

Franz Kline, by Frank O'Hara.

Introduction and Interview

Among the American artists to emerge after World War II, Franz Kline occupied a stellar position. Soon after his first one-man exhibition in 1950 at the Charles Egan Gallery in New York, he took a firm, if controversial, place in the consciousness of artists and collectors. Public recognition was slower to come, but his next exhibition a year later placed Kline in the company of Pollock, de Kooning, Gottlieb, Rothko, and Still, as one of the formative elements in a cultural development which was later to be unified under the various critical banners of Abstract Expressionism, Action Painting, or more simply "American-type Painting."

To Kline, as to Gertrude Stein, art meant power, power to move and to be moved. (He once said of Josef Albers, "It's a wonderful thing to be in love with The Square.") He is the Action Painter *par excellence*. He did not wish to be "in" his painting, as Pollock did, but to create the event of his passage, at whatever intersection of space and time, through the world. Each painting is a complete and open declaration of feeling. Like a conjurer, and with a similarly self-restricted cast of images, Kline chose to ring the infinite changes of delight, and metamorphosis, and pain. If painting was a wall to him, as several of his titles indicate, it was a wall

upon which he, as the mime, would appear in full to reveal the secret of The Dream, that dream of power which shuns domination and subjection and exists purely to inspire love.

Kline had had a thorough academic art training and, unlike many of the artists associated with him, served a long apprenticeship in devotion to traditional forms and styles. He was about thirty-seven when his own personal style began to emerge. As Elaine de Kooning, the painter and his close friend, recalls:

While young Americans in the late 'thirties were reacting variously to School of Paris and Mexican art, Franz was in London, poring over the work of English and German graphic artists and cartoonists with their references to Daumier, Blake, Fuseli, Rowlandson, Dürer and Goya, and collecting old prints of the Japanese.

In the early 'forties, when New York galleries and museums were devoted to Picasso *et al.*, Franz was entranced with Velasquez, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Corot, Courbet, Manet and with the introverted American landscape painters, Ryder, Blakelock and Wyant. When he did yield to twentieth-century styles in the mid-forties, it was with reservations, as though he viewed them through a scrim in a previous style.*

And of course it was precisely such a scrim which enabled Kline and Pollock to share such a tremendous admiration for a painter like Ryder and find such totally different inspirations in his work.

When Kline returned to America from England in 1939 his career as a serious artist began, and it was as a serious Bohemian artist. Where Gorky and de Kooning had already established a highly intellectual aura of esthetic investigation, discovery, and discussion, Kline's temperament and style developed more slowly away from the works of the past he so loved, and he himself was attracted more to the style of the boulevardier, insofar as an artist during the Great Depression could afford to be, frequenting the cafés and bars of Greenwich Village. While most of the artists with whom he would later be associated in the public's mind were employed on one or another of the painting projects of the United States Government, Kline was fortunate in receiving help and support during these years of severe financial struggle from two patrons, Dr. Theodore Edlich, his family's physician, and the industrialist I. David Orr, both of whom purchased and commissioned numerous early figurative works.

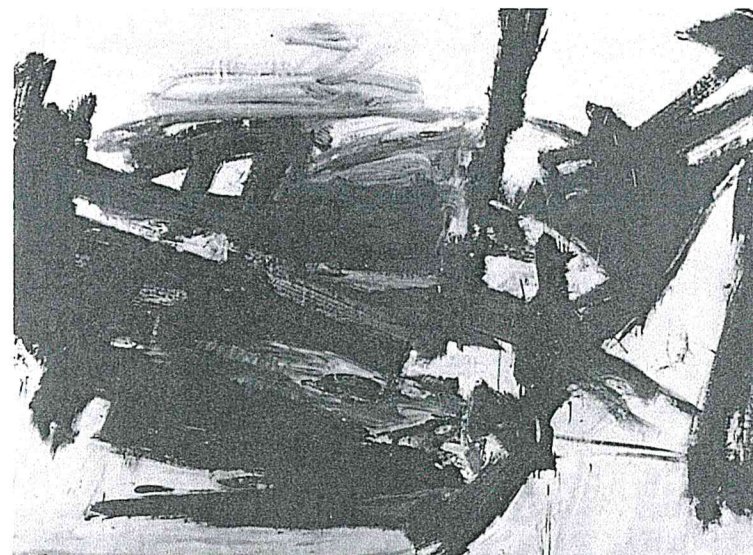
During these years Kline exhibited in the twice-yearly shows held on the sidewalks surrounding Washington Square, a Greenwich Village tradi-

* de Kooning, Elaine, "Franz Kline: Painter of his own life," *Art News* 61, no. 7, pp. 28-31, 64-69 ill., port., Nov. 1962.

tion still very much alive today. He painted a series of murals depicting vaudeville and burlesque scenes for the Bleeker Street Tavern, and drew caricatures of its patrons for the nearby Minetta Tavern. Fortunately many of these works have been preserved and in them, in contrast to the studio paintings of the period, we find the first hints of the Expressionist pace and ready confrontation, and that embrace of vulgarity and drama, which were later to emerge transformed into a new boldness of stance in Kline's abstract work of the fifties. In the studio he painted numerous portraits and seated figures, the latter usually in a rocking chair—and memories of the Pennsylvania landscape and of the trains which carried coal from the mines are among the earliest motifs. Even later, when the transformation from the traditional landscape of Post-Impressionism into a powerful personal vehicle of expression had occurred in his painting, Kline still liked to assign Pennsylvania place-names to abstract paintings (*Lehigh*—Fig. 1, *Shenandoah*, or *Hazleton*, for example), or names of locomotives remembered from his youth (*Chief*, *Cardinal*). However, it would be a mistake to read into the forms of the later paintings any significant literary meaning from the titles, applied as they were after the fact of the paintings' creation.

Above all, he drew constantly, whether in a studio, café, or street, with whatever materials were available. In his own studio he frequently used the pages of a telephone book to catch an idea or to test a gesture or a motion; elsewhere menus, napkins, or scraps of paper would be used and saved for further thought. Drawing for Kline represented not only an activity, but also a diary of plastic notions which might be resumed and developed years later, or acted upon immediately. It follows then that many of the drawings indicated as "studies" are more properly events preceding or related to a given oil painting or mimetic rehearsals of gesture awaiting their ultimate and ideal scale, rather than studies in the traditional sense.

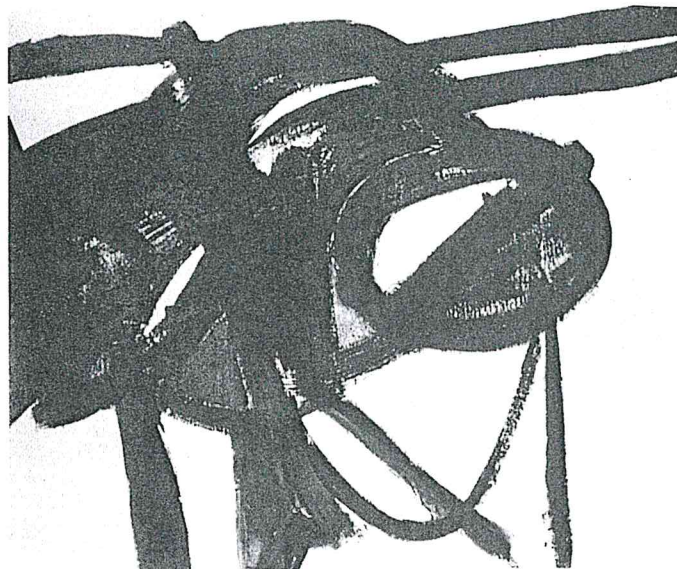
Kline loved paradoxes and theatrics: a great mime, he was fond of parodying, often wordlessly, always amiably, friends, artists, collectors, museum officials, or further afield, literary figures and performers he remembered from vaudeville and the circus. He unerringly, and with great affection, picked upon the precise eccentricity or foible which made his particular subject unique. Alone he was serious, attentive, philosophical within a wonderfully idiosyncratic frame of reference which placed his own conception of *The Dream* (of art and life) on an equal semantic footing with Existentialism and the Absurd; in public he was gregarious, a marvellous raconteur, and a tremendous fan of Mae West and W. C. Fields. He personally held at bay all possibilities of self-importance, pomposity, mysticism, and cant which might have otherwise interfered



1. *Lehigh*, 1956. Oil on canvas, 81" × 113¾".
Collection, Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Meriden, Connecticut.

with the very direct and personal relation he had to his paintings and their content. He kept himself from being publicly engulfed by his own meanings and the meanings he so well intuited in the life around him. He did not tame his work, but he thus tamed the role which he suspected so correctly society would, if allowed, impose upon him as it had on the unsuspecting Pollock. One of the lessons of our own society, often as opposed to that of Europe in the very recent past, is that for the artist to keep working after initial recognition he must adopt the cleverest devices of Dickens's Artful Dodger. Kline worked publicly to retain his studio privacy. No matter how helplessly he and those around him dissolved in laughter at one of his fantastic anecdotes, underlying it was a nostalgia and longing which reminded one of the early "idealistic" anarchists, and a melancholy recognition of mutability, self-irony singling out the irony of the specific tale.

In a sense the figurative paintings of the forties, fanatically worked



2. *Chief*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 58 $\frac{3}{8}$ " \times 73 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
gift of Mr. and Mrs. David M. Solinger.

over and over if they did not "make something happen," are his own exhaustions of appearances which haunted him. At this time Kline was teaching himself what he saw and what he could do and what he wanted to see. He loved relationships, if not imitations. He loved commissions as a challenge for his talents, and the more specific the commission the more challenged he felt. "You know I was very hard up one time and this collector was dying to have a Laurencin over his fireplace. He asked me if I could paint him one and I said I'd try. You know, it was terrific working on it, and it turned out to be a terrific picture, all pink and white. I kind of like Laurencin anyway; like Apollinaire said, she was an Amazon."

But once he had found what he wanted to see in his drawings, this fun in art, and this kind of versatility, El Greco and Cézanne in the land-

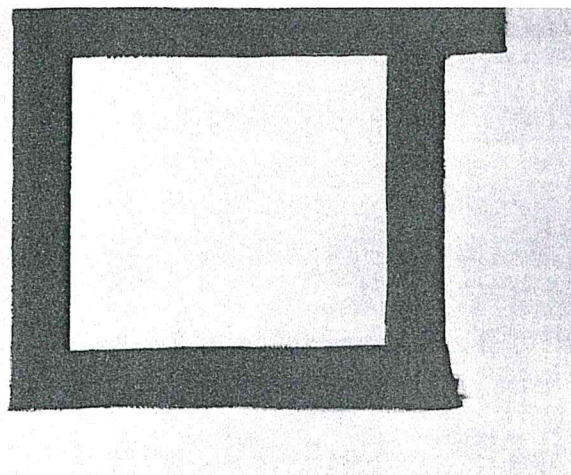
scapes, Pascin and Soutine in the figures, were put behind him. The modest quality remained in his conversation, but in his art he was on stage at last with all his own juggler's paraphernalia and the opportunity for great risks and great achievements was fully apparent to him in the harsh light.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Kline was never consciously avant-garde. He had none of the polemical anxiety which must establish itself for a movement or style and against any or all others. His great admiration for de Kooning did not preclude an intense admiration for Pollock, even in a close-knit artistic society full of partisanship and either/or decisions, which gathered frequently at The Club, an artists-sponsored meeting place, or at a nearby bar, to engage in heated discussions of esthetic right and wrong. His combats were with himself in his art, and were so personal as to defy intellectualization.

His first significant abstract works were done about 1945-47. They evolved naturally from preoccupation with the act of drawing. The "break-through" in style, which seemed to have been signalled in 1950 in his first one-man exhibition, is already foreseen in two works of 1947, *Collage*, which prefigures many of the later large horizontal paintings, and *Untitled*, with its strong relationship to both *Chief* (Fig. 2) and *Clock Face*. The later works, done in black and white, established Kline's originality and strength, but the motifs already existed in the earlier colored ones.

However, the scale marks a change in Kline's self-orientation. In the late forties de Kooning had done a series of black-and-white abstract paintings in enamel with shiny surfaces and the marvellously acute calligraphic cuttings and whippings of line for which he is famous, and Pollock was soon to embark on his series of semifigurative works done with black paint seeping into unsized canvas, at once sensitive in surface and frequently grotesque in form. Kline's was an entirely different approach to black and white. The forms are stark and simple, the gesture abrupt, rough, passionately unconcerned with finish. All the finesse so ardently acquired from the masters has been set aside for a naked confrontation with the canvas and the image. Where finesse still exists, as in *Cardinal* and *Abstraction* 1950-51, it is commanded by the image totally. The images have become hieratic and undeniable, composed of monumentally angular calligraphic strokes in constant tension with a rough and awkward semigeometrical stubbornness, like a struggle between Picasso's *Guernica* and the Bauhaus. *Wotan* (Fig. 3) is an example of the unpromisingly successful outcome of this impulse.

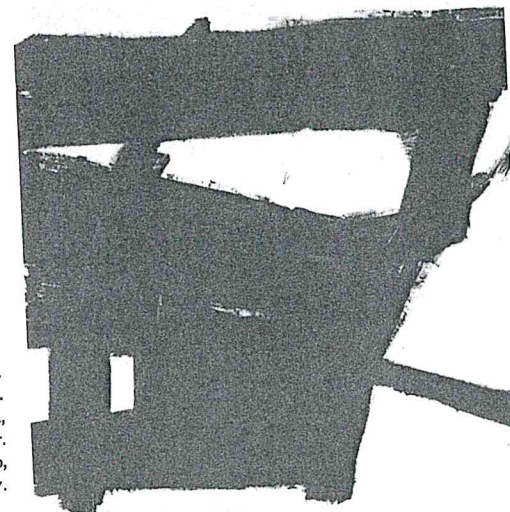
In the mid-fifties Kline enlarged enormously the scope of his expres-



3. *Wotan*, 1950. Oil on canvas on masonite, 55½" x 79½".
Courtesy, Denise René Galleries, Paris, New York, Dusseldorf.

sion without losing any of the immediacy and vigor of his painterly gesture. His blacks and whites took on more and more variety of hue, and their relationships as colors, as in *White Forms*, became the vehicle for the introduction of browns and umbers in *The Bridge* and *Shenandoah*, culminating in 1958 in *Mycenae*, where black is entirely absent, and the slashing strokes of reds and yellows interact with the whites in the same intensely opposite way as do the blacks and whites in the earlier paintings.

Paradoxically, the introduction of reds, purples, oranges, and browns into the paintings of this period met with as much controversy as had Kline's initial insistence on their absence. Having been assigned the kingdom of black and white, this seemed like abdication. But Kline's greatest efforts were always engaged in pictorial problems, rather than the pursuit of perfection. He was not at all interested in pursuing a style toward the dead-end of expertise. When problems did not exist, he created them. Even in the black-and-white paintings of this period we note the increasingly more frequent use of grays, blue-grays, charcoals, altering and complicating the previously clearly defined relationships in a



4. *Wanamaker Block*, 1955.
Oil on canvas, 78½" x 71".
Collection,
Richard Brown Baker.
Photo,
Yale University Art Gallery.

manner which has more to do with chiaroscuro and sfumato than simply with obscured calligraphy. A masterpiece like *Wanamaker Block* (Fig. 4), one of his most characteristic black-and-white paintings, seems the direct and inevitable result of a natural gift, but for Kline it was a hard-won battle, and he distrusted easy victories. To the difficult victories we owe the Kline of *Lehigh* and *Rue*, with their changes from stark opposition of line and mass toward nuances of directional structure and developments of spatial ambiguities within the mass.

To those who had thought the early paintings were influenced by Japanese calligraphy the more complicated hues in the paintings of the mid- and late-fifties were puzzling. But as the density and complexity of Kline's content deepened from embattled clarity to tragic awareness, the means of a previous feeling could not be simply restated in another context. Nor had the earlier work been actually calligraphic in the Oriental sense. The whites and blacks are strokes and masses of entirely relevant intensity to the painting as a whole and to each other. The strokes and linear gestures of the painter's arm and shoulder are aimed at an ultimate

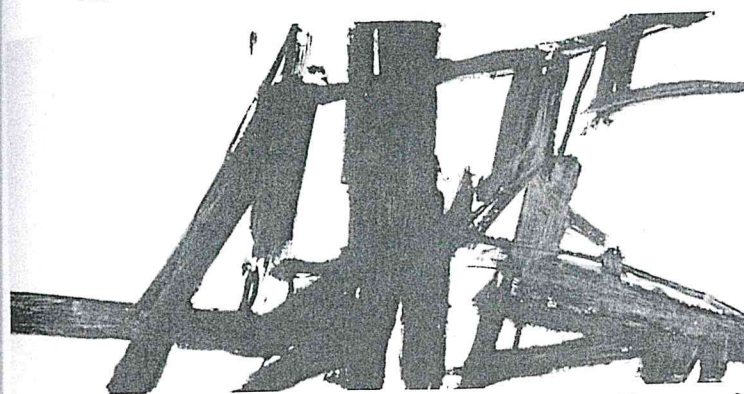
structure of feeling rather than at ideograph or writing. Unlike Tobey, Kline did not find a deep spiritual affinity in Japanese art, beyond his appreciation of its pictorial values and perhaps a fondness for the diagonal and for the build-up of unified imagery through exquisite detail also appreciated fully by so many nineteenth-century European painters. His influence on Japanese painters themselves has usually led them directly away from their own calligraphic tradition, and we know that one of their leading painters, the late Sabro Hasegawa, admired Kline precisely because his work seemed so uniquely American.

He had always, however, the draftsman's gift of placement. Forms, strokes, dots, and dabs found unerringly their ideal position in the space of his surfaces. He was very conscious of this quality, and of the vitality and freshness of a slightly "off" positioning. His consciousness of the limits of the canvas was that of the high-diver to his pool, the aerialist to his net. The range of his perception of presences was extraordinary. Some come toward you, advancing as you are beckoned, some implacably turn away from your descent while others float, implacably waiting, or speed past in panoramic darkness. The huge organic lunge of *Orleans*, the massive gates of *Zinc Door* with the exiled yellows above them, the dignified, impassive guardedness of *Slate Cross*, are all aspects of a rigorous confrontation with extreme experiences. These late, great structures of his mind, lucid, tangible, and fiercely humane in their sweeping inclusiveness, find ultimate expression in such a painting as *Shenandoah Wall* (Fig. 5), a frontier which fate was to prevent the artist from crossing into who knows what other land of promise?

The following interview was done in 1958, at one sitting. The initial reference is to an abstract painting by Willem de Kooning, c. 1945, which was in the room during the interview. Since the painter felt that set questions were too stilted for him, the agreement was that he "would just start talking."

FRANZ KLINE: That's Bill's isn't it? Terrific! You can always tell a de Kooning, even though this one doesn't look like earlier ones or later ones. It's not that style has a particular look, it just adds up. You become a stylist, I guess, but that's not it.

Somebody will say I have a black-and-white style, or a calligraphic style, but I never started out with that being consciously a style or attitude about painting. Sometimes you do have a definite idea about what you're doing—and at other times it all just seems to disappear. I don't feel mine is the most modern, contemporary, beyond-the-pale, *gone* kind of painting.



5. *Shenandoah Wall*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 80 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 171".
Courtesy, Allan Stone Gallery.

But then, I don't have that kind of fuck-the-past attitude. I have very strong feelings about individual paintings and painters past and present.

Now, Bonnard at times seems styleless. Someone said of him that he had the rare ability to forget from one day to another what he had done. He added the next day's experience to it, like a child following a balloon. He painted the particular scene itself: in form, the woman can't quite get out of the bathtub. And he's a real colorist. The particular scene itself? Matisse wouldn't let that happen, he didn't let himself get too entranced with anything.

In Braque and Gris, they seemed to have an idea of the organization beforehand in their mind. With Bonnard, he is organizing in front of you. You can tell in Léger just when he discovered how to make it like an engine, as John Kane said, being a carpenter, a joiner. What's wrong with that? You see it in Barney Newman too, that he knows what a painting should be. He paints as he thinks *painting* should be, which is pretty heroic.

What with the drying and all, you can tell immediately pretty much whether a painting was done all at once or at different intervals. In one Picasso you can see it was all immediate, spontaneous, or in another that he came back the next day and put on the stroke that completed it. Sometimes you get one of those dark Ryders; it's the top one and it's all spontaneous and immediate, done all at once, and there are seven or eight others underneath it you can't tell about.

Now I'm not saying that doing it all at once implies an idea of the organization beforehand or that you like it when it's done all at once or that you like it when you've had the idea before you began. You instinctively like what you can't do. I like Fra Angelico. I used to try all the time to do those blue eyes that are really blue. Someone once told me to look at Ingres. I loved Daumier and Rembrandt at the time and I was bored when I looked at Ingres. Before long I began to like it. You go through the different phases of liking different guys who are not like you. You go to a museum looking for Titian and you wind up looking at someone else. But the way of working before Cézanne is hidden. Cézanne is like an analyst and he seems to be right there, you can see him painting the side of a nose with red. Even though he wanted to paint like Velasquez.

They painted the object that they looked at. They didn't fit out a studio and start painting without a subject. I find that I do both. Hokusai painted Fuji because it was there. He and others remembered it and drew from their imagination of how they had tried to paint it when it was in front of them. When he paints Fuji with a brush—birds, mist, snow, etc.—its not the photographic eye but his mind has been brought to the utter simplification of it, and that doesn't bring it into symbolism. With Hokusai it was more like Toulouse-Lautrec drawing dancers and wanting to draw like Degas who wanted to draw like Ingres. It has something to do with wanting to see people dance. Or like Rembrandt going to see Hercules Seghers' landscapes.

Malevich is interesting to me. Maybe because you are able to translate through his motion the endless wonder of what painting could be, without describing an eye or a breast. That would be looking at things romantically, which painters don't do. The thing has its own appeal outside of the white-on-white, this-on-that idea. With Mondrian, in a way you see that the condition is that he's a guy who solves his own problems illogically. He's done it with paint illogically to himself—which makes it logical to some other people. I was at the studio of one of these people one day and he said he was going to put red in one of the squares to improve it and what did I think? I said try it out and see if you like it, not if it improves it.

There's this comedian I know in the borscht circuit. They had a theater group and everything up there and my friend asked me to go there and teach painting. I told him I didn't have the money to get there and he said he'd send it to me. I got up there and talked with this comedian. He had studied with Raphael Soyer and painted, but he never could sell anything, so he took this job as a comedian and never got back to painting. He loved Jackson Pollack and had such marvellous heart about it all that he could never have been popular at either painting or comedy. He *cared*

so much. Somebody did an imitation of my drawing on a napkin, laughing, six lines, and said, "That's all there is to it." My friend said, "That's why I like it."

Then of course there are reviewers. I read reviews because they are a facet of someone's mind which has been brought to bear on the work. Although if someone's against it, they act as if the guy had spent his life doing something worthless.

Someone can paint *not* from his own time, not even from himself. Then the reviewer cannot like it, maybe. But just to review, like a shopper, I saw one this, one that, good, awful, is terrible. Or he may be hopelessly uninterested in what it is anyway, but writes about it. I read Leonard Lyons in the *John* the other day and he said every other country picked out the best art for the Venice Biennale, but we didn't. Then someone in the government went to Brussels and said painters should have to get a licence for buying brushes. Lyons went on to say he hoped that there will be a day when abstractions are not supposed to be made for a child's playroom.

Criticism must come from those who are around it, who are not shocked that someone should be doing it at all. It should be exciting, and in a way that excitement comes from, in looking at it, that it's *not* that autumn scene you love, it's *not* that portrait of your grandmother.

Which reminds me of Boston, for some reason. You know I studied there for a while and once later I was up there for a show and met this Bostonian who thought I looked pretty Bohemian. His definition of a Bohemian artist was someone who could live where animals would die. He also talked a lot about the 8th Street Club and said that Hans Hofmann and Clem Greenberg run it, which is like Ruskin saying that Rowlandson and Daumier used up enough copper to clad the British Navy and it's too bad they didn't sink it. Why was he so upset about an artists' club in another city? You get classified as a New York painter or poet automatically. They do it in Boston or Philadelphia, you don't do it yourself.

Tomlin. In a way, they never did much about him and I think it's sad. He didn't start an art school, but he had an influence—his statements were very beautiful. When Pollock talked about painting he didn't usurp anything that wasn't himself. He didn't want to change anything, he wasn't using any outworn attitudes about it, he was always himself. He just wanted to be in it because he loved it. The response in the person's mind to that mysterious thing that has happened has nothing to do with who did it first. Tomlin, however, did hear these voices and in reference to his early work and its relation to Braque, I like him for it. He was not an academician of Cubism even then, he was an extremely personal and sensi-

tive artist. If they want to talk about him, they say he was supposed to be Chopin. He didn't knock over any tables. Well, who's supposed to be Beethoven? Braque? I saw Tomlin's later work at the Arts Club in Chicago when he was abstract and it was the most exciting thing around—you look up who else was in the show.

If you're a painter, you're not alone. There's no way to be alone. You think and you care and you're with all the people who care, including the young people who don't know they do yet. Tomlin in his late paintings knew this. Jackson always knew it: that if you meant it enough when you did it, it will mean that much. It's like Caruso and Bjoerling. Bjoerling sounds like Caruso, but if you think of Caruso and McCormack you think of being in the world as you are. Bjoerling sounded like Caruso, but it turned out to be handsome. Bradley Tomlin didn't. Unless. . . . Hell, if you look at all the painting in the world today it will probably all turn out to be handsome, I don't know.

The nature of anguish is translated into different forms. What has happened is that we're not through the analytical period of learning what motivates things. If you can figure out the motivation, it's supposed to be all right. But when things are "beside themselves" what matters is the care these things are given by someone. It's assumed that to read something requires an ability beyond that of a handwriting expert, but if someone throws something on a canvas it doesn't require any more care than if someone says, "I don't give a damn."

Like with Jackson: you don't paint the way someone, by observing your life, thinks you *have* to paint, you paint the way you have to in order to *give*, that's life itself, and someone will look and say it is the product of knowing, but it has nothing to do with knowing, it has to do with giving. The question about knowing will naturally be wrong. When you've finished giving, the look surprises you as well as anyone else.

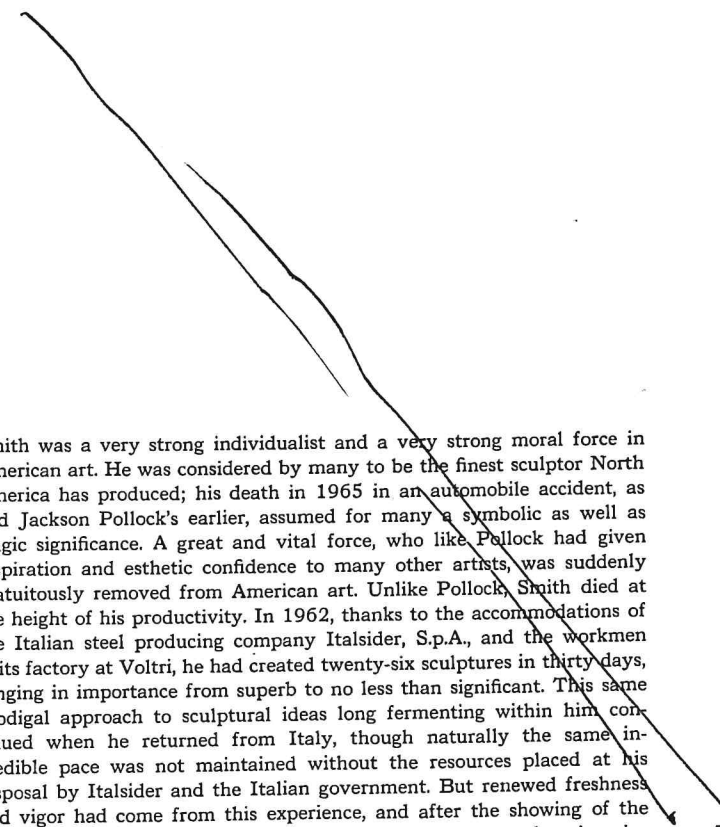
Of course, this must be an American point of view. When Delacroix talks about the spirit, it must be French. It couldn't be Russian or Japanese. But writing his journals doesn't make him knowledgeable or practical. Delacroix was more interesting than that. That isn't the end in relation to his paintings. If it had been the end, people would have thought it interesting. Some people do think so.

Some painters talking about painting are like a lot of kids dancing at a prom. An hour later you're too shy to get out on the floor.

Hell, half the world wants to be like Thoreau at Walden worrying about the noise of traffic on the way to Boston; the other half use up their lives being part of that noise. I like the second half. Right?

To be right is the most terrific personal state that nobody is interested in.

David Smith



Smith was a very strong individualist and a very strong moral force in American art. He was considered by many to be the finest sculptor North America has produced; his death in 1965 in an automobile accident, as had Jackson Pollock's earlier, assumed for many a symbolic as well as tragic significance. A great and vital force, who like Pollock had given inspiration and esthetic confidence to many other artists, was suddenly gratuitously removed from American art. Unlike Pollock, Smith died at the height of his productivity. In 1962, thanks to the accommodations of the Italian steel producing company Italsider, S.p.A., and the workmen in its factory at Voltri, he had created twenty-six sculptures in thirty days, ranging in importance from superb to no less than significant. This same prodigal approach to sculptural ideas long fermenting within him continued when he returned from Italy, though naturally the same incredible pace was not maintained without the resources placed at his disposal by Italsider and the Italian government. But renewed freshness and vigor had come from this experience, and after the showing of the works at the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, he returned to America to commence work on bronzes, on small painted steel pieces (the

PERSONISM: A MANIFESTO

Everything is in the poems, but at the risk of sounding like the poor wealthy man's Allen Ginsberg I will write to you because I just heard that one of my fellow poets thinks that a poem of mine that can't be got at one reading is because I was confused too. Now, come on. I don't believe in god, so I don't have to make elaborately sounded structures. I hate Vachel Lindsay, always have; I don't even like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff. You just go on your nerve. If someone's chasing you down the street with a knife you just run, you don't turn around and shout, "Give it up! I was a track star for Mineola Prep."

That's for the writing poems part. As for their reception, suppose you're in love and someone's mistreating (*mal aimé*) you, you don't say, "Hey, you can't hurt me this way, I care!" you just let all the different bodies fall where they may, and they always do may after a few months. But that's not why you fell in love in the first place, just to hang onto life, so you have to take your chances and try to avoid being logical. Pain always produces logic, which is very bad for you.

I'm not saying that I don't have practically the most lofty ideas of anyone writing today, but what difference does that make? They're just ideas. The only good thing about it is that when I get lofty enough I've stopped thinking and that's when refreshment arrives.

But how can you really care if anybody gets it, or gets what it means, or if it improves them. Improves them for what? For death? Why hurry them along? Too many poets act like a middle-aged mother trying to get her kids to eat too much cooked meat, and potatoes with drippings (tears). I don't give a damn whether they eat or not. Forced feeding leads to excessive thinness (*effete*). Nobody should experience anything they don't need to, if they don't need poetry bully for them. I like the movies too. And after all, only Whitman and Crane and Williams, of the American poets, are better than the movies. As for measure and other technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you. There's nothing metaphysical about it. Unless, of course, you flatter yourself into thinking that what you're experiencing is "yearning."

Abstraction in poetry, which Allen [Ginsberg] recently commented on in *It Is*, is intriguing. I think it appears mostly in the minute particulars where decision is

necessary. Abstraction (in poetry, not in painting) involves personal removal by the poet. For instance, the decision involved in the choice between "the nostalgia of the infinite" and "the nostalgia for the infinite" defines an attitude towards degree of abstraction. The nostalgia of the infinite representing the greater degree of abstraction, removal, and negative capability (as in Keats and Mallarmé). Personism, a movement which I recently founded and which nobody knows about, interests me a great deal, being so totally opposed to this kind of abstract removal that it is verging on a true abstraction for the first time, really, in the history of poetry. Personism is to Wallace Stevens what *la poésie pure* was to Béranger. Personism has nothing to do with philosophy, it's all art. It does not have to do with personality or intimacy, far from it! But to give you a vague idea, one of its minimal aspects is to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feelings towards the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about the person. That's part of Personism. It was founded by me after lunch with LeRoi Jones on August 27, 1959, a day in which I was in love with someone (not Roi, by the way, a blond). I went back to work and wrote a poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born. It's a very exciting movement which will undoubtedly have lots of adherents. It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages. In all modesty, I confess that it may be the death of literature as we know it. While I have certain regrets, I am still glad I got there before Alain Robbe-Grillet did. Poetry being quicker and surer than prose, it is only just that poetry finish literature off. For a time people thought that Artaud was going to accomplish this, but actually, for all their magnificence, his polemical writings are not more outside literature than Bear Mountain is outside New York State. His relation is no more astounding than Debuffet's to painting.

What can we expect of Personism? (This is getting good, isn't it?) Everything, but we won't get it. It is too new, too vital a movement to promise anything. But it, like Africa, is on the way. The recent propagandists for technique on the one hand, and for content on the other, had better watch out.

September 3, 1959

WHY I AM NOT A PAINTER

I am not a painter, I am a poet.
Why? I think I would rather be
a painter, but I am not. Well,

for instance, Mike Goldberg
is starting a painting. I drop in.
"Sit down and have a drink" he
says. I drink; we drink. I look
up. "You have SARDINES in it."
"Yes, it needed something there."
"Oh." I go and the days go by
and I drop in again. The painting
is going on, and I go, and the days
go by. I drop in. The painting is
finished. "Where's SARDINES?"
All that's left is just
letters, "It was too much," Mike says.

But me? One day I am thinking of
a color: orange. I write a line
about orange. Pretty soon it is a
whole page of words, not lines.
Then another page. There should be
so much more, not of orange, of
words, of how terrible orange is
and life. Days go by. It is even in
prose, I am a real poet. My poem
is finished and I haven't mentioned
orange yet. It's twelve poems, I call
it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery
I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES.

HOMAGE TO RROSE SÉLAVY

Towards you like amphibious airplanes
peacocks and pigeons seem to scoot!

First thing in the morning your two eyes
are shining with all night's funny stories

and every time you sit down during the day
someone drops a bunch of rubies in your lap.

When I see you in a drugstore or bar I
gape as if you were a champagne fountain

and when you tell me how your days and nights
seem to you you are my own stupid Semiramis.

Listen, you are really too beautiful to be true
you egg-beater and the next time I see you

clattering down a flight of stairs like a
ferris wheel jingling your earrings and feathers

a subway of smiling girls a regular fireworks
display! I'll beat you and carry you to Venice!

MELMOTH THE WANDERER

These women are given the
bleeding meat of bulls fresh
killed in fields their work
of charity at night to sing
to tombstones and ships

this is the only food they
need wives of shadows their
cheeks suck inwards the waves

are white and thin you can
smell their breaths as they

wash over the hill blue
eyes shine dimly and the
moon spins in its socket of
comparative stone unable to
decide if this is the night

HE will again appear the
real lighthouse beyond the
sleeping city and the sailors
their voices rise it is a
long time lover since youth

AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

When I was a child
I played by myself in a
corner of the schoolyard
all alone.

I hated dolls and I
hated games, animals were
not friendly and birds
flew away.

If anyone was looking
for me I hid behind a
tree and cried out "I am
an orphan."

And here I am, the
center of all beauty!
writing these poems!
Imagine!

2

mel!" Her udder splayed richly
in the green, she crooned
silently and threw a leg

over my shoulder. I leaned my
head against her throat. We
looked admiringly skyward.

Very chummy. "Some day I'll
read you my story" I said.
"It will kill you."

AN 18TH CENTURY LETTER

to V. R. Lang

To you who's friend to my angels (all quarrelling)
I write this breathlessly, marvelling
at the power of communication of the Word,
which is not a mystery but is not bored
at being an attribute of the Good. What
is important to you, the angels & me is: Thought
must somehow touch these larger links
& not relax at movie references to the Sphinx.
& Word must not be shy of Good, but strong;
but not belligerent or painless, that is wrong.

Thus the formula for 100% cognition
is 60% true tribulation 40% anxious ebullition,
is it now? & then if we feel the stars
slipping away further & our course
unalterable, we must only remember the Good.
At this the stars will move sensibly, as our food
or as if we had fallen into a mirror,
towards us with quiet consideration nearer
our hearts, & it will be Thought as
Hero. Our joy will give birth to Word, was
ever a cycle more magical, angels, meant
more? Again we'll be free to puzzle the event
but we'll pay respect to the alleged glory
of Unknown, thought and worded in this Allegory.

MEMORIAL DAY 1950

Picasso made me tough and quick, and the world;
just as in a minute plane trees are knocked down
outside my window by a crew of creators.
Once he got his axe going everyone was upset
enough to fight for the last ditch and heap
of rubbish.

Through all that surgery I thought
I had a lot to say, and named several last things
Gertrude Stein hadn't had time for; but then
the war was over, those things had survived
and even when you're scared art is no dictionary.
Max Ernst told us that.

How many trees and frying pans
I loved and lost! Guernica hollered look out!
but we were all busy hoping our eyes were talking
to Paul Klee. My mother and father asked me and
I told them from my tight blue pants we should
love only the stones, the sea, and heroic figures.
Wasted child! I'll club you on the shins! I
wasn't surprised when the older people entered
my cheap hotel room and broke my guitar and my can
of blue paint.

At that time all of us began to think
with our bare hands and even with blood all over
them, we knew vertical from horizontal, we never
smeared anything except to find out how it lived.
Fathers of Dada! You carried shining erector sets
in your rough bony pockets, you were generous
and they were lovely as chewing gum or flowers!
Thank you!

And those of us who thought poetry
was crap were throttled by Auden or Rimbaud
when, sent by some compulsive Juno, we tried
to play with collages or sprechstimme in their bed.
Poetry didn't tell me not to play with toys
but alone I could never have figured out that dolls
meant death.

Our responsibilities did not begin
in dreams, though they began in bed. Love is first of all
a lesson in utility. I hear the sewage singing
underneath my bright white toilet seat and know
that somewhere sometime it will reach the sea:
gulls and swordfishes will find it richer than a river.

③

And airplanes are perfect mobiles, independent
of the breeze; crashing in flames they show us how
to be prodigal. O Boris Pasternak, it may be silly
to call to you, so tall in the Urals, but your voice
cleans our world, clearer to us than the hospital:
you sound above the factory's ambitious gargle.
Poetry is as useful as a machine!

Look at my room.

Guitar strings hold up pictures. I don't need
a piano to sing, and naming things is only the intention
to make things. A locomotive is more melodious
than a cello. I dress in oil cloth and read music
by Guillaume Apollinaire's clay candelabra. Now
my father is dead and has found out you must look things
in the belly, not in the eye. If only he had listened
to the men who made us, hollering like stuck pigs!

V. R. LANG

You are so serious, as if
a glacier spoke in your ear
or you had to walk through
the great gate of Kiev
to get to the living room.

I worry about this because I
love you. As if it weren't grotesque
enough that we live in hydrogen
and breathe like atomizers, you
have to think I'm a great architect!

and you float regally by on your
incessant escalator, calm, a jungle queen.
Thinking it a steam shovel. Looking
a little uneasy. But you are yourself
again, yanking silver beads off your neck.

Remember, the Russian Easter Overture
is full of bunnies. Be always high,

full of regard and honor and lanolin. Oh
ride horseback in pink linen, be happy!
and with your beads on, because it rains.

A SCENE

Pie, tomatoes, eggs, coffee, spaghetti
clobbered the dusty kitchen toward
Mrs. Bennett Smith, teacher of pianoforte.
"Bah!" her husband, frazzled and frenzied, cried
"Your damnable ennui's aroused the Gods!
I'm through with sitting in my unmade bed
praying on my brass knuckles for guidance!
Why do you tootle for our daily bread, you
messy girl, while I in solitude am wracked
by a thousand demon consciences, all arguing!"

"Oh dear, oh dear. You miserable lout!
Whatever I have cooked for you, you throw at me!
At me, who works all day to keep us free
Of psychopathic hospital and all!
If you don't kiss me quick I'll tear off my
chemise, and tell the judge you threw me out!
Why do you speak so nastily, you beast, I'll not
teach pimply girls pianoforte no more!
If you are going to beat me up like this, I
won't live with you. I'm going to do something!"

Pie, tomatoes, eggs, coffee, spaghetti,
meat balls, dishes, shoes, cups and punches
settled soft as airplanes to the kitchen floor.
"Why do I do these things?" said Mr. Smith.
"I never beat you up. I even love the way
your mother cooks. Right now the gods are telling me
I love you. I'll buy you, dear, a television set."

THE CRITIC

I cannot possibly think of you
other than you are: the assassin

of my orchards. You lurk there
in the shadows, meting out

conversation like Eve's first
confusion between penises and

snakes. Oh be droll, be jolly
and be temperate! Do not

frighten me more than you
have to! I must live forever.

ORIGINAL SIN

Dense black trees trapped and bound! the hairy skull
and pushed wildly against the door of sky!
the paralyzed flowers, ah! with each eye
shrieking, caught in the web of stars, skillful

seiners! in the pitiless sea of will.
Hysterical telegraph vines cry to
the vacationing sky, monstrous! the blue
mother with her breasts to the wall. The hill

groans in support of them all, saddled! grinds
its great wheels like a riverboat, plunging
and deadly in a smoke of bleeding woods.

Beetles scurry under! ostriches, hinds,
dolphins die in the tumult! The unguent
python waits at the open window, broods.

POETRY

The only way to be quiet
is to be quick, so I scare
you clumsily, or surprise
you with a stab. A praying
mantis knows time more
intimately than I and is
more casual. Crickets use
time for accompaniment to
innocent fidgeting. A zebra
races counterclockwise.
All this I desire. To
deepen you by my quickness
and delight as if you
were logical and proven,
but still be quiet as if
I were used to you; as if
you would never leave me
and were the inexorable
product of my own time.

TARQUIN

Exactly at one o'clock your arms broach
the middle of the moon; surf finds its ways
barred by the bold light and a rough loon sways,
bumps in night's ear, a clattering stagecoach.

It is the murmur and the moonstruck ouch!
of love, its glitter in the dark of days
and hurricane of knights' and cowboys' hey!
on the fragrant plaza, on the hard couch.

The loon resounds like a knock on the door
of the flooded heart, o sweet Roman light
in ribbons over the prairie's collapse!

to be silent; in halls the audience
disperses as the instrument's wheeled off
and through jet tears and wet mascara scoff
the year, boring heart-and-concert season.
Too, I've not been silent again, or since.

FOR GRACE, AFTER A PARTY

You do not always know what I am feeling.
Last night in the warm spring air while I was
blazing my tirade against someone who doesn't
interest

me, it was love for you that set me
afire,

and isn't it odd? for in rooms full of
strangers my most tender feelings

writhe and
bear the fruit of screaming. Put out your hand,
isn't there

an ashtray, suddenly, there? beside
the bed? And someone you love enters the room
and says wouldn't

you like the eggs a little
different today?

And when they arrive they are
just plain scrambled eggs and the warm weather
is holding.

LOVE

A whispering far away
heard by the poet in a bower
of flesh his limbs stir

is it sadness or the perfection
of eyes that clutches him?

And a parade of lamenting
draws near a wave of angels
he is drowning in the word

POEM

I watched an armory combing its bronze bricks
and in the sky there were glistening rails of milk.
Where had the swan gone, the one with the lame back?

Now mounting the steps
I enter my new home full
of grey radiators and glass
ashtrays full of wool.

Against the winter I must get a samovar
embroidered with basil leaves and Ukrainian mottos
to the distant sound of wings, painfully anti-wind,

a little bit of the blue
summer air will come back
as the steam chuckles in
the monster's steamy attack

and I'll be happy here and happy there, full
of tea and tears. I don't suppose I'll ever get
to Italy, but I have the terrible tundra at least.

My new home will be full
of wood, roots and the like,
while I pace in a turtleneck
sweater, repairing my bike.

I watched the palisades shivering in the snow
of my face, which had grown preternaturally pure.
Once I destroyed a man's idea of himself to have him.

If I'd had a samovar then
I'd have made him tea

the fragrance of his innocent flesh
like smoke, the temporary lift,
the post-cancer excitement
of vile manners and veal-thin lips,
obscure in the carelessness of your scissors.

Men cry from the grave while they still live
and now I am this dead man's voice,
stammering, a little in the earth.
I take up
the nourishment of his pale green eyes,
out of which I shall prevent
flowers from growing, your flowers.

THINKING OF JAMES DEAN

Like a nickelodeon soaring over the island from sea to bay,
two pots of gold, and the flushed effulgence of a sky Tiepolo
and Turner had compiled in vistavision. Each panoramic second, of
his death. The rainbows canceling each other out, between martinis

and the steak. To bed to dream, the moon invisibly scudding
under black-blue clouds, a stern Puritanical breeze pushing at
the house, to dream of roaches nibbling at my racing toenails,
great-necked speckled geese and slapping their proud heads

as I ran past. Morning. The first plunge in dolorous surf
and the brilliant sunlight declaring all the qualities of the world.
Like an ant, dragging its sorrows up and down the sand to find
a hiding place never, here where everything is guarded by dunes

or drifting. The sea is dark and smells of fish beneath its
silver surface. To reach the depths and rise, only in the sea;
the abysses of life, incessantly plunging not to rise to a face
of heat and joy again; habits of total immersion and the stance

victorious in death. And after hours of lying in nature, to nature,
and simulated death in the crushing waves, their shells and heart

pounding me naked on the shingle: had I died at twenty-four as he, but
in Boston, robbed of these suns and knowledges, a corpse more whole,

less deeply torn, less bruised and less alive, perhaps backstage
at the Brattle Theatre amidst the cold cream and the familiar lice
in my red-gold costume for a bit in *Julius Caesar*, would I be
smaller now in the vastness of light? a cork in the monumental

stillness of an eye-green trough, a sliver on the bleaching beach
to airplanes carried by the panting clouds to Spain. My friends
are roaming or listening to *La Bohème*. Precisely, the cold last swim
before the city flatters meanings of my life I cannot find,

squeezing me like an orange for some nebulous vitality, mourning
to the fruit ignorant of science in its hasty dying, kissing
its leaves and stem, exuding oils of Florida in the final glass of
pleasure. A leaving word in the sand, odor of tides: his name.

MY HEART

I'm not going to cry all the time
nor shall I laugh all the time,
I don't prefer one "strain" to another.
I'd have the immediacy of a bad movie,
not just a sleeper, but also the big,
overproduced first-run kind. I want to be
at least as alive as the vulgar. And if
some aficionado of my mess says "That's
not like Frank!", all to the good! I
don't wear brown and grey suits all the time,
do I? No. I wear workshirts to the opera,
often. I want my feet to be bare,
I want my face to be shaven, and my heart—
you can't plan on the heart, but
the better part of it, my poetry, is open.

To be more revolutionary than a nun
is our desire, to be secular and intimate
as, when sighting a redcoat, you smile
and pull the trigger. Anxieties
and animosities, flaming and feeding
on theoretical considerations and
the jealous spiritualities of the abstract,
the robot's smoke, billows above
the physical event. They have burned up.
See how free we are! as a nation of persons.

Dear father of our country, so alive
you must have lied incessantly to be
immediate, here are your bones crossed
on my breast like a rusty flintlock,
a pirate's flag, bravely specific

and ever so light in the misty glare
of a crossing by water in winter to a shore
other than that the bridge reaches for.
Don't shoot until, the white of freedom glinting
on your gun barrel, you see the general fear.

RADIO

Why do you play such dreary music
on Saturday afternoon, when tired
mortally tired I long for a little
reminder of immortal energy?

All
week long while I trudge fatiguingly
from desk to desk in the museum
you spill your miracles of Grieg
and Honegger on shut-ins.

Am I not
shut in too, and after a week
of work don't I deserve Prokofieff?

Well, I have my beautiful de Kooning
to aspire to. I think it has an orange
bed in it, more than the ear can hold.

STATUE

Alone in the dusk with you
while music by Ravel washes over us
and I clasp you in my arms,
your cool white plaster face
is warm against my stubbled cheek
and your arms seem to tremble.
Are you troubled, emotionally troubled?

What things we have heard together!
and afterwards, most of all, what you tell me
of artistic modesty. Your waist feels rough,
rough as the skin that keeps us apart
from each other. I shall be nude
against you, close as we can come.

SLEEPING ON THE WING

Perhaps it is to avoid some great sadness,
as in a Restoration tragedy the hero cries "Sleep!
O for a long sound sleep and so forget it!"
that one flies, soaring above the shoreless city,
veering upward from the pavement as a pigeon
does when a car honks or a door slams, the door
of dreams, life perpetuated in parti-colored loves
and beautiful lies all in different languages.

Fear drops away too, like the cement, and you
are over the Atlantic. Where is Spain? where is
who? The Civil War was fought to free the slaves,
was it? A sudden down-draught reminds you of gravity
and your position in respect to human love. But
here is where the gods are, speculating, bemused.
Once you are helpless, you are free, can you believe
that? Never to waken to the sad struggle of a face?
to travel always over some impersonal vastness,
to be out of, forever, neither in nor for!

The Israeli Army is at the door and winged parachute-troopers
rush around and nobody is scared while several die,
among them a handsome stranger who had smiled and she
had started loving. But isn't everyone a stranger?
Merrie thought, and then felt shallow. Now the dust
blew in

and the Israeli Army outside was choking, but the British
and French were in drinking Vichy water. No, it is now,
and the Israeli Army cannot seem to reach a city, it
gets darker and darker like old parchment on which
something indecipherably sexual is written and lost.
Merrie smiles because she is inside and cannot get
outside, any more than you can shoot a dog.

A little shopping and she is tired, she is looking for the
Suez Canal. She is wrapped in someone's arms and he
is sweating. "Amer," she murmurs and kisses him after
a day of fighting. He is handsome, he does not fight
at night. Everyone seems handsome, she reflects, but
he handsomest.

She wipes herself off and walks, smiling, back to her
hotel. She is pale and the wind frees her hair,
full of cries and smoke and bloody medicines. The
lift is very old and open as it sags to her floor.
Inside her room she switches on the fan and wipes
her wig off, dark, dark, the glamorous insurgence
of pain and a feeling

almost, of defeat. She falls on the bed and cries and
writes in her message the name "Amer," and sleeps.
The Israeli Army marches in like a chorale, through
vanishing streets and high yelps from corrugated
burnouses. "They are always coming" she smiles with-
out waking, and her sleep deepens as the miles be-
come intimate, and deaths appear, and they are the
right deaths.

POEM READ AT JOAN MITCHELL'S

At last you are tired of being single
the effort to be new does not upset you nor the effort to be other
you are not tired of life together

city noises are louder because you are together
being together you are louder than calling separately across a tele-
phone one to the other
and there is no noise like the rare silence when you both sleep
even country noises—a dog bays at the moon, but when it loves the
moon it bows, and the hitherto frowning moon fawns and slips

Only you in New York are not boring tonight
it is most modern to affirm some one
(we don't really love ideas, do we?)
and Joan was surprising you with a party for which I was the decoy
but you were surprising us by getting married and going away
so I am here reading poetry anyway
and no one will be bored tonight by me because you're here

Yesterday I felt very tired from being at the FIVE SPOT
and today I felt very tired from going to bed early and reading ULYSSES
but tonight I feel energetic because I'm sort of the bugle,
like waking people up, of your peculiar desire to get married

It's so
original, hydrogenic, anthropomorphic, fiscal, post-anti-esthetic,
bland, unpicturesque and WilliamCarlosWilliamsian!
it's definitely not 19th Century, it's not even Partisan Review, it's
new, it must be vanguard!

Tonight you probably walked over here from Bethune Street
down Greenwich Avenue with its sneaky little bars and the Women's De-
tention House,
across 8th Street, by the acres of books and pillows and shoes and
illuminating lampshades,
past Cooper Union where we heard the piece by Mortie Feldman with "The
Stars and Stripes Forever" in it
and the Sagamore's terrific "coffee and, Andy," meaning "with a cheese
Danish"—
did you spit on your index fingers and rub the CEDAR's neon circle for
luck?
did you give a kind thought, hurrying, to Alger Hiss?

It's the day before February 17th
 it is not snowing yet but it is dark and may snow yet
 dreary February of the exhaustion from parties and the exceptional de-
 sire for spring which the ballet alone, by extending its run,
 has made bearable, dear New York City Ballet company, you are
 quite a bit like a wedding yourself!
 and the only signs of spring are Maria Tallchief's rhinestones and a
 perky little dog barking in a bar, here and there eyes which
 suddenly light up with blue, like a ripple subsiding under a
 lily pad, or with brown, like a freshly plowed field we vow
 we'll drive out and look at when a certain Sunday comes in May—
 and these eyes are undoubtedly Jane's and Joe's because they are ad-
 vancing into spring before us and tomorrow is Sunday

This poem goes on too long because our friendship has been long, long
 for this life and these times, long as art is long and un-
 interruptable,
 and I would make it as long as I hope our friendship lasts if I could
 make poems that long

I hope there will be more
 more drives to Bear Mountain and searches for hamburgers, more evenings
 avoiding the latest Japanese movie and watching Helen Vinson
 and Warner Baxter in *Vogues of 1938* instead, more discussions
 in lobbies of the respective greatnesses of Diana Adams and
 Allegra Kent,
 more sunburns and more half-mile swims in which Joe beats me as Jane
 watches, lotion-covered and sleepy, more arguments over
 Faulkner's inferiority to Tolstoy while sand gets into my
 bathing trunks
 let's advance and change everything, but leave these little oases in
 case the heart gets thirsty en route
 and I should probably propose myself as a godfather if you have any
 children, since I will probably earn more money some day
 accidentally, and could teach him or her how to swim
 and now there is a Glazunov symphony on the radio and I think of our
 friends who are not here, of John and the nuptial quality
 of his verses (he is always marrying the whole world) and
 Janice and Kenneth, smiling and laughing, respectively (they
 are probably laughing at the Leaning Tower right now)
 but we are all here and have their proxy
 if Kenneth were writing this he would point out how art has changed
 women and women have changed art and men, but men haven't
 changed women much
 but ideas are obscure and nothing should be obscure tonight
 you will live half the year in a house by the sea and half the year in
 a house in our arms

we peer into the future and see you happy and hope it is a sign that we
 will be happy too, something to cling to, happiness
 the least and best of human attainments

JOHN BUTTON BIRTHDAY

Sentiments are nice, "The Lonely Crowd,"
 a rift in the clouds appears above the purple,
 you find a birthday greeting card with violets
 which says "a perfect friend" and means
 "I love you" but the customer is forced to be
 shy. It says less, as all things must.

But
 grease sticks to the red ribs shaped like a
 sea shell, grease, light and rosy that smells of
 sandalwood: it's memory! I remember JA
 staggering over to me in the San Remo and murmuring
 "I've met someone MARVELOUS!" That's friendship
 for you, and the sentiment of introduction.

And now that I have finished dinner I can continue.

What is it that attracts one to one? Mystery?
 I think of you in Paris with a red beard, a
 theological student; in London talking to a friend
 who lunched with Dowager Queen Mary and offered
 her his last cigarette; in Los Angeles shopping
 at the Supermarket; on Mount Shasta, looking . . .
 above all on Mount Shasta in your unknown youth
 and photograph.

And then the way you straighten
 people out. How ambitious you are! And that you're
 a painter is a great satisfaction, too. You know how
 I feel about painters. I sometimes think poetry
 only describes.

Now I have taken down the underwear
 I washed last night from the various light fixtures
 and can proceed.

think of filth, is it really awesome
neither is hate
don't be shy of unkindness, either
it's cleansing and allows you to be direct
like an arrow that feels something

out and out meanness, too, lets love breathe
you don't have to fight off getting in too deep
you can always get out if you're not too scared

an ounce of prevention's
enough to poison the heart
don't think of others
until you have thought of yourself, are true

all of these things, if you feel them
will be graced by a certain reluctance
and turn into gold

if felt by me, will be smilingly deflected
by your mysterious concern

POEM

I don't know as I get what D. H. Lawrence is driving at
when he writes of lust springing from the bowels
or do I
it could be the bowels of the earth
to lie flat on the earth in spring, summer or winter is sexy
you feel it stirring deep down slowly up to you
and sometimes it gives you a little nudge in the crotch
that's very sexy
and when someone looks sort of raggedy and dirty like Paulette Goddard
in *Modern Times* it's exciting, it isn't usual or attractive
perhaps D.H.L. is thinking of the darkness
certainly the crotch is light
and I suppose
any part of us that can only be seen by others
is a dark part
I feel that about the small of my back, too and the nape of my neck
they are dark

they are erotic zones as in the tropics
whereas Paris is straightforward and bright about it all
a coal miner has kind of a sexy occupation
though I'm sure it's painful down there
but so is lust
of light we can never have enough
but how would we find it
unless the darkness urged us on and into it
and I am dark
except when now and then it all comes clear
and I can see myself
as others luckily sometimes see me
in a good light

PERSONAL POEM

Now when I walk around at lunchtime
I have only two charms in my pocket
an old Roman coin Mike Kanemitsu gave me
and a bolt-head that broke off a packing case
when I was in Madrid the others never
brought me too much luck though they did
help keep me in New York against coercion
but now I'm happy for a time and interested

I walk through the luminous humidity
passing the House of Seagram with its wet
and its loungers and the construction to
the left that closed the sidewalk if
I ever get to be a construction worker
I'd like to have a silver hat please
and get to Moriarty's where I wait for
LeRoi and hear who wants to be a mover and
shaker the last five years my batting average
is .016 that's that, and LeRoi comes in
and tells me Miles Davis was clubbed 12
times last night outside BIRDLAND by a cop
a lady asks us for a nickel for a terrible
disease but we don't give her one we
don't like terrible diseases, then

we go eat some fish and some ale it's
cool but crowded we don't like Lionel Trilling
we decide, we like Don Allen we don't like
Henry James so much we like Herman Melville
we don't want to be in the poets' walk in
San Francisco even we just want to be rich
and walk on girders in our silver hats
I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is
thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi
and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go
back to work happy at the thought possibly so

POST THE LAKE POETS BALLAD

Moving slowly sweating a lot
I am pushed by a gentle breeze
outside the Paradise Bar on
St. Mark's Place and I breathe

and bourbon with Joe he says
did you see a letter from Larry
in the mailbox what a shame I didn't
I wonder what it says

and then we eat and go to
The Horse Riders and my bum aches
from the hard seats and boredom
is hard too we don't go

to the Cedar it's so hot out
and I read the letter which says
in your poems your gorgeous self-pity
how do you like that

that is odd I think of myself
as a cheerful type who pretends to
be hurt to get a little depth into
things that interest me

and I've even given that up
lately with the stream of events

going so fast and the movingly
alternating with the amusingly

the depth all in the ocean
although I'm different in the winter
of course even this is a complaint
but I'm happy anyhow

no more self-pity than Gertrude
Stein before Lucey Church or Savonarola
in the pulpit Allen Ginsberg at the
Soviet Exposition am I Joe

NAPHTHA

Ah Jean Dubuffet
when you think of him
doing his military service in the Eiffel Tower
as a meteorologist
in 1922
you know how wonderful the 20th Century
can be
and the gaited Iroquois on the girders
fierce and unflinching-footed
nude as they should be
slightly empty
like a Sonia Delaunay
there is a parable of speed
somewhere behind the Indians' eyes
they invented the century with their horses
and their fragile backs
which are dark

we owe a debt to the Iroquois
and to Duke Ellington
for playing in the buildings when they are built
we don't do much ourselves
but fuck and think
of the haunting Métro
and the one who didn't show up there

why do you say you're a bottle and you feed me
the sky is more blue and it is getting cold
last night I saw Garfinkel's Surgical Supply truck
and knew I was near "home" though dazed and thoughtful
what did you do to make me think
after we led the bum to the hospital
and you got into the cab
I was feeling lost myself

(ALWAYS)

never to lose those moments in the Carlyle without a tie

endless as a stick-pin barely visible you
drown whatever one thought of as perception and
let all the clouds in under the yellow heaters
meeting somewhere over St. Louis
call me earlier because I might want to do something else
except eat ugh

endlessly unraveling itself before the Christopher Columbus Tavern
quite a series was born as where I am going is to
Quo Vadis for lunch
out there in the blabbing wind and glass c'est l'azur

perhaps
marinated duck saddle with foot sauce and a tumbler of vodka
picking at my fevered brain
perhaps
letting you off the hook at last or leaning on you in the theatre

oh plankton!
"mes poèmes lyriques, à partir de 1897, peuvent se lire comme un journal intime"

yes always though you said it first
you the quicksand and sand and grass
as I wave toward you freely
the ego-ridden sea
there is a light there that neither
of us will obscure
rubbing it all white
saving ships from fucking up on the rocks
on the infinite waves of skin smelly and crushed and light and absorbed

POEM

Lana Turner has collapsed!
I was trotting along and suddenly
it started raining and snowing
and you said it was hailing
but hailing hits you on the head
hard so it was really snowing and
raining and I was in such a hurry
to meet you but the traffic
was acting exactly like the sky
and suddenly I see a headline
LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!
there is no snow in Hollywood
there is no rain in California
I have been to lots of parties
and acted perfectly disgraceful
but I never actually collapsed
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

POEM

Dee Dum, dee dum, dum dum, dee da
here it is March 9th 1962
and JJ is shooting off to work
I loll in bed reading *Roots of Russia*
feeling perfectly awful and smoking

hey wait a minute! I leap out of bed
it's Sam Barber's birthday and they
are going to play *Souvenirs!* turn it up!
how glad I am I'm going to be late that's
starting the day with rose-colored binoculars!