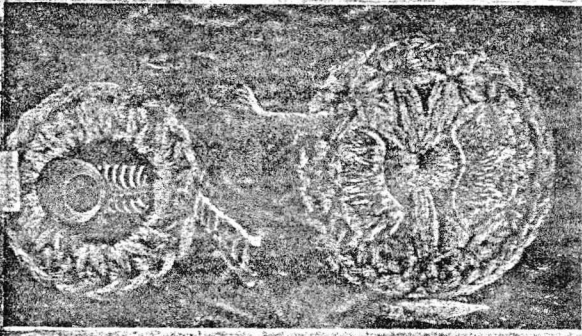


b.a.t. Max S.





**A**usstellung  
Gemälde  
Zeichnung  
Fata Morgana  
Plastik  
Aquarell

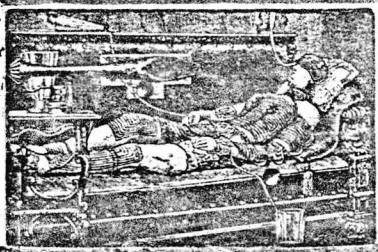


Grüß, Gott, tritt,  
ein,  
Hüften, fest.

Die ausgestell-  
ten Kunstwerke  
können begossen  
werden

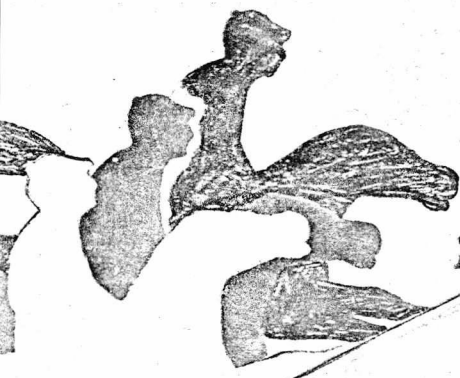
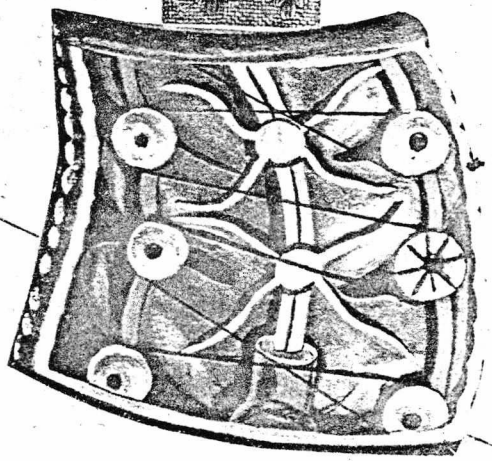
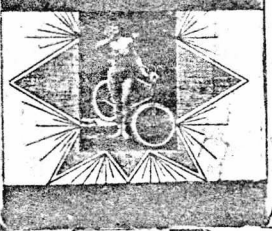
Die ausge-  
stellten Kun-  
sten am be-  
quemsten  
im Liege-  
stutz seit

Max Ernst  
ist ein.  
Lügner, Erb-  
schleicher,  
Ohrenbläser  
Roptäuscher  
Ehrabschnei-  
der und  
Boxer



lings ge-  
würdigt un-  
den. Sind  
jedoch Ihre  
Eizellen noch  
im Teilung be-  
griffen so fu-  
ren Sie leb-  
hafte Bewe-  
gungen mit  
Hüftstütze  
aus

**MAX ERNST**



APPENDIX TWO

Demuth, Sheeler and the Primitives

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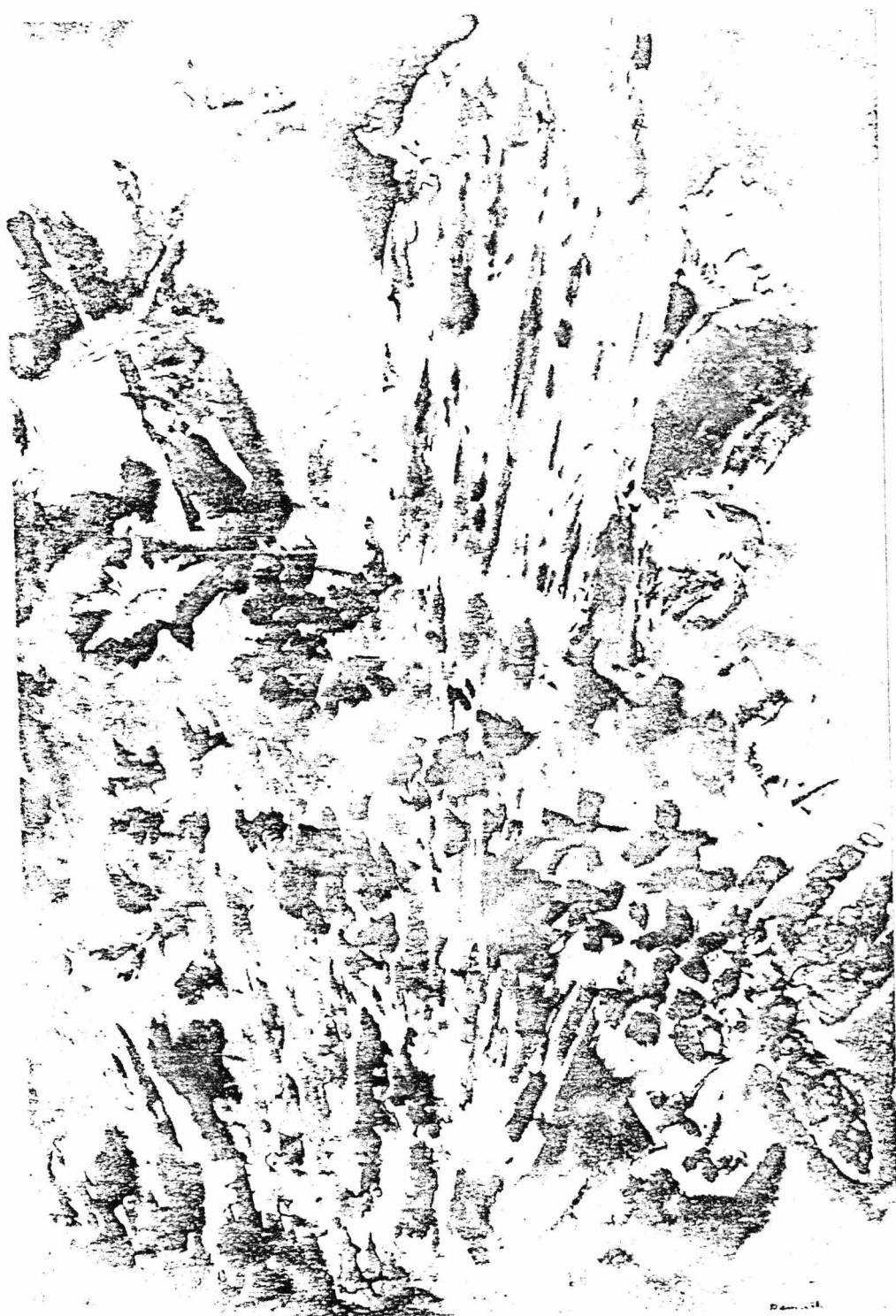
*Daisies*. 1918. Watercolor, 17½ x 11½". The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



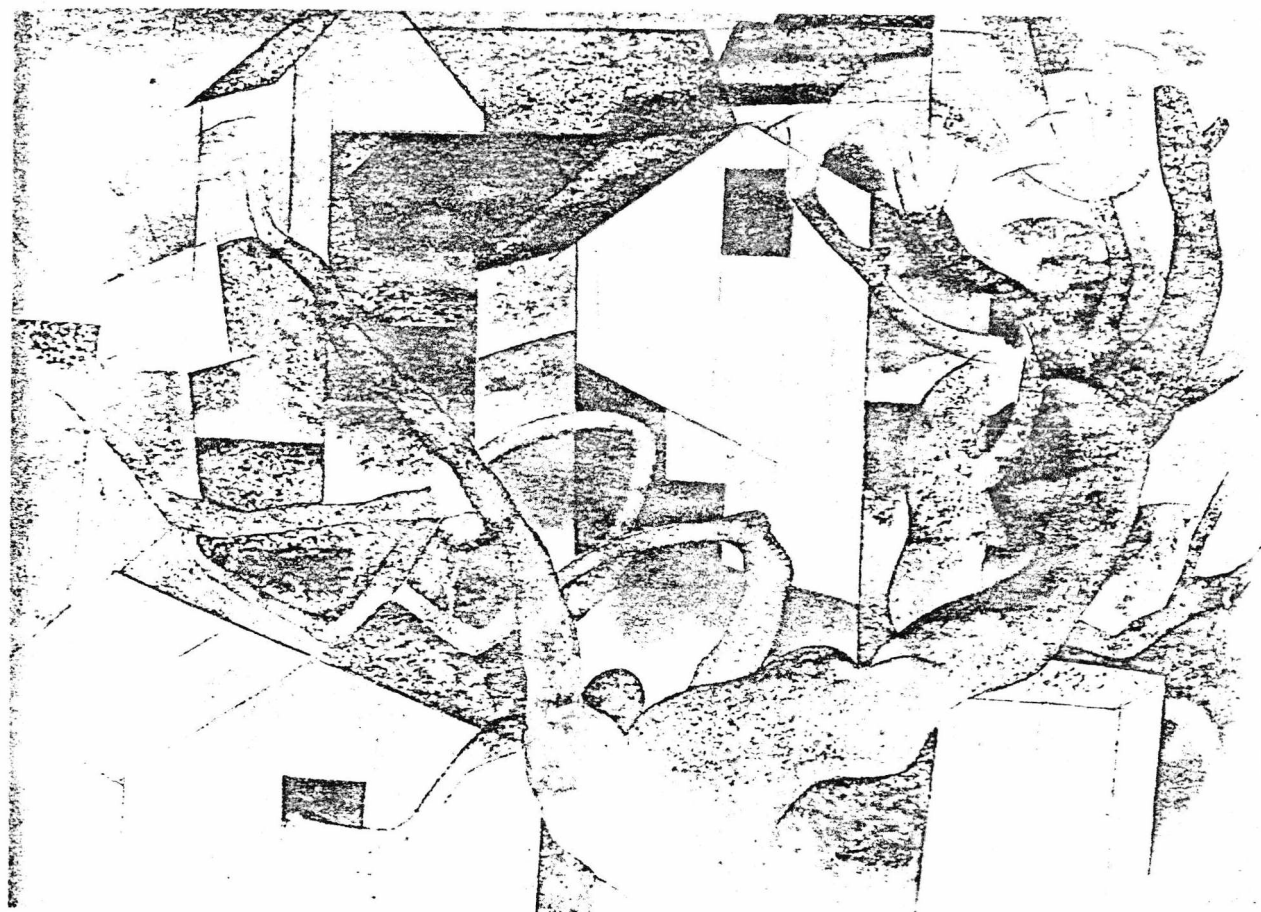
*Nana and Her Men.* Illustration no. 4 for Zola's *Nana* (Chapter X?), 1915-16. Watercolor, 8½ x 10¾". The Barnes Foundation. Merion, Pa.

"The room was full of Nana's intimate existence: a pair of gloves, a fallen handkerchief, an open book, lay scattered about, and their owner seemed present in careless attire with that well-known odour of violets, and that species of untidiness which became her in her character of good-natured courtesan, and had such a charming effect among all those rich surroundings."

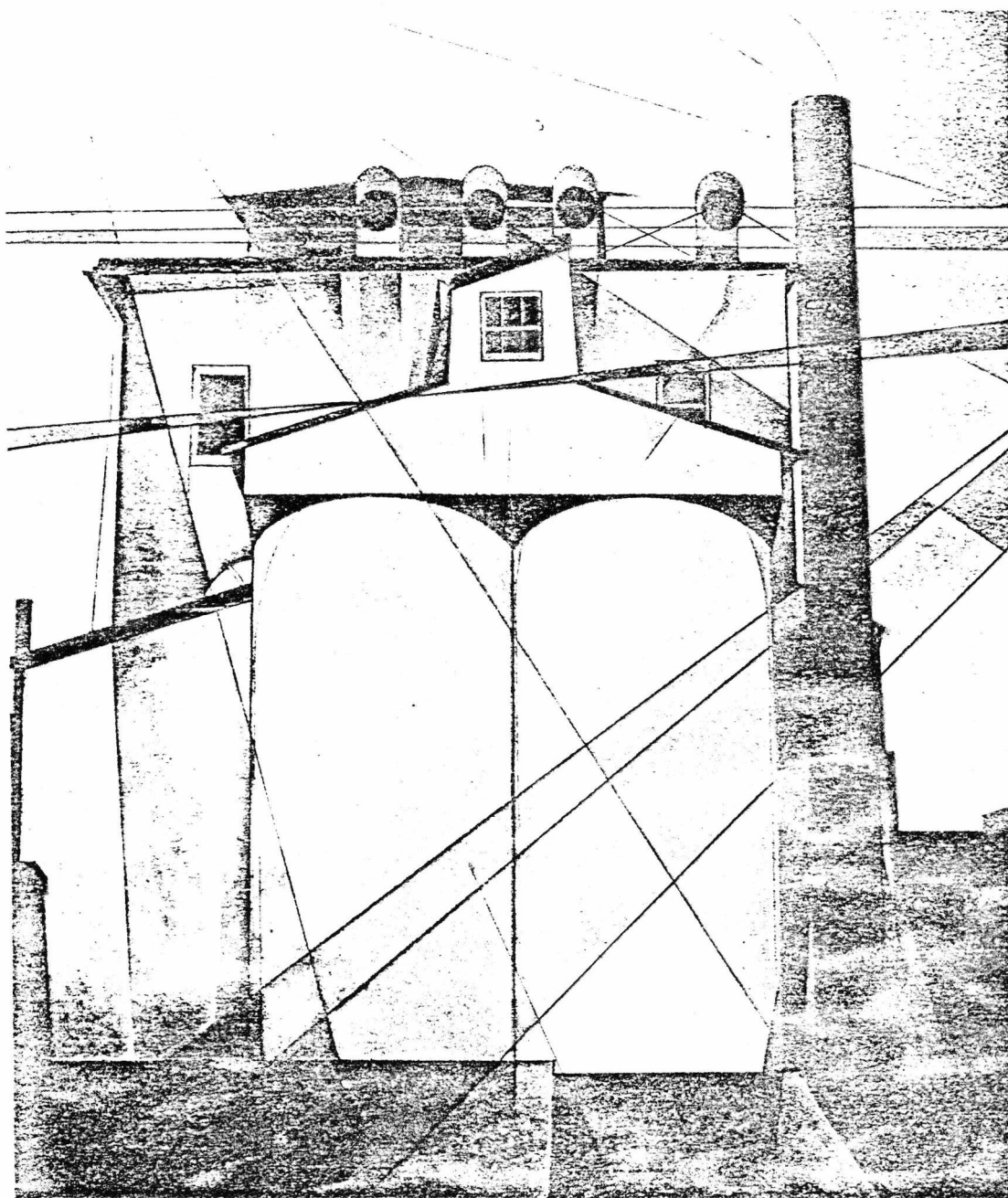




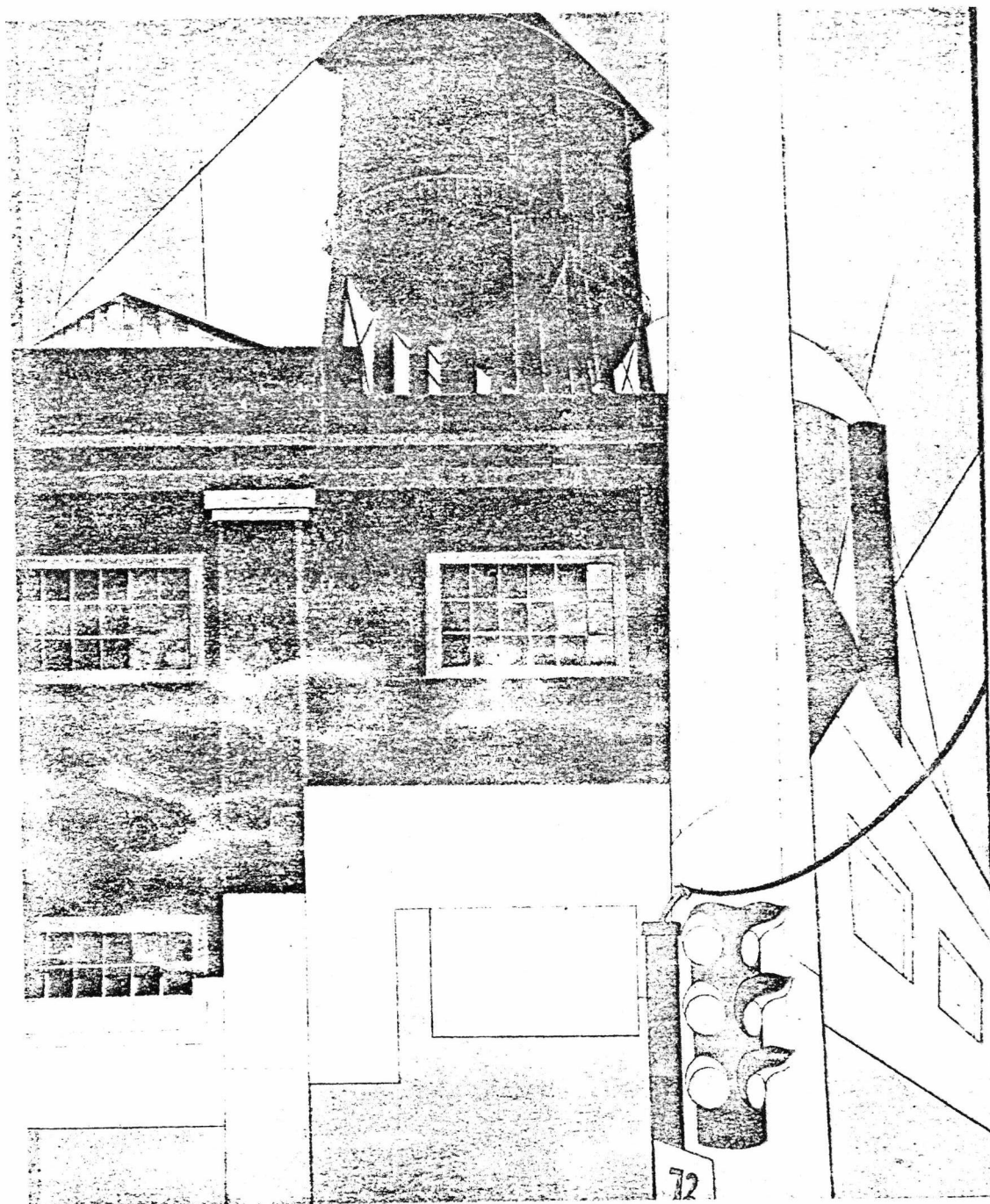
*Flower Piece*. 1915. Watercolor, 18 x 11½". Collection Miss Susan W. Street, New York



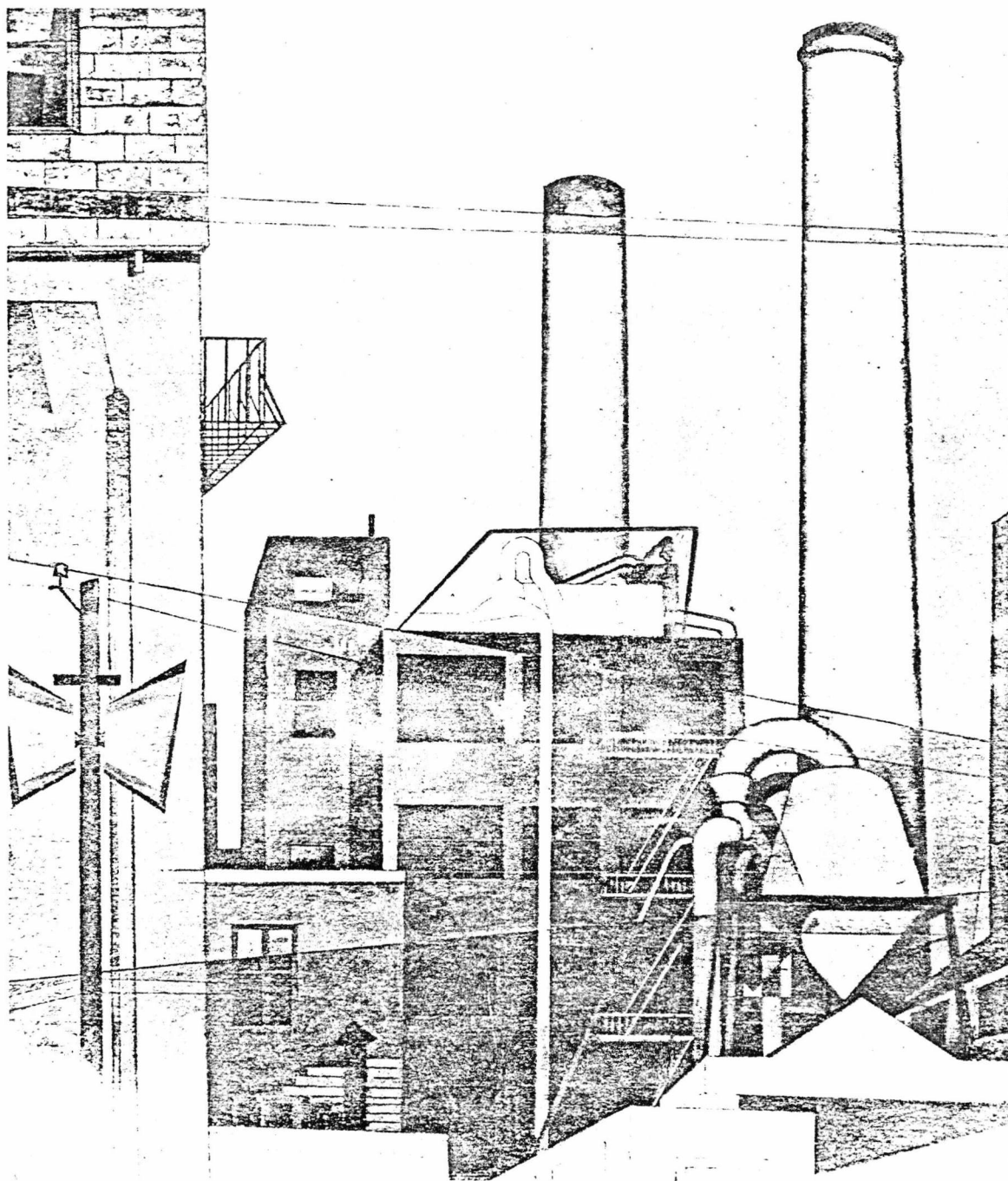
*Trees and Barns (Bermuda)*. 1917. Watercolor, 9½ x 13½".



*My Egypt*. 1927? Oil, 36 x 30". The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



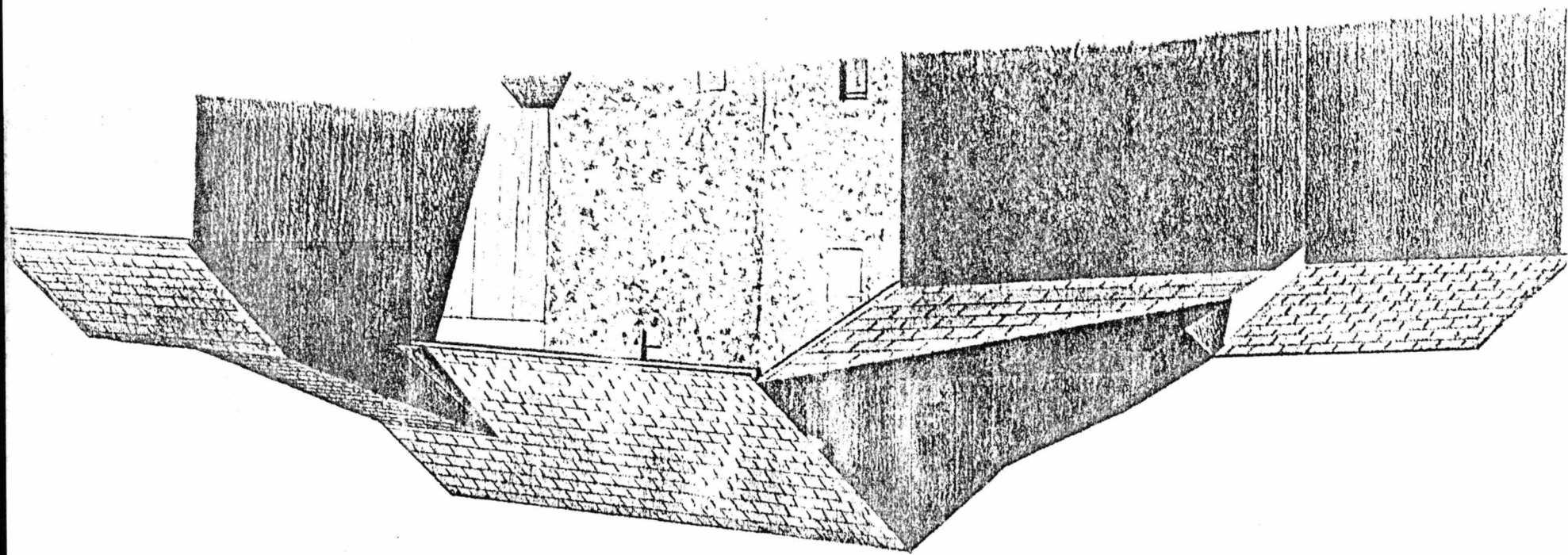
"...and the Home of the Brave." 1931. Oil, 30 x 24". The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.



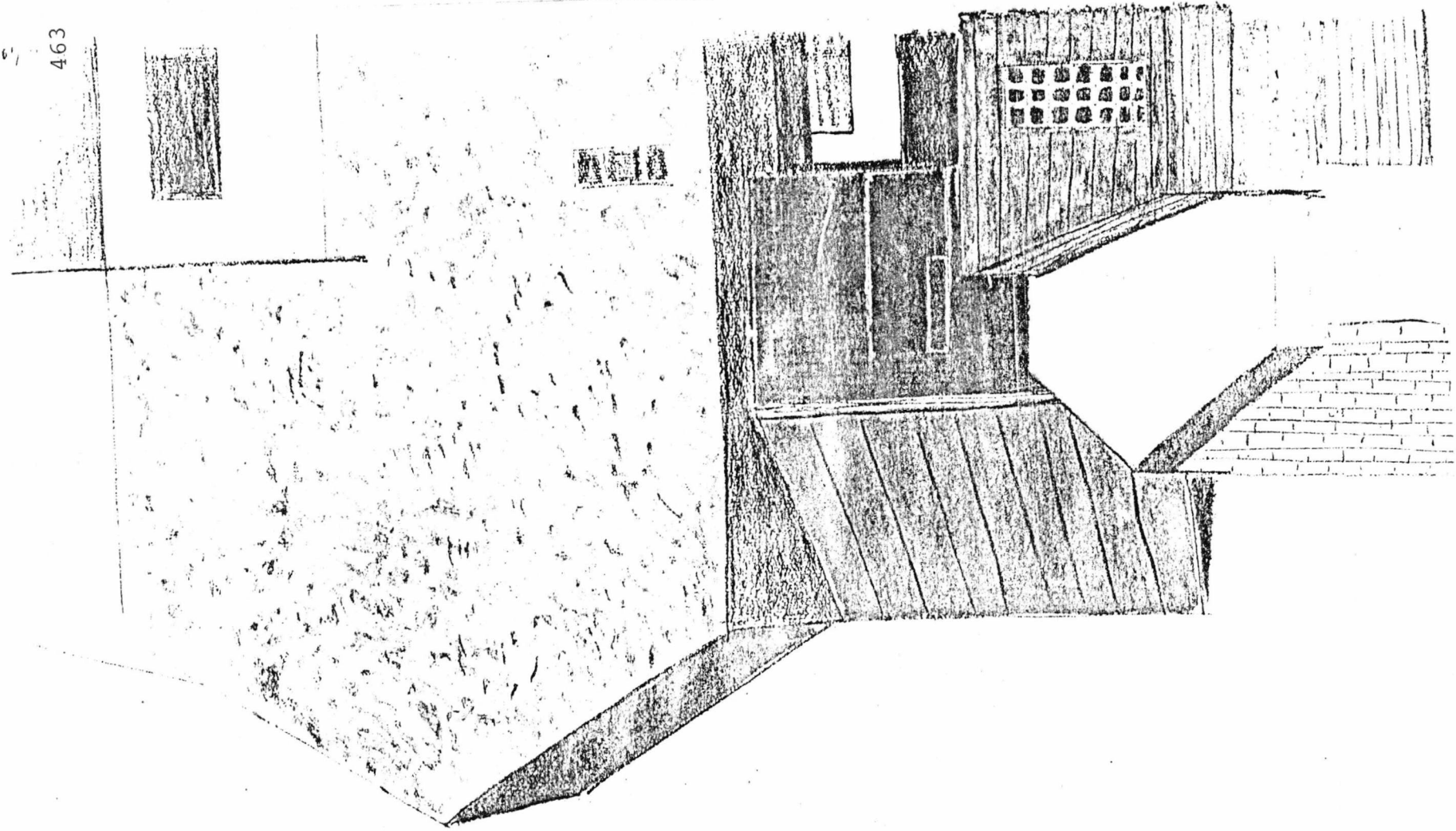
*"After All..."* 1933. Oil, 36 x 30". Collection Miss Georgia O'Keeffe, New York







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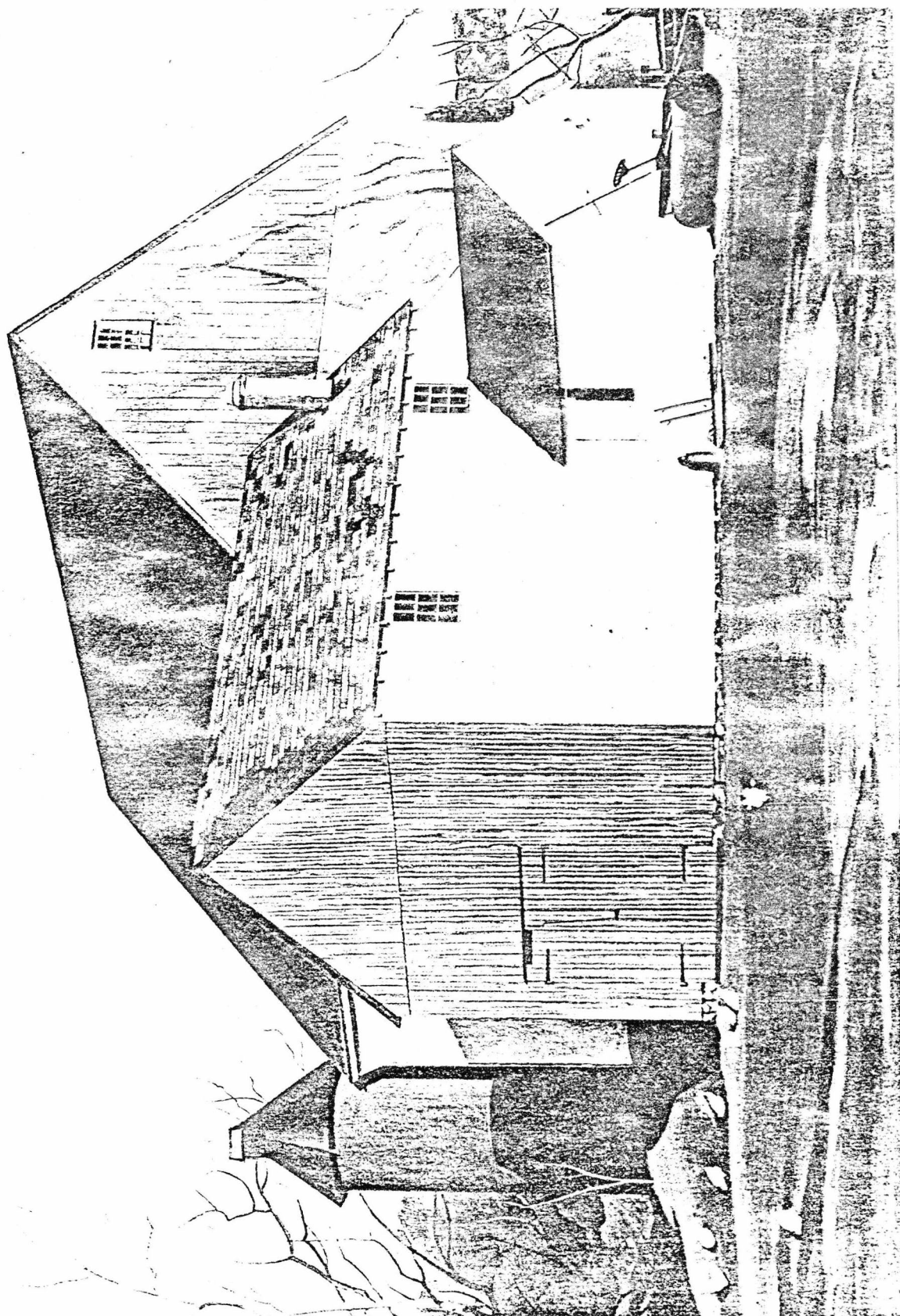
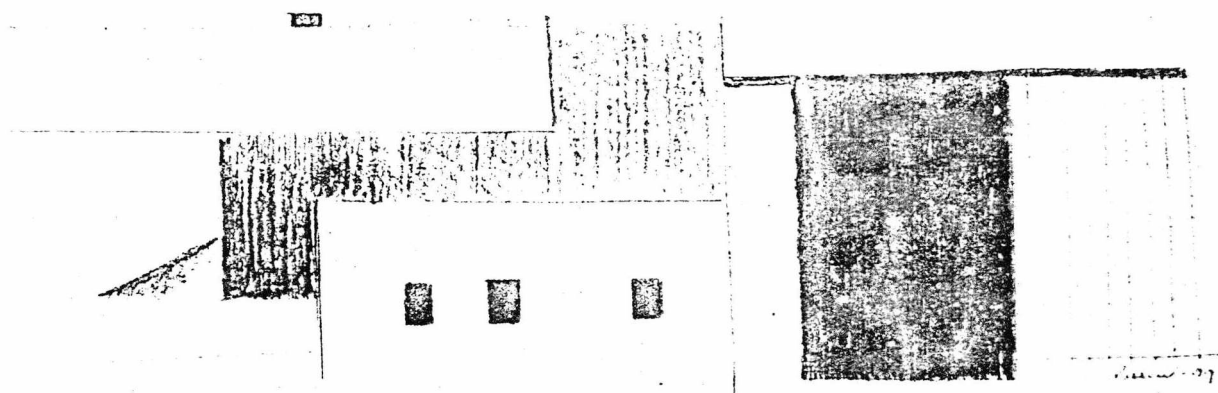
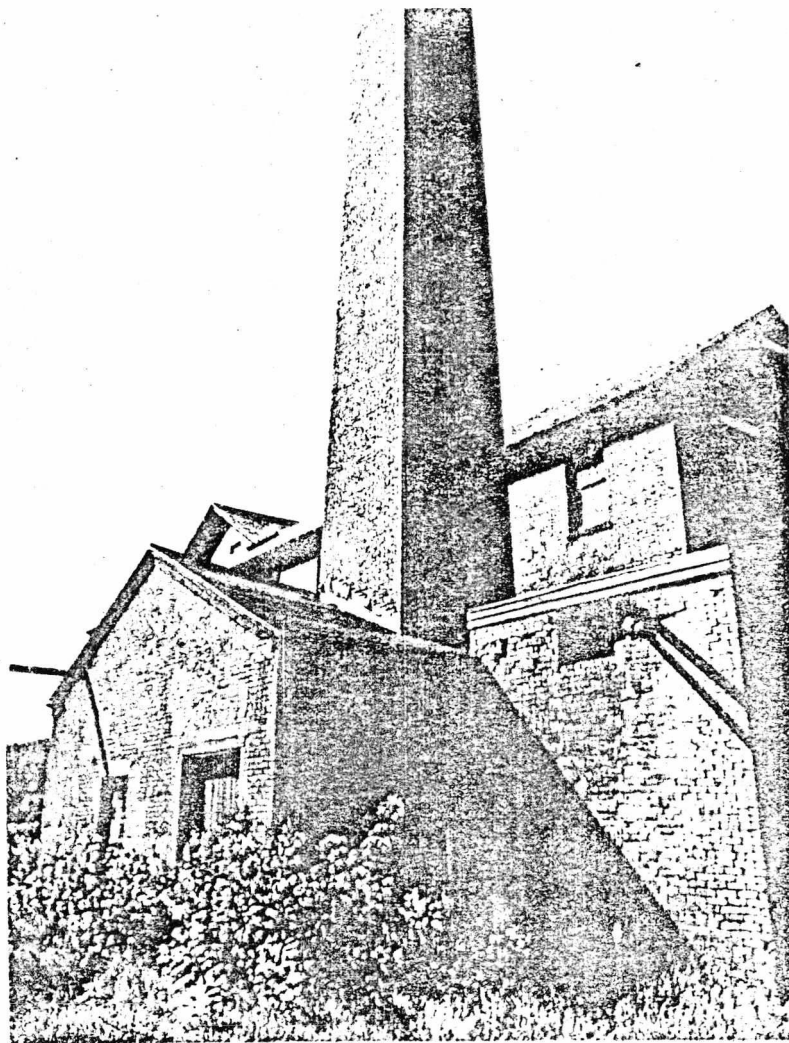


Fig. 11

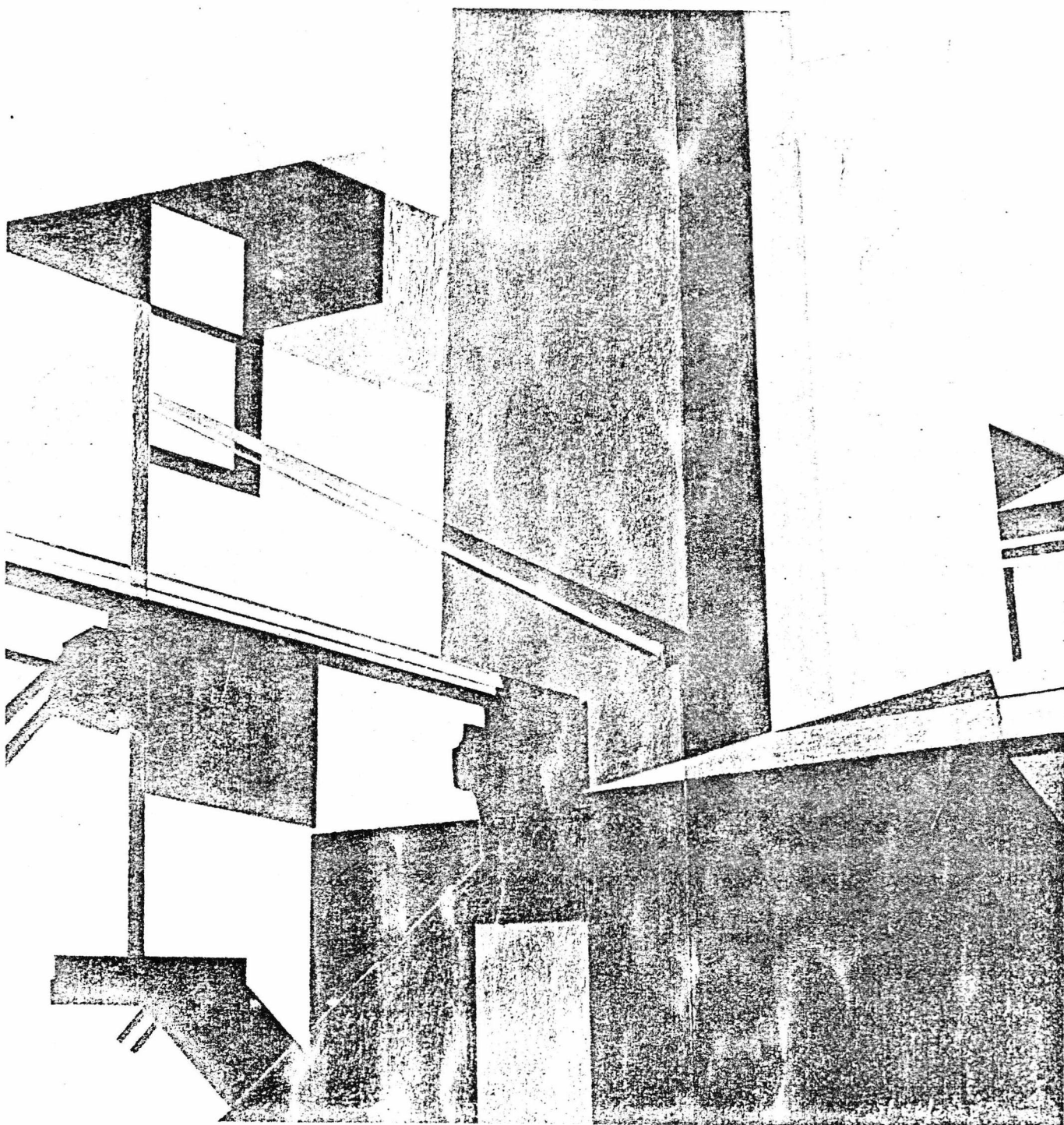


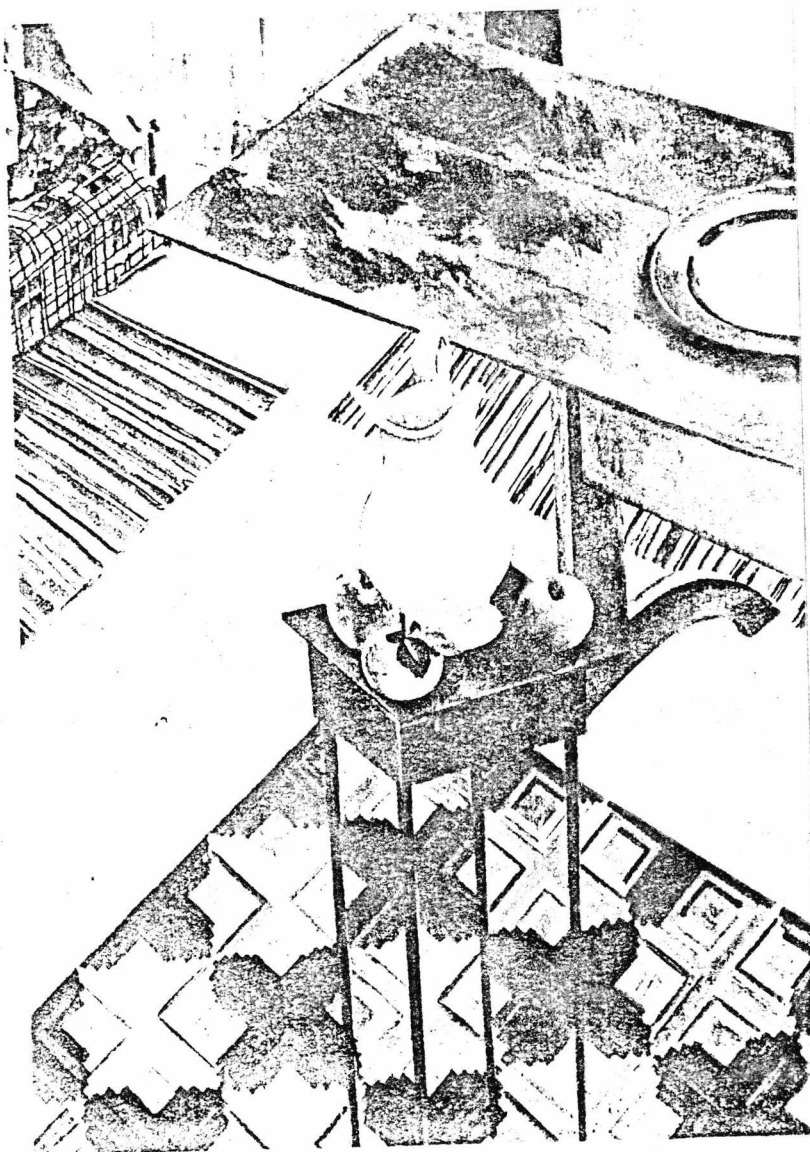
Barn Abstraction 1917



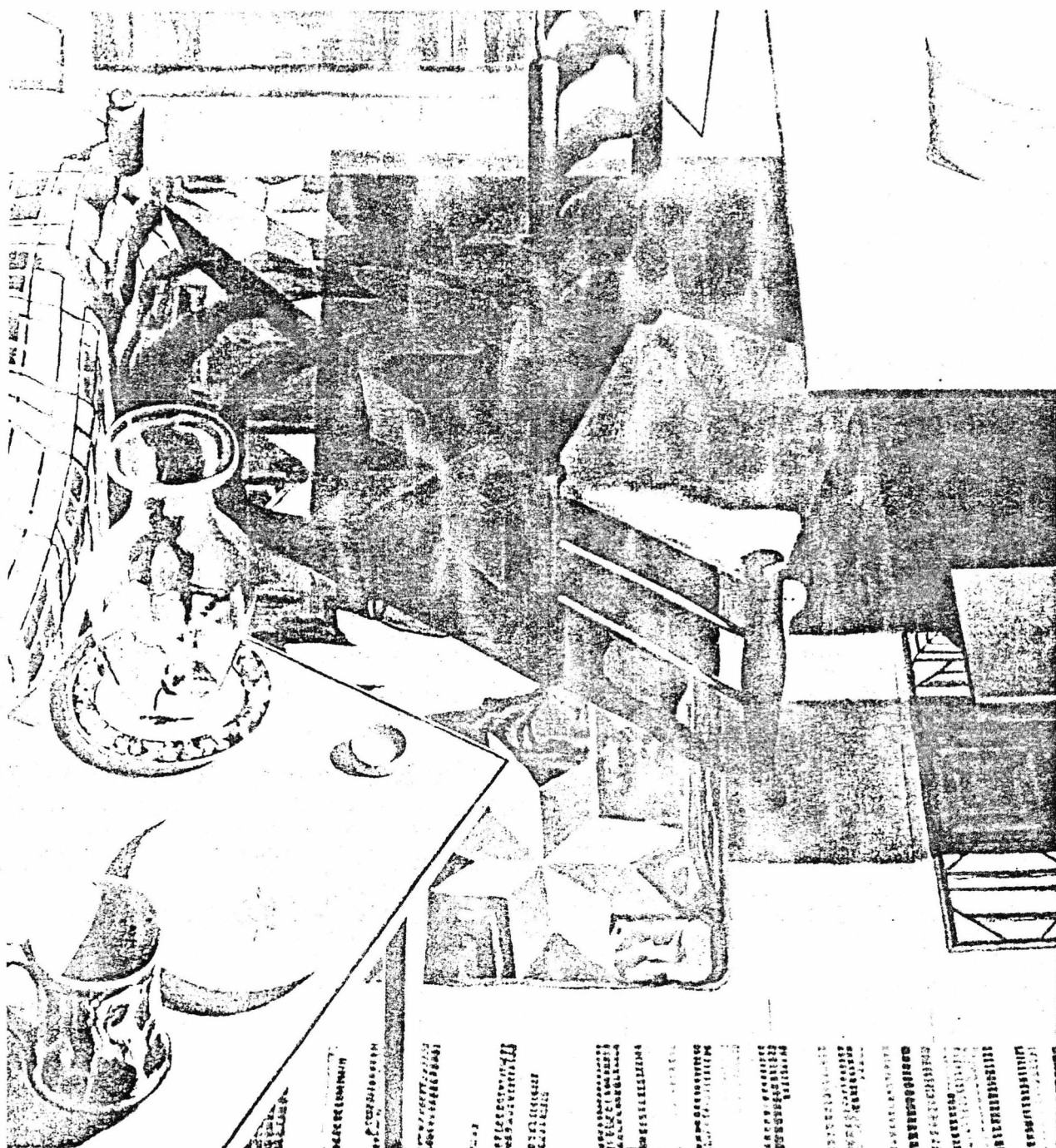


Photograph by Charles Sheeler of a mill in Ballardvale, Massachusetts

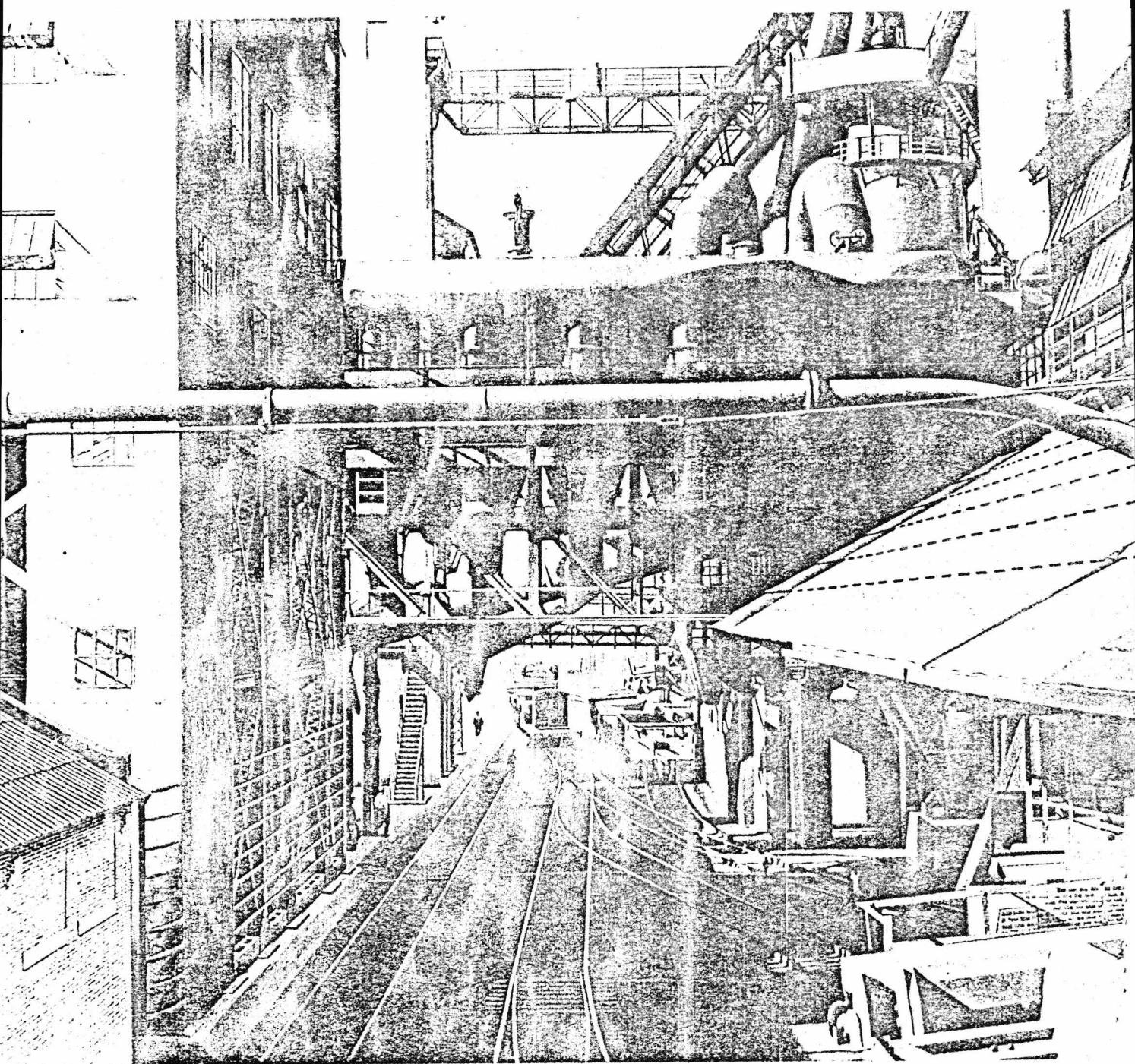




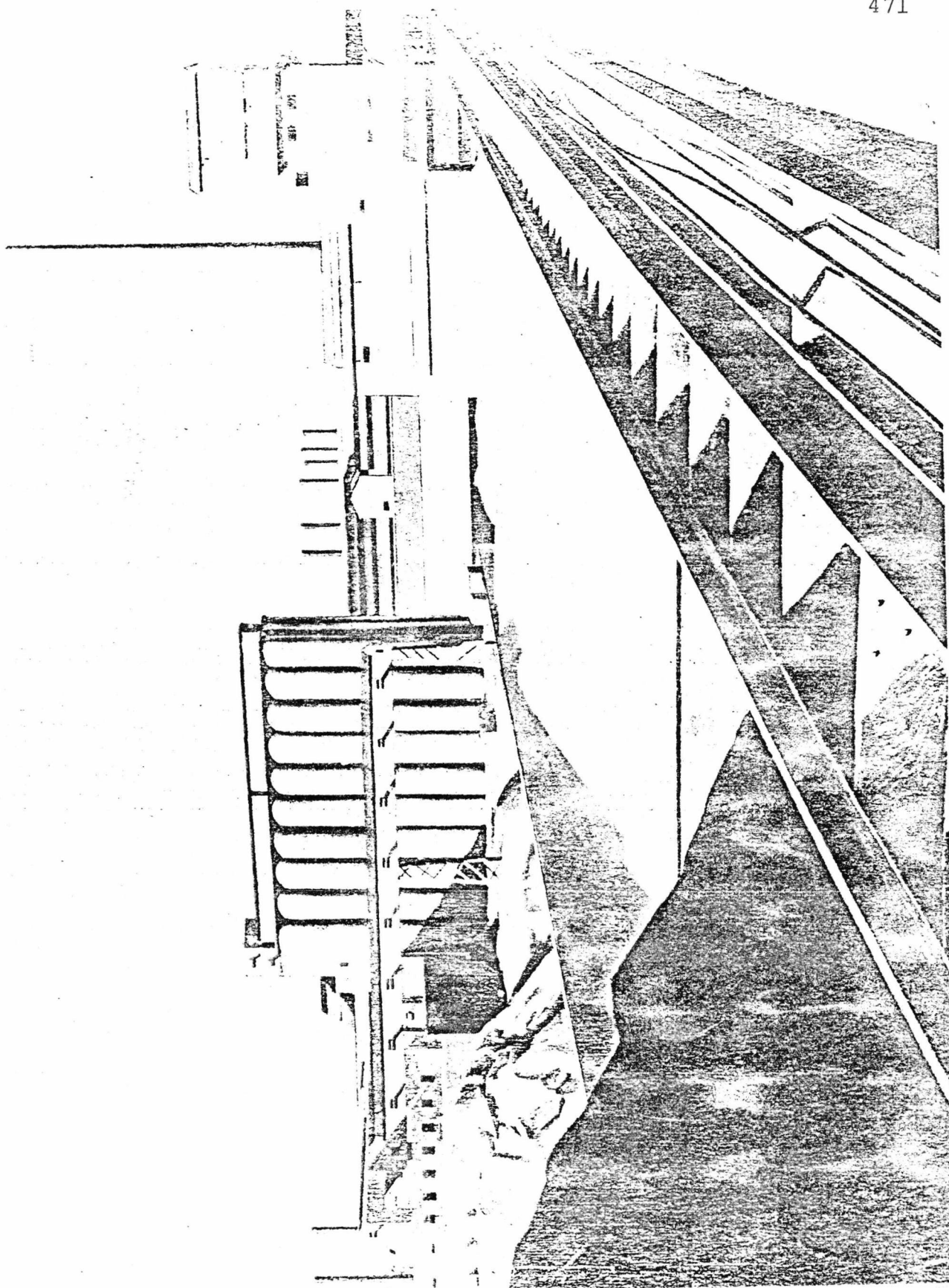
Interior 1926

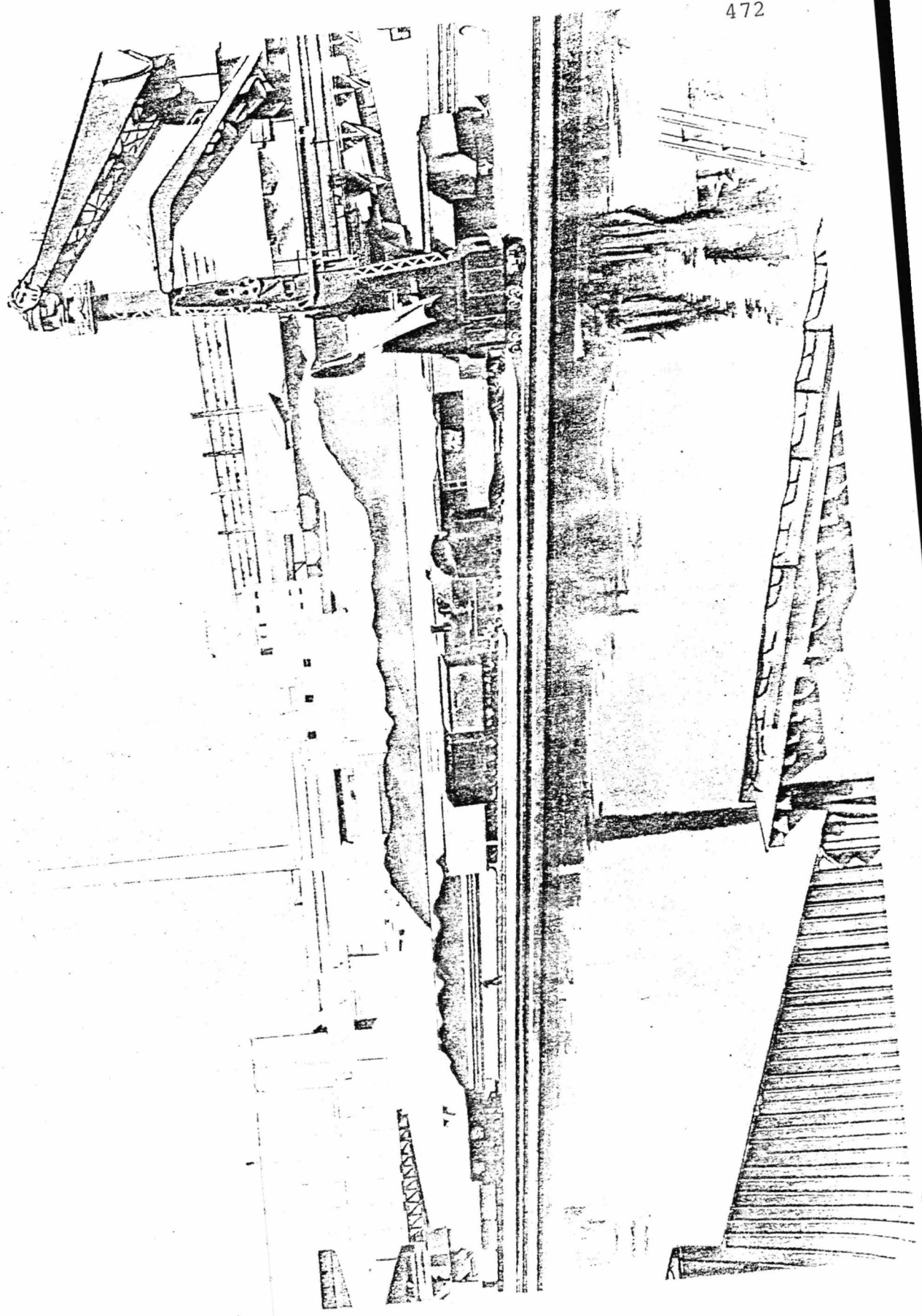


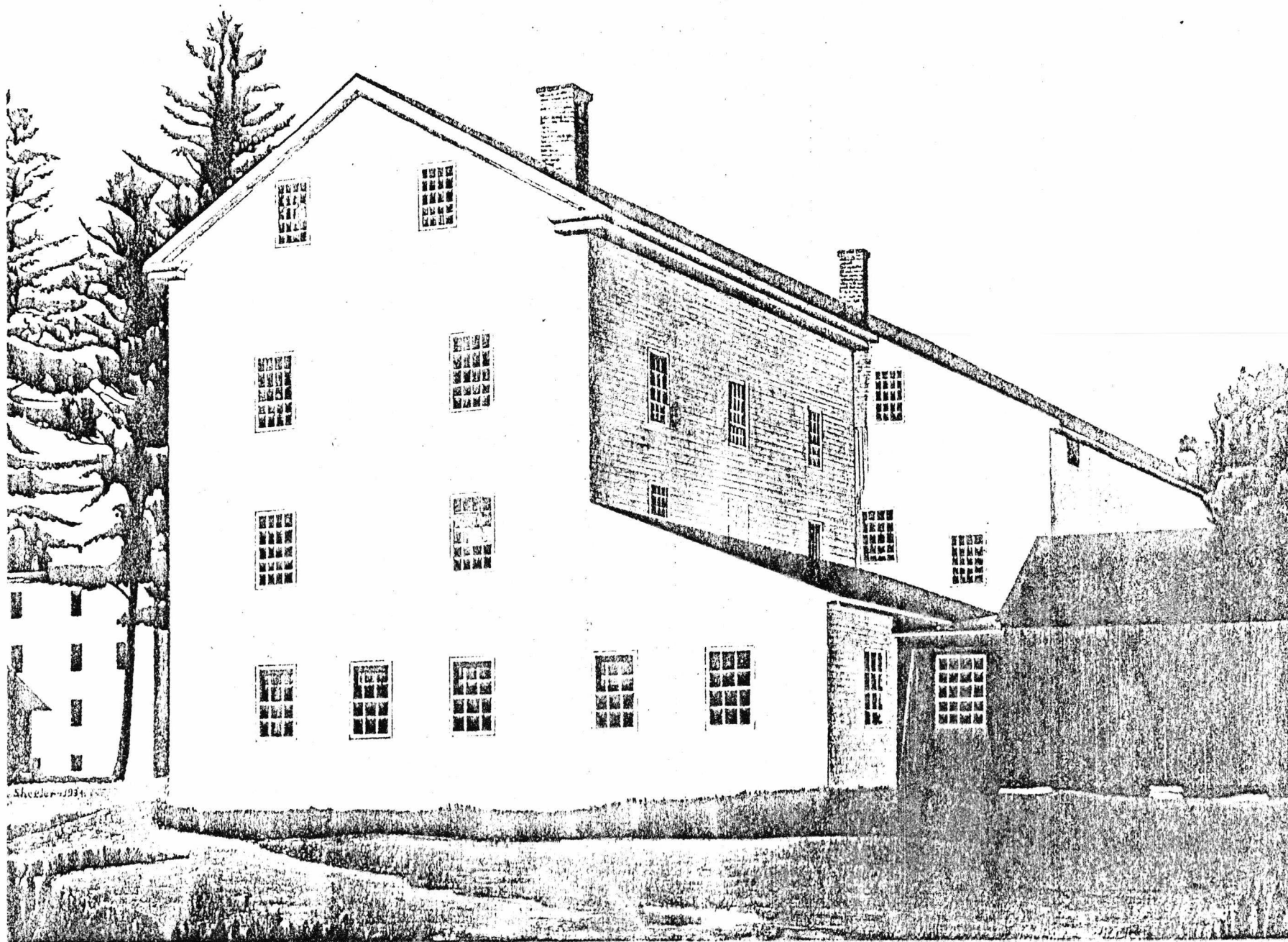








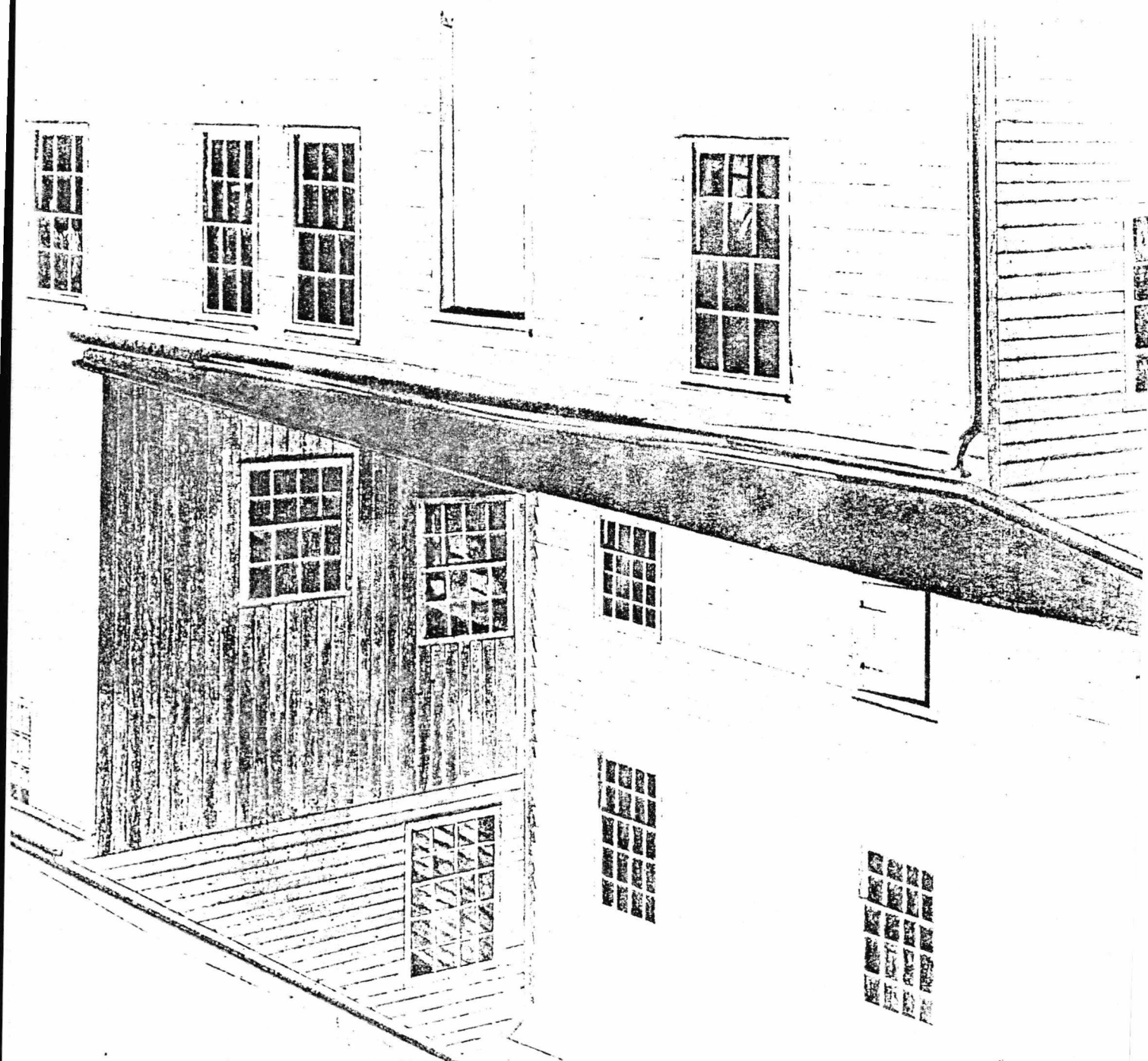




Sheeler 1934

Feb 20

Shaker Buildings 1934

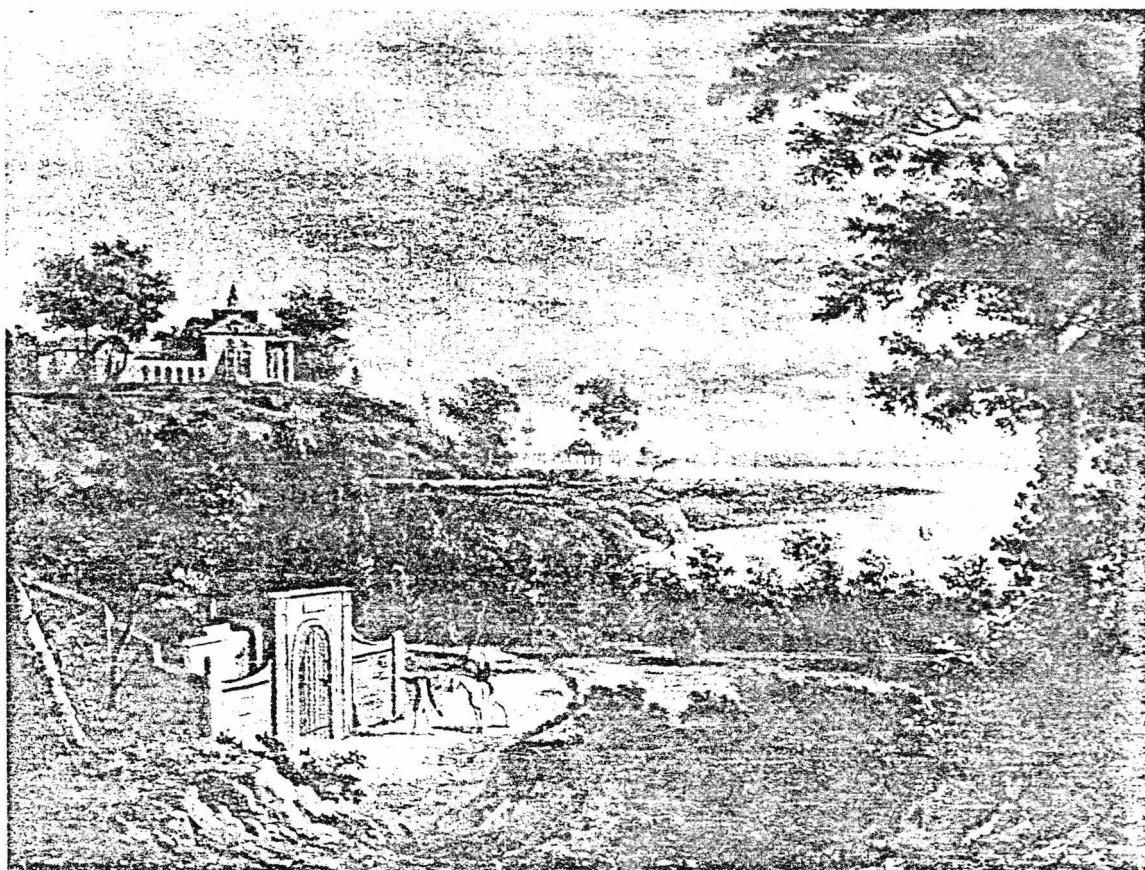






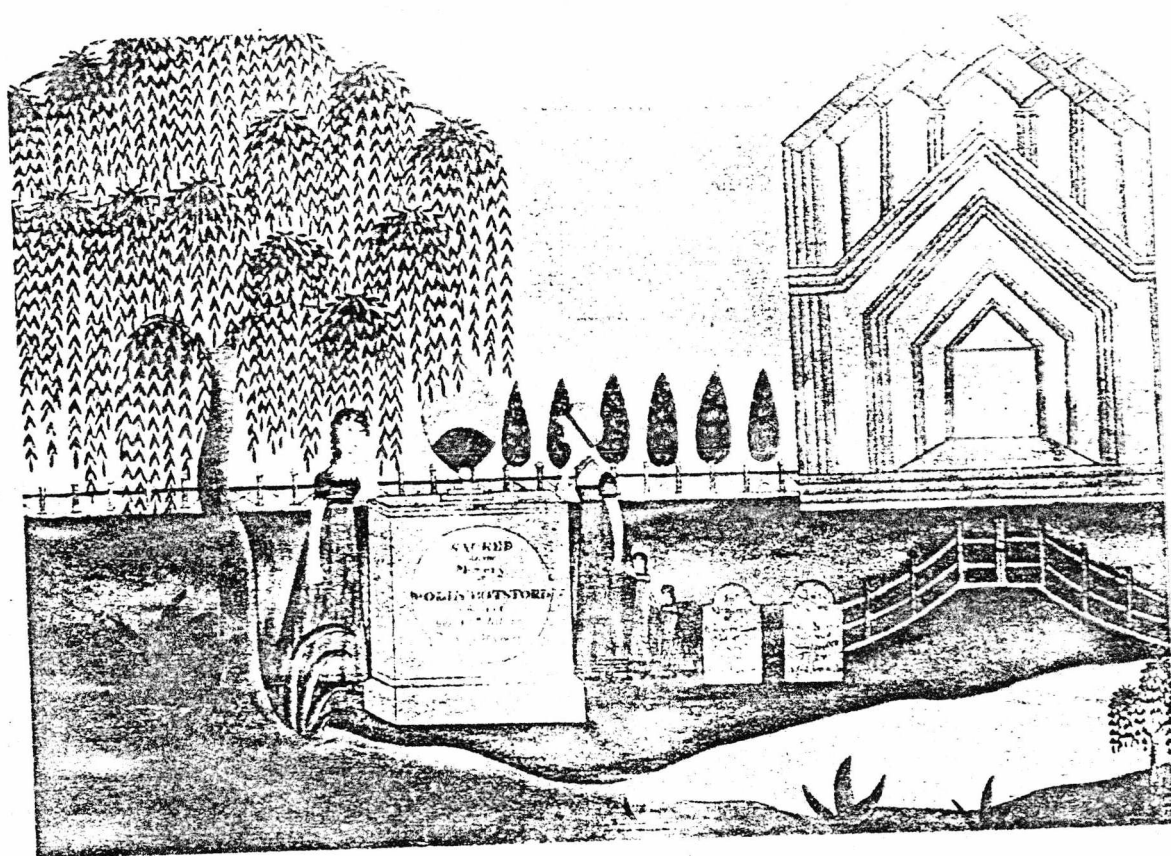
XXI. Juan Gris, *Roses* (Collage), 1914  
(Private Collection, Paris).





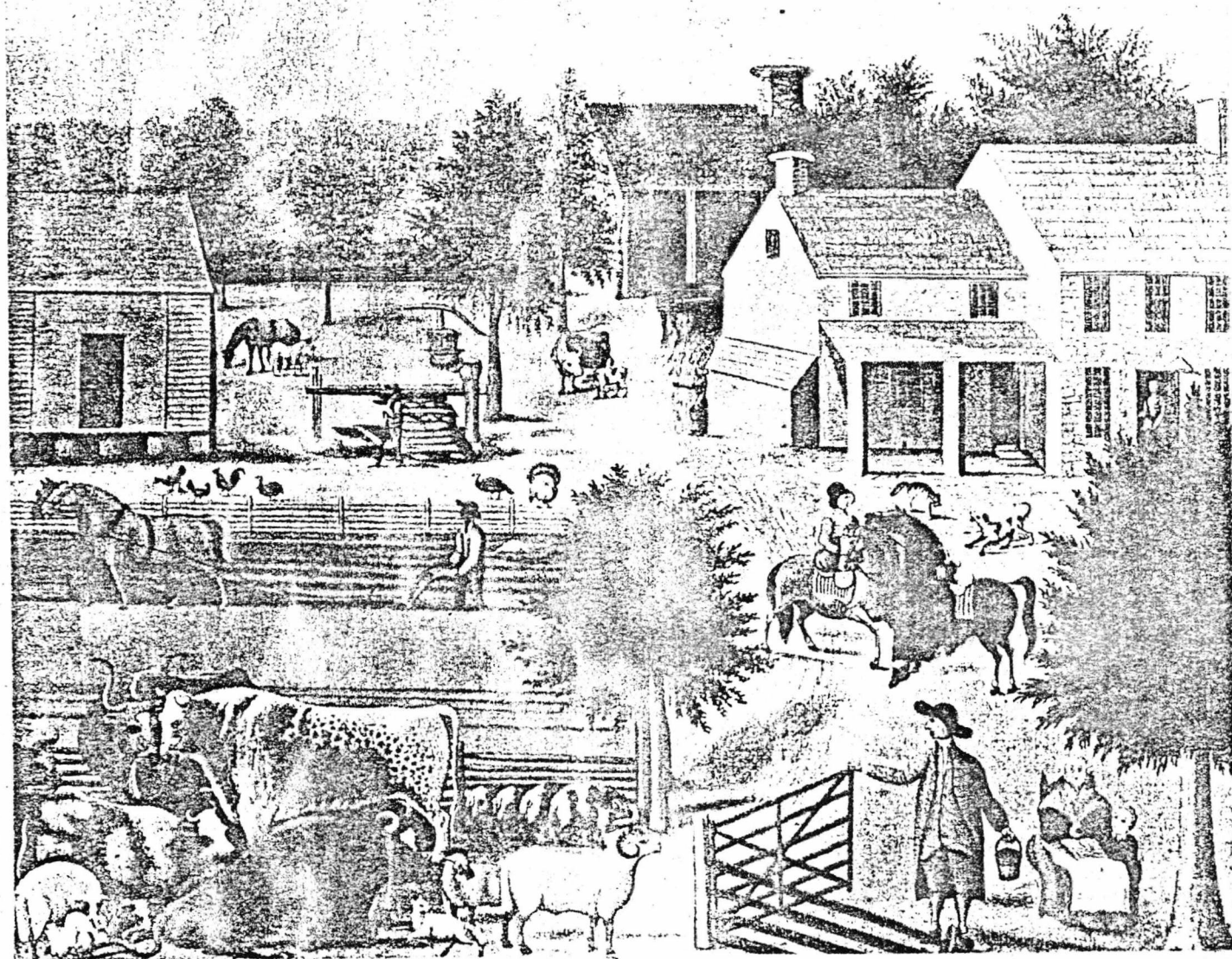
WASHINGTON'S TOMB AND MT. VERNON  
W. H. Bartlett Oil on canvas Mid 19th century

*Mrs. P. B. Key Daingerfeld Collection*



MEMORIAL FOR POLLY BOTSFORD  
Watercolor 1813

*Museum of Modern Art*



'THE RESIDENCE OF DAVID TWINING IN 1787'  
Edward Hicks Oil on canvas Early 19th century

*Museum of Modern Art*

APPENDIX THREE

The Constructions of Kurt Schwitters

## LIST OF FIGURES

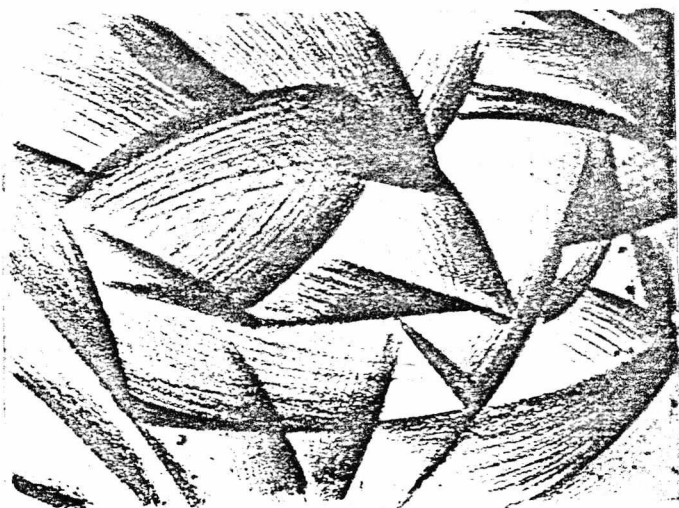
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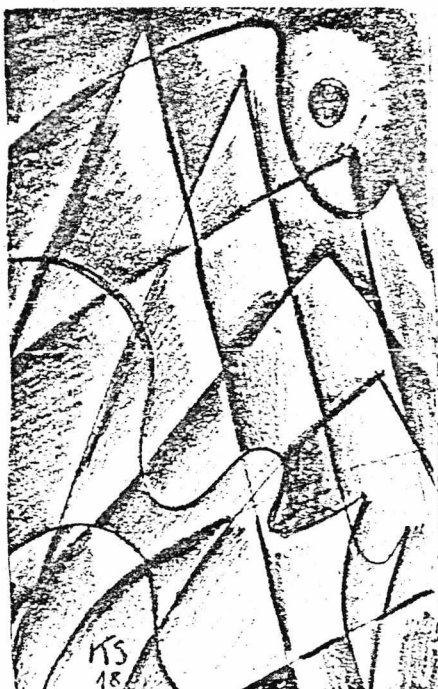




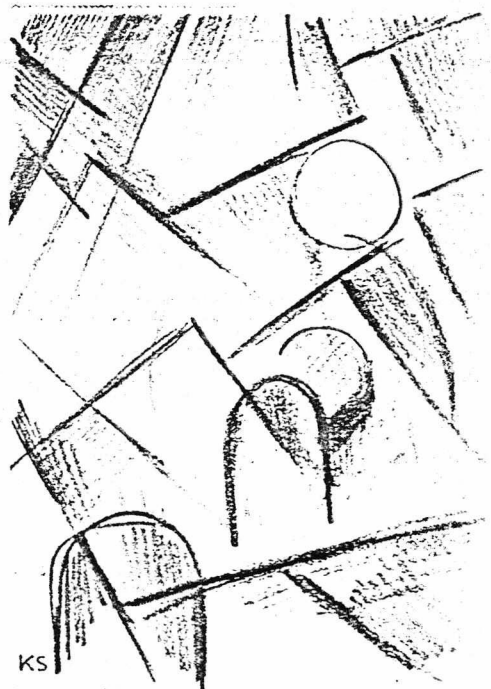
Vision (Helma Schwitters als Jungverheiratete) 1916-17



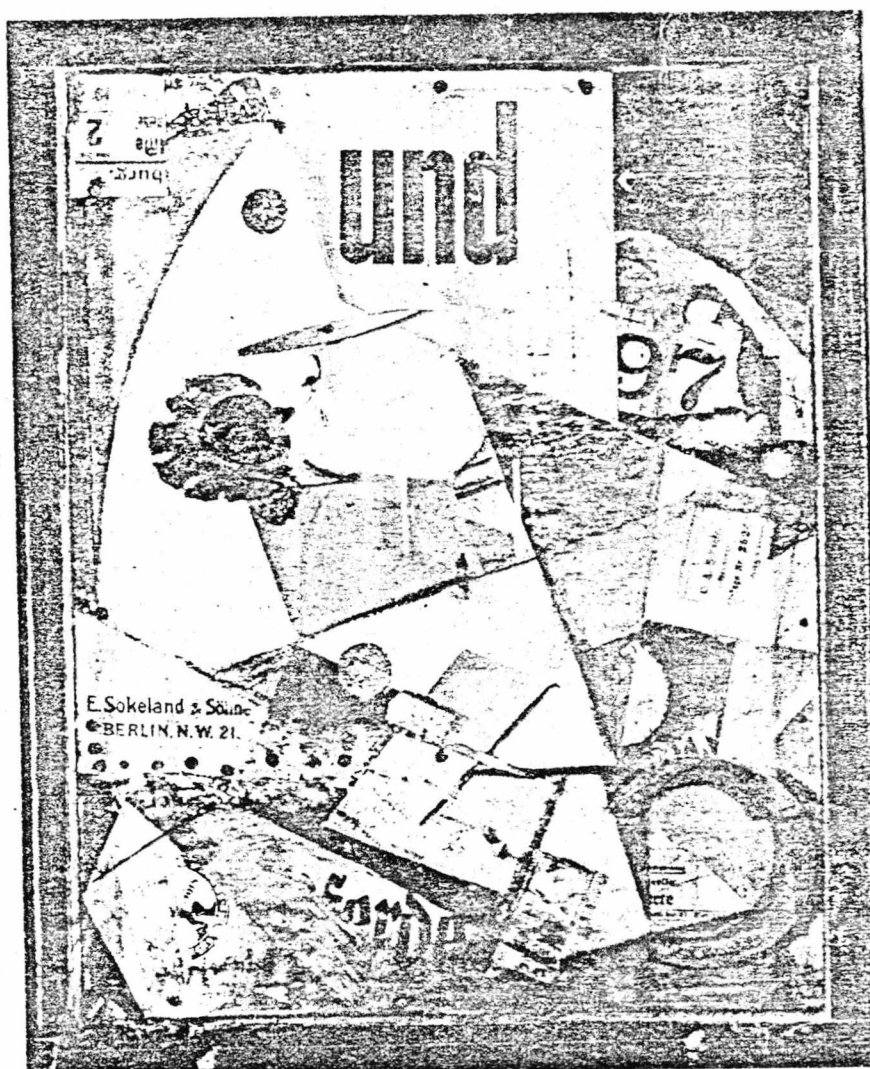
Abstraktion 1918



Eisgebirge. 1918

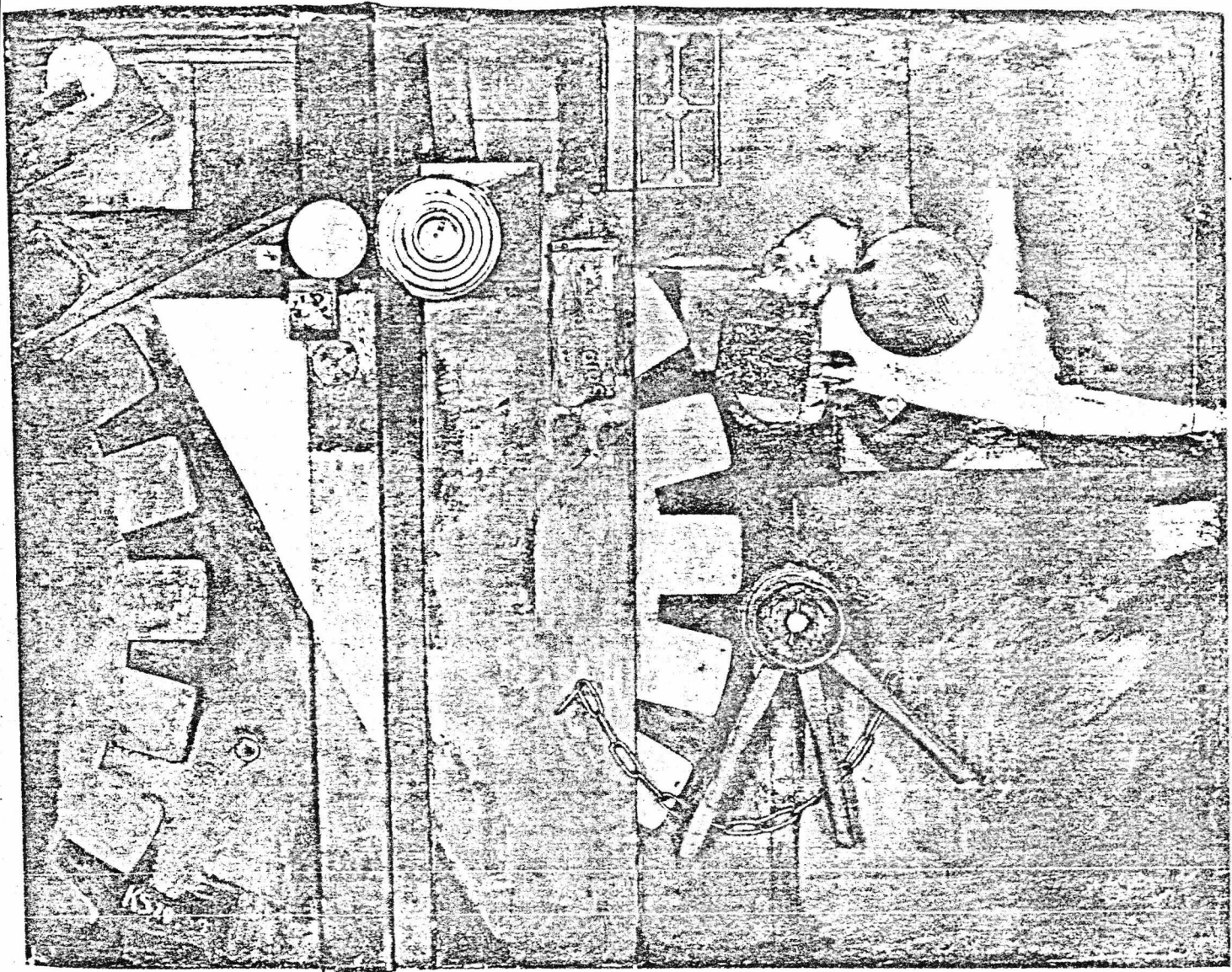


Hochgebirge 1918



Das Undbild 1919





Merzbild 29A Bild mit Drehrad 1920





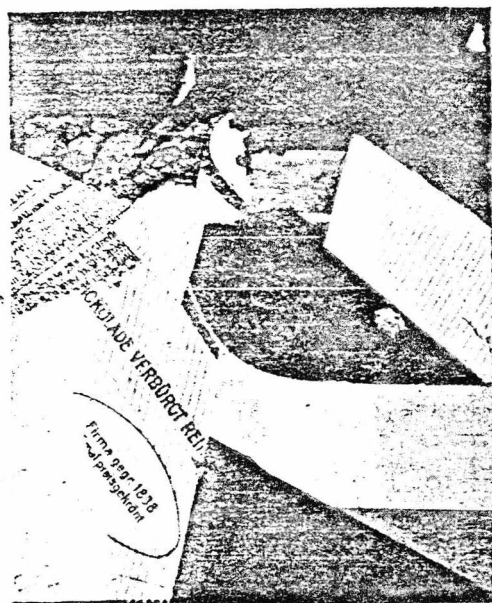
Mz151. Wenzel Kind 1921



Mz 180. Figurine 1921

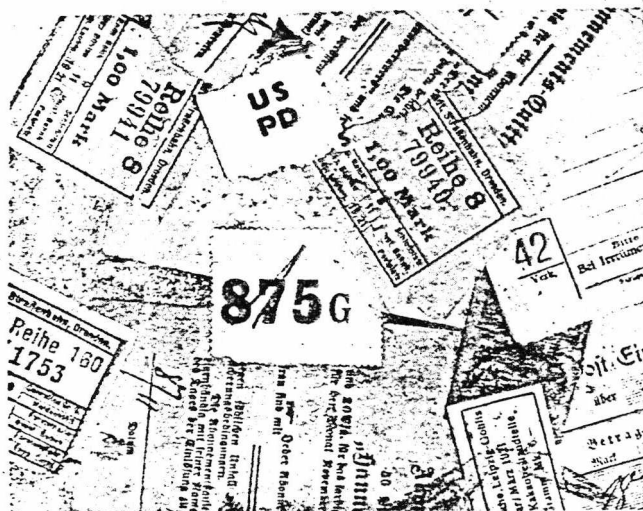


Mal Kah 1921

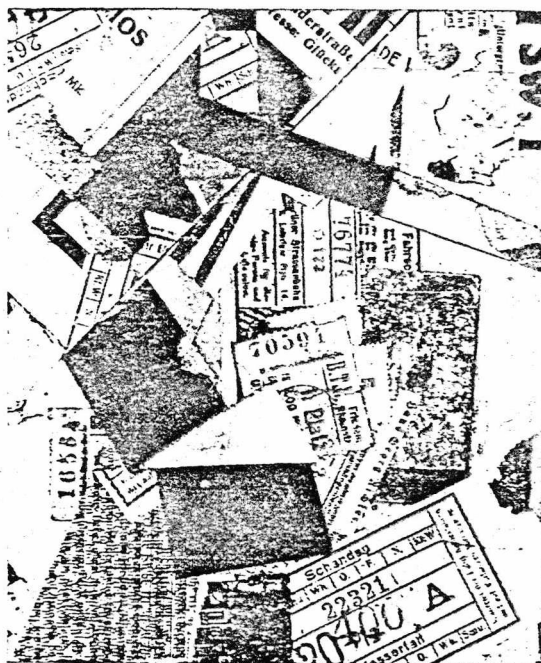


1918  
Firma 909 1918  
auftragsgemäß

Mz 334. Verbürgt rein 1921



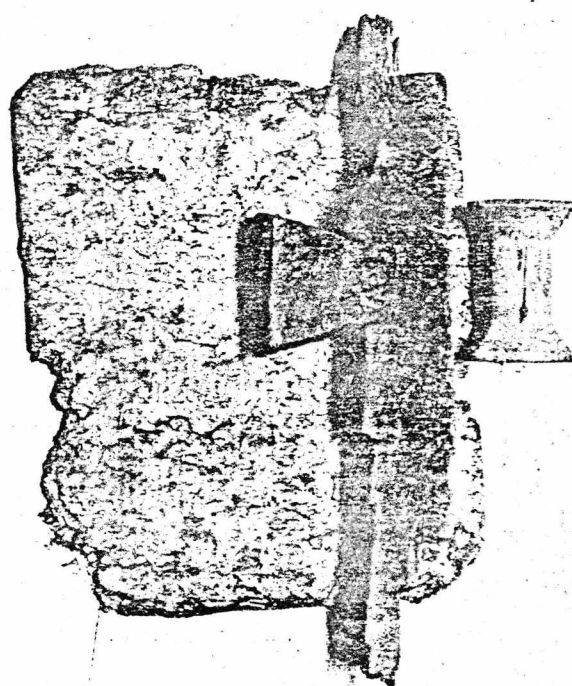
875 G. 1921-24



Mz 407. Lia 1922

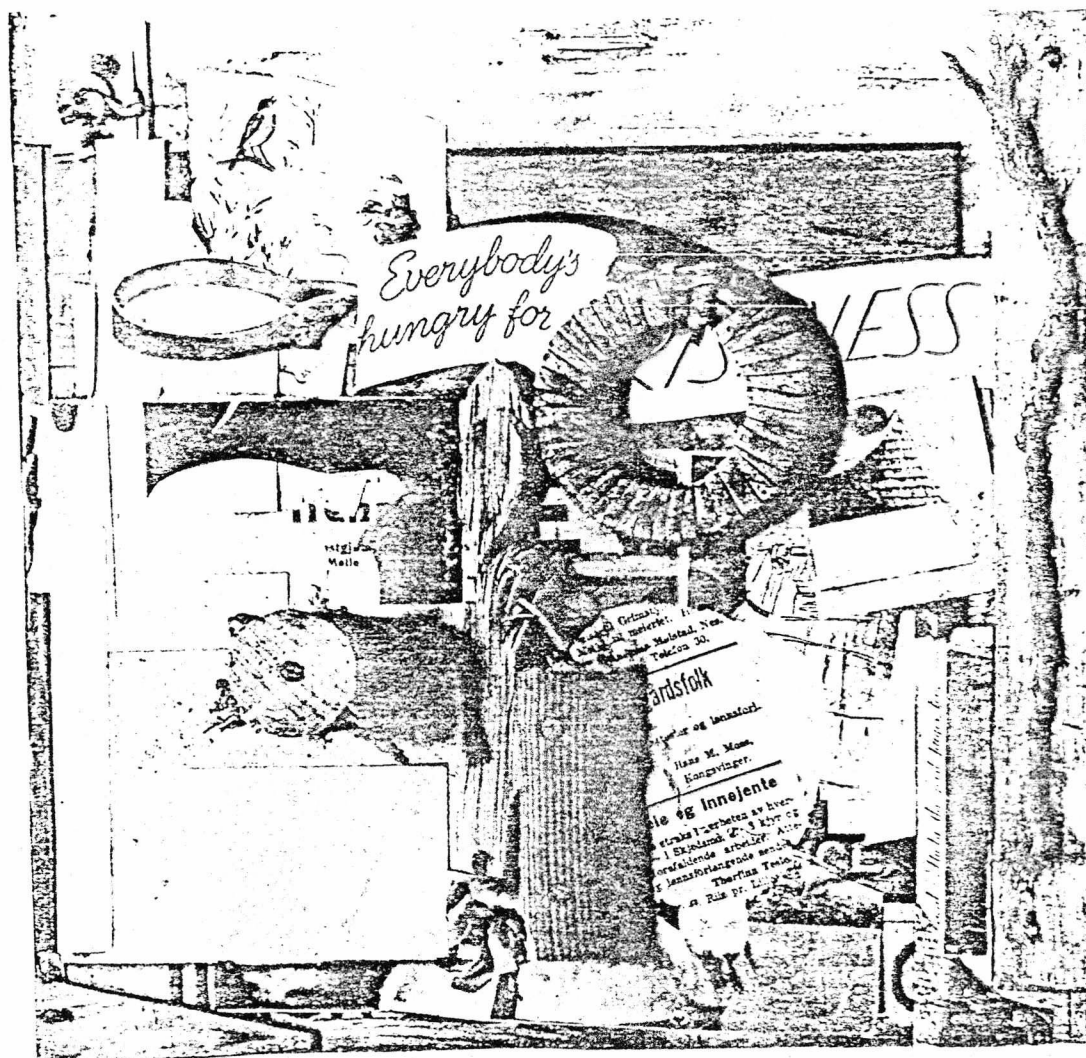


Mz 395. Ein Erdbeben 1922



Panaggi's Faselo 1938

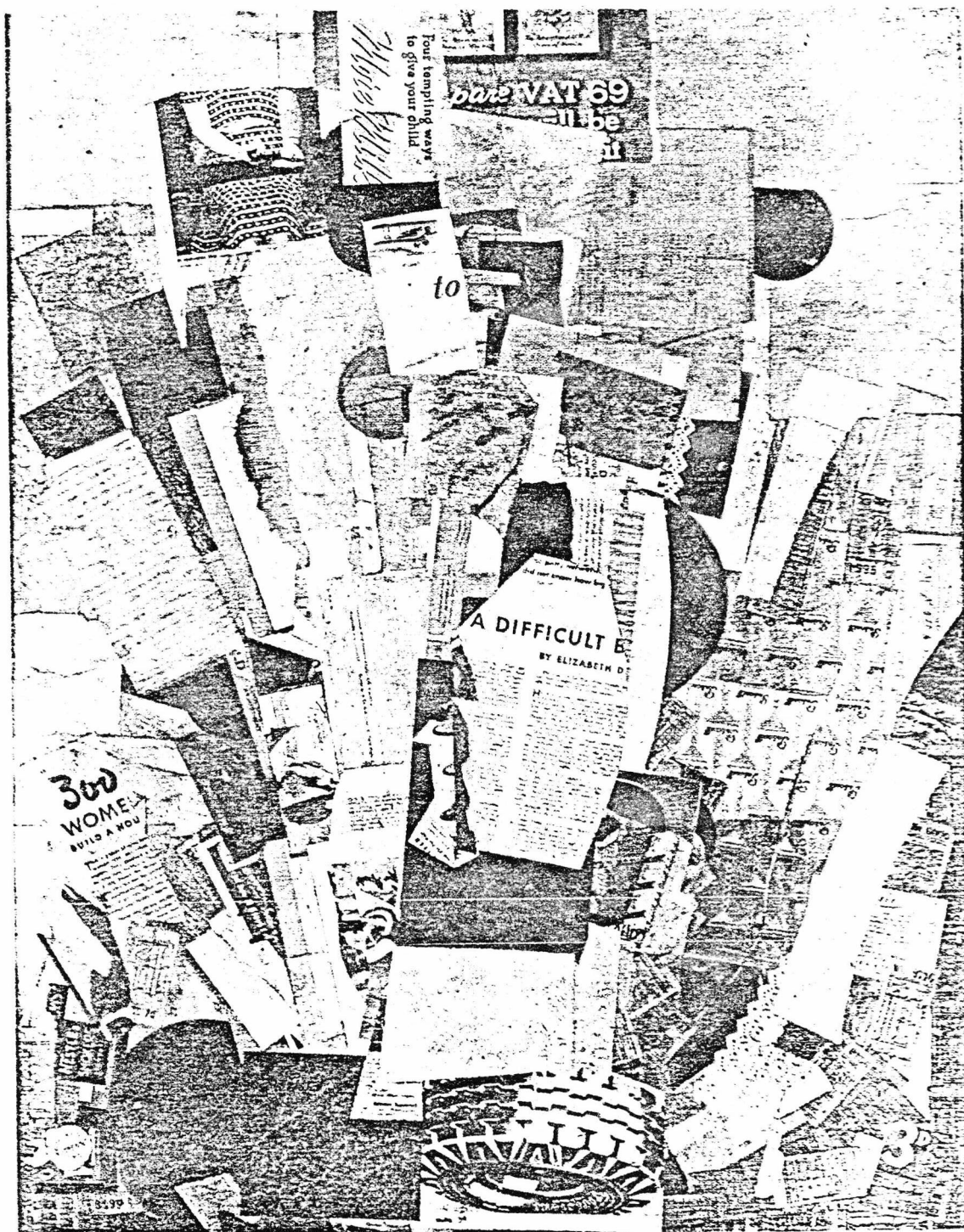




Everybody's hungry for 1938

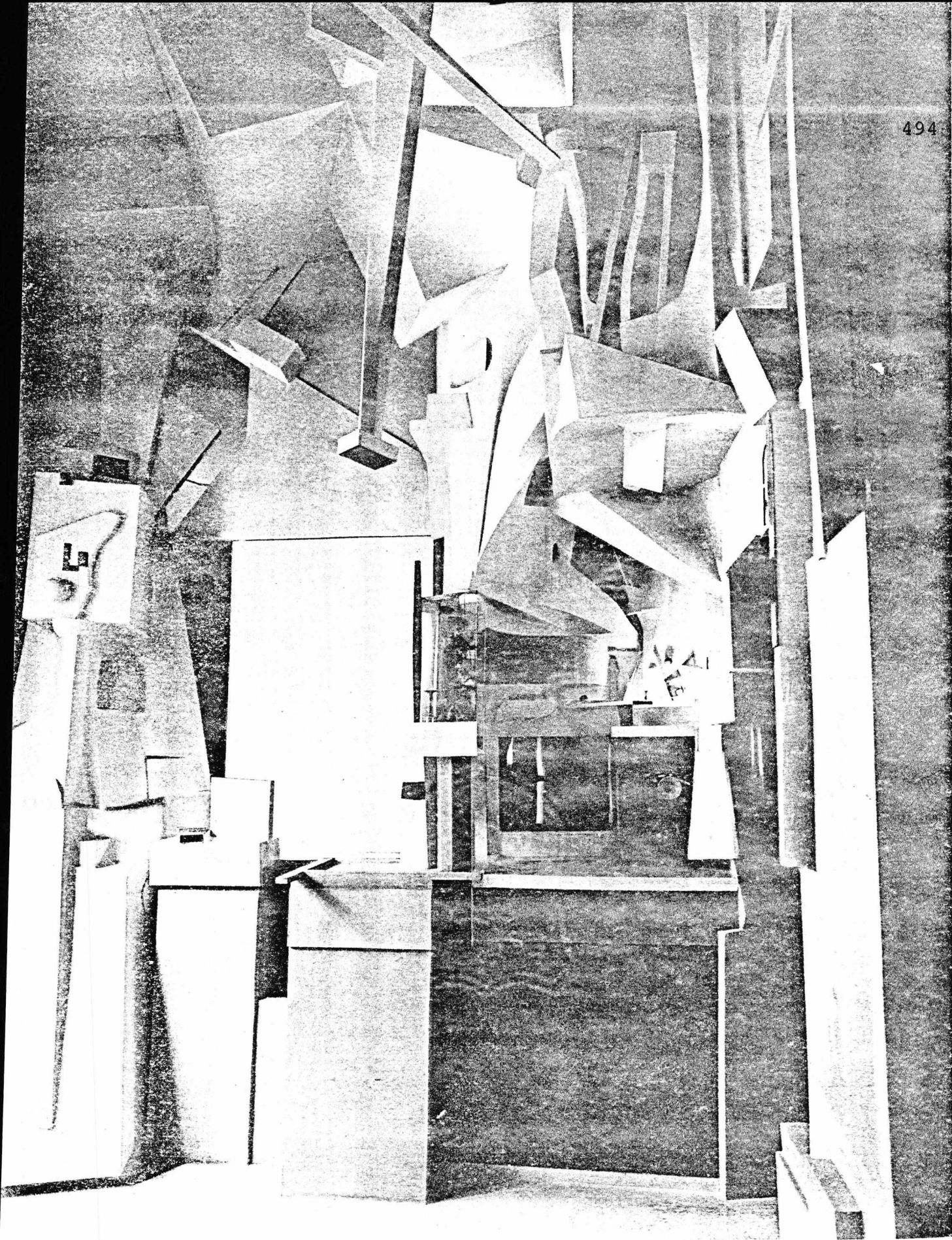


Merzbilde med regnbue 1939

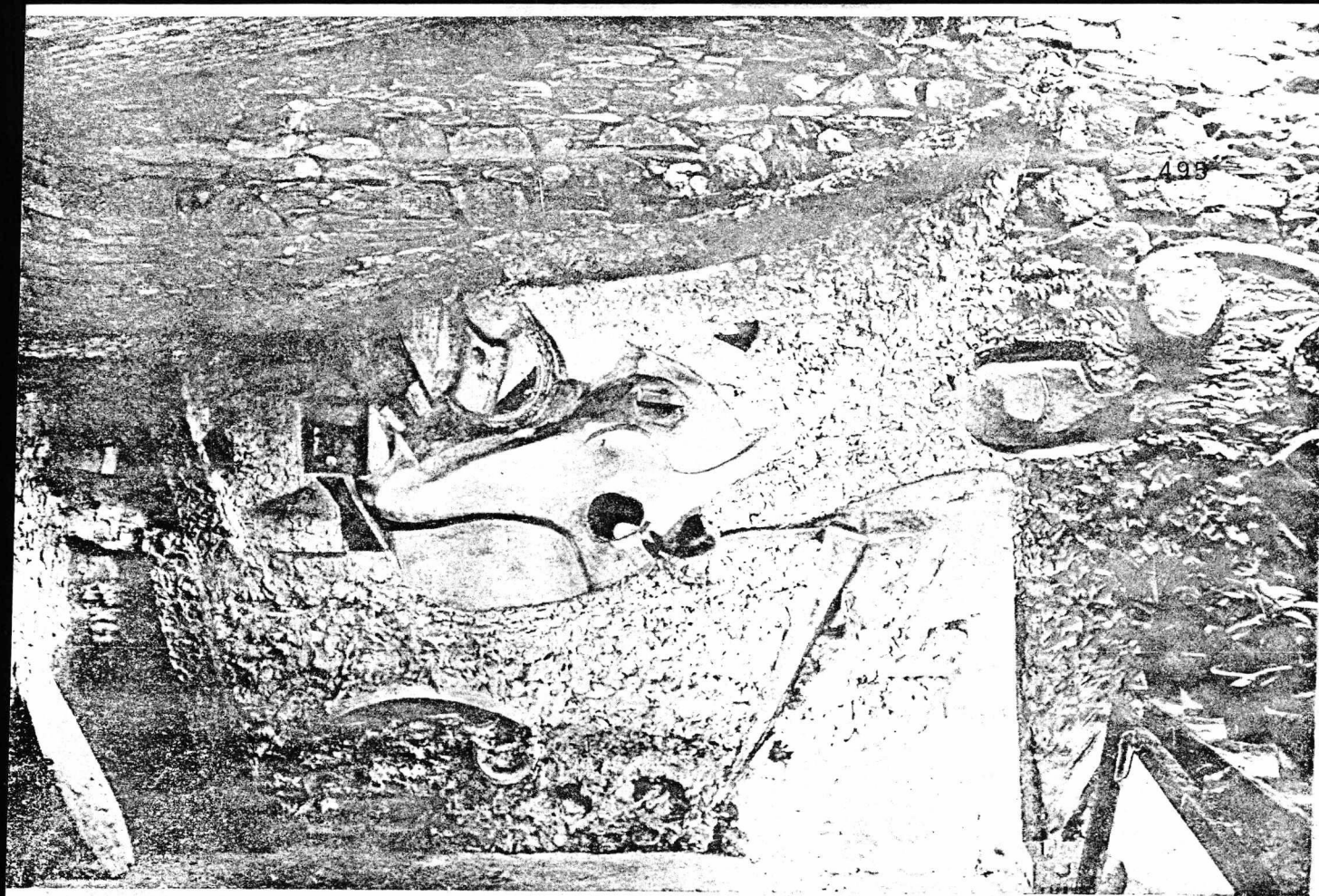












6 Merzbau in Little Langdale (Merz Barn) The Merz Barn in Little Langdale



## EXHIBITIONS OF THE WORK OF KURT SCHWITTERS

HELD IN NEW YORK: 1920-1965

- 1920: Galleries of the Société Anonyme (5th Exhibition)  
1921: " (Der Sturm artists)  
1928: " (50th Exhibition)  
1930: " (59th Exhibition)  
1931: " (61st Exhibition)  
1936: " (73rd Exhibition)

Museum of Modern Art. ("Cubism and Abstract Art")

College Art Association. ("New Forms in Art")

Museum of Modern Art. ("Fantastic Art--Dada--Surrealism")

- 1938: Columbia University  
1939: Springfield, Mass. Museum of Fine Arts.  
1948: Pinacotheca Gallery.  
1952: Sidney Janis Gallery.  
1956: "  
1959: "  
1962: "  
1963: Galerie Chalette.  
1965: Malborough-Gerson Gallery.

