The Sense of Neurotic Coherence: Structural Reversals in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara.

by Hazel Smith B.A.

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, October 1988

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for granting me interviews and in some cases for giving me or directing me towards relevant material: Donald Allen, John Ashbery, Bill Berkson, Morris Golde, John Gruen, Barbara Guest, Grace Hartigan, Kenneth Koch, Joe LeSueur, Alfred Leslie, Ron Padgett, Waldo Rasmussen, Larry Rivers, David Shapiro, Alexander Smith and the late Morton Feldman. I would like to thank Maureen O'Hara for giving me permission to read unpublished material and for assistance and advice; George Butterick of the Homer Babbidge Library, University of Connecticut, Daniel Pearle of the Reference Library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Kathleen Manwaring of the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University for helping me with my research when I was in the United States. I would also like to express my gratitude towards the British Association of American Studies for the short term travel grant which was awarded to me. Most of all I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. David Murray of the American Studies Department, University of Nottingham, for his invaluable stimulation and advice.

Abstract

This thesis argues that structures in O'Hara's poetry are constantly turning into their opposites and demonstrates both these structural reversals and their effects in terms of thematic reversals. It analyses the way in which O'Hara's poetry locates the points of intersection between non-symbolic, symbolic and surreal modes by interchanging metaphorical and metonymical networks, and shows how this interchange both creates plurality of meaning and also activates the tension between the poem as referring to the world and the poem as structural arrangement. The thesis extends the argument in a number of different directions: it argues that plurality of meaning in O'Hara's work does not make it value-less and does not prevent an active and decisive self or a political stance. It also sets the structures of the poems in the context of working methods and performance and argues that the concept of improvisation is relevant to the creation of the poems and the impression which they give of being talked rather than written. In addition the thesis inter-textualises the argument by analysing structural reversals in O'Hara's collaborations with painters and other poets. It considers the way in which the collaborations break down the concept of a unique and unified self by merging the work of different individuals and how they turn the differences between poetry and painting into similarities by mixing representational and abstract modes in both mediums. Finally it applies the analysis of the relationship between poetry and painting to O'Hara's poetry by demonstrating that the

interdependence of metaphor and metonymy is a fluctuation between representation and abstraction.

The thesis develops these ideas within new frameworks extended from critical theory, makes inter-artistic connections with relevant art and music of the period and also draws on original material collected by the author, including interviews with O'Hara's friends and colleagues.

Abbreviations

After the initial citation the following abbreviations will be made for books by O'Hara :

CP-Collected Poems; SS-Standing Still and Walking in New York ; AC-Art Chronicles, PR-Poems Retrieved.

After the initial reference recurring references will be given in shortened form.

Introduction.

One of the shortcomings of criticism on Frank O'Hara's work has always been the tendency to stress only a single aspect. Charles Altieri, for instance, sees O'Hara as exemplifying a particular type of immanentist movement in post-modern poetry[1] while Marjorie Perloff engages in interpretations of individual poems which often reduces them to single meanings.[2] Bruce Boone concentrates upon what he considers to be a gay language in O'Hara's poetry.[3] Even Charles Molesworth who calls O'Hara the "crown prince of simultaneity" has not really considered the mechanics of this simultaneity.[4] Consequently though O'Hara's poetry has been acknowledged for its freshness and originality, its cunning structural and thematic reversals have not been fully acknowledged. This thesis therefore concentrates on the way that O'Hara's work is constantly undermining notions of unity and singleness. It examines the process in O'Hara's poetry whereby modes and meanings are pushed to their extremes and turned into their opposites and it analyses O'Hara's location of the point at which this occurs. The thesis demonstrates the relentless movement in O'Hara's poetry whereby apparent unities are broken down into differences which reassemble as new unities, themselves to be broken down. It emphasises how in O'Hara many of the traditional oppositions thought to exist in poetry, between the literal and the metaphoric, the metaphoric and the metonymic, the symbolic and the surreal, the self and the non-self, the serious and the humorous, are interrogated and reversed.

O´Hara´s poetry, I will argue, embodies in its own structure the movement between identity and difference. The concept of structure here is not used to suggest a rigid, empty container into which the content of the poem is poured, but the mobile internal relationships between the words, the verbal dynamic through which the content of the poems rotates. For in O´Hara´s poetry it is impossible to separate structure and sense. Rather O´Hara locates and accentuates the push and pull between the poem as pointing to the world and the poem as structural arrangement: this dynamic interaction between referentiality and non-referentiality is in my opinion one of the great interests of O´Hara´s work and will be one of the main and recurring themes of the thesis.

The thesis develops and extends this fundamental argument as follows:

Chapter One begins with a general discussion of the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy in poetry and with examples of the non-symbolic, symbolic and surreal in the work of William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and André Breton. It then discusses the interpenetration of non-symbolic, symbolic and surreal modes in O´Hara´s poetry and relates this to his reversal of the oppositions between the literal and metaphoric, metaphoric and metonymic. The chapter ends with a brief comparison with the work of John Ashbery and with the implications of this kind of analysis for an appreciation of O´Hara´s work.

Chapter Two discusses the consequences of plurality of meaning for the self and for a political position. It includes a

consideration of attitudes towards the self in other contemporary artistic endeavour, a discussion of the relationship between poetry and politics, relevant information about the social mileu and political context in New York, a discussion of homosexuality in O'Hara's poetry and a brief comparison between the work of O'Hara and Allen Ginsberg.

Chapter Three uses improvisation as a concept to link various aspects of the production and reception of O'Hara's work not fully encapsulated by textual analysis. Beginning with a general consideration of improvisation and a brief review of its relevance to much contemporary endeavour, the chapter considers O'Hara's working methods, speculates on their relationship to the structure of the poems and considers the impression of direct communication which O'Hara's poems convey and their relationship to talk. It concludes with a discussion of O'Hara's own performances of his poems and with a brief comparison with the "talks" of David Antin.

Chapter Four begins with a theoretical framework for considering collaboration with regard to the role of the self, the relationship of poetry and painting and the operation of difference and similarity. After some consideration of the social and artistic milieu of the collaborations the chapter analyses four of them: two text-image collaborations by O'Hara with Larry Rivers and Norman Bluhm, and two verbal collaborations by O'Hara with Kenneth Koch and Bill Berkson, and shows how they interrogate the idea of artistic autonomy and of the differences between poetry and painting. The chapter also shows how the application of the analysis of the text-image collaborations in

terms of the interdependence of representation and abstraction can be extended to the verbal collaborations and returns through this to the analysis of the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy undertaken in Chapter One.

Chapter Five begins with a consideration of the interdependence of representation and abstraction in the painting of the period. It then applies the concepts of representation and abstraction to single-author poems through analysis of the poem "Why I am not a Painter", making through this analysis a further link with the metaphor-metonymy theme of Chapter One. The chapter makes a comparison between O'Hara and the painters of the period, including a consideration of the relevance of the application of the concepts of metaphor and metonymy and concludes by linking, "Why I am not a Painter" with all the other chapters in the thesis.

The Postscript ends the thesis with a new beginning by suggesting the possibility for fresh work which arises out of the thesis.

The argument of the thesis implicates a wide variety of different issues and therefore inevitably connects up with several theoretical positions, but it also diverges from and extends some of them. Throughout it Derrida's dismantling of a fixed centre, a point of presence, and his strategy of reversing oppositions, is relevant to my recurring theme of the breakdown and reconstitution of unities in O'Hara's work. In particular my emphasis on the movement in O'Hara's work between difference and unity, multiplicity and singleness parallels Derrida's

emphasis on "the tension between free-play and presence.[5] Seen in this light O'Hara's work creatively enacts this tension and O'Hara is the archetypal deconstructionist: consequently the idea of deconstruction will be a recurring one in the thesis. In its approach to textual analysis the thesis connects with work by Jonathan Culler on the relationship of metaphor and metonymy[6] and Paul de Man's deconstructions of the relationship between symbol and allegory and metaphor and metonymy.[7] However it also develops and extends their insights: through a more detailed analysis of the way the metonymical network of a poem interacts with any metaphorical network; by applying this kind of analysis to contemporary poems which take the breakdown of metaphorical unity to much greater extremes than nineteenth century poems; and by stressing not only that metaphor is composed of metonymies which can unravel into differences but the reverse, that accidental connection (difference) has an inevitable tendency within it to realign as metonymy and ultimately as metaphor. For the relationship of poetry to the social and political formation I have found the work of Raymond Williams particularly helpful and applicable, especially his emphasis on a non-reductive cultural analysis which stresses what he calls the emergent and residual culture within the dominant; his insistence that the social must not be reduced to fixed forms; and his analysis of the complex interaction within literature of aesthetic function and ideological content.[8] Finally I have been most stimulated by the work of Wendy Steiner and W.J.T. Mitchell on the relationship between poetry and painting.[9] I found Steiner's analysis of the mixed signs

within both paintings and poems particularly suggestive, and was stimulated into adapting and extending it into a theoretical framework of my own which uses the interdependence of representation and abstraction as a means for analysing poems and comparing poems and paintings. I also made a connection between this kind of analysis and my analysis of the relationship of metaphor and metonymy.

The thesis emphasises and elaborates on the relationship between O'Hara's work and other contemporary endeavour in painting and music but to keep this inter-textualising within reasonable limits I have mainly concentrated on American contemporary endeavour and particularly (though by no means exclusively) that of O'Hara's friends and contemporaries. In Chapter Three I call on my own experience of improvising in music and discussion with fellow-musicians. I have also included some social and political background material and a considerable amount of material (some previously undocumented and collected by myself in the United States) relating to O'Hara's life, interests, friendships and collaborations. These include excerpts from unpublished and published letters, references to available manuscripts and to my own interviews with O'Hara's friends and collaborators. Appendix A consists a list of questions presented to interviewees, Appendices B and C parts of interviews which do not appear in the main text. Appendix D gives the text of the two poem collaborations discussed in Chapter Four.

Notes

1. Altieri, Charles, Enlarging the Temple:New Directions in American Poetry during the 1960's, London, Associated University Presses, 1979.

2.Perloff Marjorie, Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters, Austin, University of Texas, 1979.

3. Boone, Bruce, Gay language as political praxis: the poetry of Frank O'Hara Social Text, Winter, 1979.

4. Molesworth, Charles, The Fierce Embrace, London, University of Missouri Press, 1979.

5. Derrida, Jacques. Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences, in Macksey, Richard and Donato, Eugenio, ed. The Structuralist Controversy, London, John Hopkins University Press, 1972.

6. Culler, Jonathan, Structuralist Poetics, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975 and The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature and Deconstruction, New York, Cornell University Press, 1981.

7. de Man, Paul, Blindness and Insight, London, Methuen and Co, 1983 and Allegories of Reading, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.

8. Williams, Raymond, Marxism and Literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977.

9. Steiner, Wendy, The Colours of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting, Chicago, Chicago Press, 1982 and W.I.T Mitchell, Iconology: Image, Text and Ideology, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Chapter One: The Non-Symbolic, Symbolic and Surreal: the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy.

"There is the sense of neurotic coherence"-Ode on Causality (CP,302)[1]

"Each in asserting beginning to be more of the opposite"-Ode to Causality. (CP,302)

"An opposite force´s breath" -In Favour of One´s Time- (CP,341)

In this chapter I want to show how O´Hara´s poetry interrogates the apparent oppositions between non-symbolic, symbolic and surreal modes, and by continually overturning them calls into question their limits, independence and dissimilarity from each other. My argument will be that O´Hara does this by deconstructing the apparent opposition between the literal and metaphorical, metaphorical and metonymic within poetry, thereby making his poems creative enactments of their interdependence.

O´Hara´s poems I will argue, activate the fundamental difference within language between pointing inward to itself as a system and pointing outwards to the world. This difference within language arises because it is a closed network of signifiers which have only an arbitary connection with their signifieds, so that however much words may seem to refer to the world they are always disjunct from it. While at one extreme language strives to be identical with the world, at the other extreme it is always cut off from it, a self-enclosed system, itself a system of differences. So language oscillates betweem referring and non-referring and is always moving between identity and

difference. One important consequence of this is that language is never entirely literal, because words are always signs, all language is innately metaphorical.

Within poetry metaphor is based on a similarity with the outside world: it uses a description of an object or event to stand for an object, event, idea or concept which is in the outside world and not in the poem. Modern theory however has shown how metaphor is composed of metonymic connections, that is part-whole relationships. As Jonathan Culler puts it, "metaphor is a combination of two synecdcches: it moves from a whole to one of its parts to another whole which contains that part, or from a member to a general class and then back again to another member of that class." and the interpretation of a metaphor involves this kind of act of transference.[2] Paul de Man makes a similar point when he talks of the "general pattern of substitution that all tropes have in common" and when in his analysis of a passage from Proust he says, "The synecdoche that substitutes part for whole and whole for part is in fact a metaphor..."[3] (To avoid the confusion caused by the closeness of the terms metonymy and synecdoche I will use the term metonymy throughout for part-whole and member-of-a-class substitutions).

This insight about the relationship of metaphor and metonymy can be extended and applied considerably further than it has been by Culler and Paul de Man. While metaphorical elements which seem to refer outwards may join together within a poem, at the same

time the metonymies of which the metaphors are composed can join together to form an network of internal association which works against the tendency of the metaphors to point outwards. In addition a sequence of metonymies (part-whole member-class connections) can move further and further away from the initial "part" as, for example, in the sequence cat, fur, hair, follicle. Metaphor then can unravel from similarity through metonymy into difference, dissociation, accidental connection. On the other hand poems which are based on accidental association will tend inevitably to produce some metonymic association and this metonymy, if it consists of enough parts which seem to fit together, will turn eventually back into metaphorical association and reference to the world.

The consequence of this interdependence of the literal and metaphoric and the metaphoric and metonymic is that non-symbolic, symbolic and surreal modes in poetry are actually always surpassing their own limits and opening out into each other. In a non-symbolic poem a poet tries to minimise the inevitable distance between word and thing, the objects and events in the poem do not represent something outside the poem. But the poet can never make completely invisible the gap between signified and referent: another way of putting this is that non-symbolic poems always have symbolic potentiality because they must ever remain signs. So in William Carlos Williams "Poem"[4]

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

carefully
then the hind
stepped down

into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot

although the cat does not represent anything other than himself, the reader is likely to go half-way to seeing the poem as metaphorical when he/she is reading it and, in Culler's terms, will see the cat as a member of a general class of living creatures, including human beings, and its actions as displaying certain human characteristics, for example, control and care.

In a symbolic poem the poet uses language to appear to refer to objects and events which themselves stand for ideas and feelings which are not in the poem, but the symbolic scheme may itself be unstable. For example in Wallace Steven's poem, "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts", [5] the cat and rabbit seem to represent ideas which are not in the poem: crudely speaking, the cat might be said to represent sensual pleasure, the rabbit the imagination. But neither the symbols nor the symbolic scheme

are really so stable or so clearly differentiated as such a crude interpretation might seem to indicate. The cat's appearance keeps changing, it has a red tongue and a green mind but is subsequently referred to as a red cat and a green cat: its green mind could "stand for" the aspect of mind which is necessary to physical existence or conversely for logical thought. In addition, the rabbit and cat change places in the course of the poem. Whereas at the beginning it is the cat who is large (monumental) and who finds harmony with the environment, "slopping its milk all day", at the end it is the rabbit who is humped up high "like a carving in space" and who subsequently finds harmony, albeit of a different kind, with the environment, "The grass is full /And full of yourself". The apparent differences between cat and rabbit are offset by similarities (they are both members of the animal kingdom and dwell in the natural environment). In fact a network of internal association based on metonymical association of colour and shape is produced within the poem which pulls against the (metaphorical) symbolic import of the poem.

In a surrealist poem the poet breaks down signification, maximising the arbitariness of the connection between signifiers and signifieds in order to produce new signifieds which cut free from some of the constraints on language but these new conjunctions can align as metonymy and ultimately as symbols. Breton's "The Spectral Attitudes" [6] consists of wholes and parts which do not fit into any integrated whole. So in the passage:

The circus always enchants the same tramline
The plaster figures have lost nothing of their
expression
They who bit the smiles fig

the nature of the whole is unfixed and changing and the apparent whole "life":

I attach no importance to life
I pin not the least of life's butterfies to importance
I do not matter to life

is not prioritised over the parts. The poem still retains the vestiges of continuity between these parts, for example, in the passage:

Perhaps there is a hilt to this sword
But already there is a duel in this hilt
During the duel the combatants are unarmed
Death is the least offence
The future never comes

where there is a metonymical link between sword, duel, combatant and death or in the passage:

The wolves are clothed in mirrors of snow
I have a boat detached from all climates

I am dragged along by an ice-pack with teeth of flame

where metonymic association between snow, climates and ice links the disparate elements (wolves, boats teeth, flame). However this continuity is not usually sustained and even where it occurs is soon disrupted: for example the passage just quoted immediately breaks out of the metonymic "weather" linkage with:

I cut and cleave the wood of this tree that will always be green

A musician is caught up in the strings of his instrument

The poem remains surrealistic because the parts of the poem cannot be seen consistently as parts of one whole: if they could be seen as such the poem would begin to stabilise as symbol. In fact this disruption of the whole is effected in a variety of different ways in surrealist poetry: in Breton's "Free union" the whole ("my wife") is the focus of the poem but her constituent parts (hair, thoughts, waist, mouth, teeth etc.) are likened to a vast array of different parts (brush fire, summer lightning, hourglass, waist of an otter caught in the teeth of a tiger) which do not fit together.[7] On the other hand in Desnos' "I have dreamed of you so much " the surrealism derives from the interchangeability of wholes which would normally seem to be distinct and opposed: self and shadow, and woman and phantom.[8] Since the woman the poet loves seems more real in a dream, and since he feels he can only fully recapture her by becoming a shadow, an inversion occurs whereby dreams, shadows

and phantoms become more "real" than waking thoughts and other people.[9]

I want now to apply these ideas about the interdependence of modes to Frank O'Hara and show how he activates and locates the limits of the non-symbolic, symbolic and surreal: the point at which each opens out into the other. The poems I will be focusing on are "Chez Jane", "In Memory of My Feelings", "Easter", and "The Day Lady Died".

Chez Jane

"Chez Jane" (CP, 102) is based on a single incident, a cat pissing into a pot. The poem is in one sense non-symbolic, centering on the behaviour of the domestic pet or "puss" and deriving its anti-romantic, down-to-earth humour from the fact that the cat does not share human values of privacy and propriety and therefore pisses into the pot. Many of the details of the poem can be explained in purely practical and literal terms e.g. the white chocolate jar was one of a type of a dutch cocoa jar normally used as a vase, it was customary to drop aspirin into water in vases to make flowers last longer, four o'clocks are a type of flower of variegated colour and the idea of the cat as a tiger seems a good-humoured joke.[10] But the poem oscillates between this non-symbolic level and elevating the tiger to a symbolic status which makes him more than just another cat. This is done by exaggerating his grandeur (the puss is a tiger with stripes) and also by anthropomorphising him so he is reflective, "mentally flexing" and temperamental, "marvellously striped and

irritable". The cat, bringing together conflicting and opposite characteristics, such as the primitive and sophisticated, the reflective and active, the human and the animal, can in one sense be seen as a symbol of the creative artist and the conflicting characteristics and activities which creative work involves: an amusing incident takes on wider implications.

But the tiger's conflicting characteristics are pushed to breaking point and ultimately disrupt his symbolic status. The extremity of the opposites he represents push far beyond any peaceful "New Critical" reconciliation of opposites. One moment the tiger is mentally flexing, the next moment he is a "brute beast". In fact the opposites he "represents" could be seen to cancel each other out as the symbol veers from one extreme to another. Moreover the different sets of characteristics he represents are so various and the consequences of his actions so difficult to interpret that he could stand for almost anything at all, the creative artist being only one of several possibilities.

Not only does the poem undermine the symbolic unity of the tiger but it also fails to differentiate the tiger from everything else in the poem, to give him a specific position in a particular symbolic scheme of things. The white chocolate jar is as active as the tiger himself and is similarly anthropomorphised:

> The white chocolate jar full of petals
> swills odds and ends around in a dizzying eye
> of four o'clocks now and to come.

while music scratches its "scrofulous stomach" (merging here with the image of the cat himself) and the flowers display "breathless attention". This means that the jar merges with the pot, the room in which the incident takes place with the studio and as the poem progresses it becomes less and less obvious what is happening. In a dizzy succession of interpenetrating and highly entertaining images:

> the brute beast emerges and stands,
> clear and careful, knowing always the exact peril
> at this moment caressing his fangs with
> a tongue given wholly to luxurious usages;
> which only a moment before dropped aspirin
> in this sunset of roses, and now throws a chair
> in the air to aggravate the truly menacing.

it becomes unclear who dropped aspirin in this sunset of roses, who throws a chair in the air and what or who the exact peril is. The agent of the aspirin could be the tongue, luxurious usages or the exact peril; the chair could be thrown in the air by the exact peril, luxurious usages or the sunset of roses; the exact peril could be the tiger's mistress or his internal dilemma. No particular interpretation of any particular passage would be any more likely than its opposite, any interpretive decision would depend on previous decisions which were equally opposed possibilities. Everything in the poem could be seen to point to creativity or destructiveness, order or chaos; for example the

exact peril could be the peril of either thought or action, throwing a chair in the air could be a destructive act or a creative discovery, dropping aspirin into this sunset of roses could be the attempt to either subdue or heighten experience. It is impossible to read the poem in any consistent way without being continually bombarded by other possibilities of meaning and consequently the poem, whose images now depend for their humour upon their absurdity, threaten to disrupt into the kind of dissociation with the outside world, the forging of new conjunctions, accidental connections we associate with surrealism.

This disruption of the symbolic import of the poem, and the sliding of meaning which results from it, is caused both by a breaking down of the whole into parts and by substitution of one member of a class for another. Metonymic substitution is used so abundantly here that the metaphor turns in on itself, the parts start to join with other parts creating new conjunctions and a situation arises whereby everything becomes potentially connected to everything else. The poem therefore illustrates the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy discussed above. As the metaphorical scheme is pushed to extremes where each element seems to be similar not to one thing but to a multitude of things, metonymical association forms a number of different lines of internal connection which intersect. These metonymic connective lines include the following: eye-stomach-tongue-fangs-nuts (parts of the body); Saint-Saëns-music (Saint-Saëns is a member of the general class, music); petals-roses-four o'clocks (members of the general class of flowers); jar, pot (members of

the general class of container); four o'clocks and eternally fixed afternoon (parts of the day) tiger-puss (members of the animal family). The metonymic lines intersect with each other creating humorous, because unlikely and unexpected, conjunctions: for example, the parts of the body line intersects with the musical line in the image "music scratches its scrofulous stomach" and in the image of the piss which whispers Saint-Saëns. "Four o'clocks", because it suggests both a time and a type of flower, can link with both connective lines. This intersection of the metonymic lines creates a complex internal network in which the different parts form the new conjunctions typical of surrealism. The metonymical association therefore both pulls against, and plays a part in, the metaphorical association. Oscillating between these two types of association, metaphorical and metonymical, the poem hangs between referring to the world and referring inwards to the internal arrangement of its elements. The result of this is that the poem does not merely point to its meaning but enacts it, pushing us as readers in and out of difference and similarity, structure and subject. And in so doing it demonstrates that humour is not the province of any particular mode, but can be built into, and change with, the structure of the poem.

In Memory of My Feelings

"In Memory of My Feelings" (CP,252) could be said to take symbolism to its extremes through its proliferation of apparent symbols and its use of a traditional symbol such as the serpent.

But symbolism is interrogated by the presence of the non-symbolic and surreal in the poem and in fact the poem oscillates between all three modes.

This occurs through a mixing of the literal and metaphorical in the poem. While some passages such as the opening of the poem might strike us as heavily metaphorical, other passages seem to be composed of observations or recollections which do not seem metaphorical, such as the casual, apparently non-symbolic passage in section 4:

> I'm looking for my Shanghai Lil.
> Five years ago, enamored of fire-escapes, I went to
> Chicago,
> an eventful trip: the fountains! the Art Institute, the
> Y
> for both sexes, absent Christianity.
>
> At 7, before Jane
> was up, the copper lake stirred against the sides
> of a Norwegian freighter; on the deck a few dirty men
> tired of night, watched themselves in the water,
> as years before the German prisoners on the Prinz Eugen
> dappled the Pacific with their sores, painted purple
> by a Naval doctor.

In addition many of the images, such as that of the hunt, hover between literal and metaphorical status, while the image of the selves oscillates between concept and metaphor. The idea

of a metaphor standing for something outside the poem is sometimes inverted in the course of it, by making the quality the image is standing for part of the image. For example in the passage:

> My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent
> and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets.
> He has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals.

quietness contains the man, rather than the man standing for quietness.

In fact the poem consists of a number of chains of connected images which defy categorisation into the metaphoric or literal since everything literal in the poem can be taken as metaphorical. These chains include the serpent chain; the selves chain; the hunt chain (the hunter crackles and pants, animal death whips out its flashlight, the dead hunting /the alive ahunted, fleeing a hunter); the war chain (the barrage balloon, My/grand-aunt dying for me, like a talisman, in the war, the war hero, the German prisoners, the bush full of white flags, a guerrilla warrior); the race chain (the center of the track, my transparencies could not resist the race, racing into sands, as runners arrive from the mountains); the desert chain (in the desert/taste of chilled anisette; the most arid stretch is often richest; his mistress will follow him across the desert). This

division into chains is however highly artificial and even misleading since the chains are continually overlapping and intersecting; merging and then diverging.

If we look first at the images which comprise the image chains we can see how they surpass the limits of symbols in the sense of seeming to stand for almost anything: how they deconstruct their symbolic or metaphoric status through their non-specificity. [11] The serpent, for example, is not sketched in with the explicit detail or consistency which would be needed for him to represent anything obvious in the world. His behaviour and characteristics are conveyed in fragmentary images which do not add up to an overall picture: his eyes redden at the sight of thorny fingernails, he is aquiline and comes to "resemble the Medusa", he leaves "a globe of spit on a taut piece of grass", at the end he is in the midst of the selves. When a comparison is made between him and anything else it is elusive and inexplicit:

> And now it is the serpent's turn.
> I am not quite you, but almost, the opposite of visionary.

or

> When you turn your head
> can you feel your heels, undulating? that's what it is
> to be a serpent

The stated or implied reactions to the serpent are also highly contradictory. Section 1 alludes to "love of the serpent" and the end of the poem could be seen to imply that the serpent is more important than anything else. But the serpent also comes "to resemble the Medusa" implying that he can turn those who look at him to stone. The serpent then cannot be said to represent anything consistent: it could stand for one thing as well as its opposite: god or the devil, art or chaos.

Similarly the selves do not form a consistent image. They are sometimes implied to be alike, since they are all transparent and flail about like vipers in a pail, and at other times are characterised in terms of their differences:

> I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don't know what
>
> blood's
>
> in me I feel like an African prince

The poem oscillates between the voice of the single self, the "I" of the poem and the image of the multiple selves. Sometimes, as in the above passage, the first person is used but multiplicity is implied: the conjunction of singleness and multiplicity is to be found in the word "himselves" in Section 3.

Moreover these images do not maintain a position in a symbolic scheme. On the one hand they are disparate from each other and not connected in the way that we might expect symbols to be. On the other hand during the course of the poem they merge, intersect and transform into each other so much that they

cannot possibly maintain a position in a particular symbolic design. In the end there is the same lack of differentiation between the elements that there is in "Chez Jane" and everything seems to be related to everything else. This means that new conjunctions are continually being forged which loosen ties with the outside world and the poem opens out into surrealism. Names, places and historical allusions do not produce a fixed sense of time or topology. Nevertheless the poem never disrupts into total surrealism for the recurring images pull the poem back nearer to symbolism.

Again this oscillation between symbolism and surrealism occurs because of the way the poem activates the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy. The metonymic aspect of metaphor is taken to excess, creating internal association rather than external similarity. The "symbols" or images are broken into parts, for example the serpent is mainly alluded to in terms of parts (his eye, his tail, his spit). Parts can therefore join together with other parts in new conjunctions and one part can substitute for another part in another chain. Parts form new wholes and the hierarchy of whole and part is itself questioned: for example, each self is a new whole and at the beginning of the poem an apparent "whole", a man, is contained within "my quietness". In addition one member of a class is sometimes substituted for another, so vipers, plate of devils and Medusa (belonging to the serpent class) are substituted for or connected with the serpent.

If we look at this at work in the poem we can see how this breaking down into parts creates a vast network of intersection

and association in the poem keeping it incessantly mobile. This metonymic network functions in a number of ways as follows.

1.Parts and wholes are substituted for each other within a particular chain, so that the chain itself is always transforming. For example the tongue and tail in Section 4 seem to substitute for the serpent (though this is not made explicit). Similarly in Section 1 "one of me" seems to be a self, and the transparencies, the selves and the "I" an accumulation of selves, though this is inexplicit and in fact any such integrated impression is challenged. In addition some of the parts could belong to more than one chain, for example, the guns or weapons could be part of either the hunt or the war chain.

2.Parts and wholes from different image chains are juxtaposed creating a quick transition from one to the next. For example in the passage:

> I am underneath its leaves as the hunter crackles and
>
> pants
>
> and bursts, as the barrage balloon behind a cloud
> and animal death whips out its flashlight,
>
> whistling
>
> and slipping the glove off the trigger hand. The
>
> serpents eyes
>
> redden at sight of those thorny fingernails, he is so
>
> smooth!

there is a rapid transition from hunt to war, to hunt to serpent. This transition creates a merging effect between the hunt, war and serpent image chains.

3.A part used in one chain may be transferred to another where its significance is transformed: so the trigger hand in Section 1 turns into "the hand lifting towards a fig tree from hunger" in Section 3, while the tails of the horse in Section 1 become the tail of the (implied) serpent in Section 4:

> tongue out
> leaving a globe of pit on a taut spear of grass
> and leaves off rattling his tail a moment
> to admire this flag.

4. A part which might seem to belong to one image chain is included in another: for example when guns and weapons from the hunt and war chains are used to attack and defend the selves:

> My quietness has a number of naked selves,
> so many pistols I have borrowed to protect myselves
> from creatures who too readily recognise my weapons
> and have murder in their heart!

and when the selves enter a race:

> One of me rushes
> to window #13 and one of me raises his whip and one of
> me

flutters up from the center of the track amidst the pink
flamingoes,
and underneath their hooves as they round the last turn
my lips
are scarred and brown, brushed by tails, masked in
dirt's lust
definition, open mouths gasping for the cries of the
bettors for the lungs of earth.

5.Members of the same class form connecting links between chains, e.g. water vehicles such as a gondola, a rusted barge and a Norwegian freighter.

6.Image chains are linked by comparison, for example, in part 1 where my transparent selves/flail about like vipers in a pail (with the added complication that here vipers substitutes for serpent as a member of the same class). These comparisons often obscure more than they elucidate, as in the following passage where the basis of the comparison becomes obscured and the serpent seems both like the "I" of the poem and in contrast to him :

And now it is the serpent's turn.
I am not quite you, but almost, the opposite of
visionary

7.Finally, the implied whole of any particular part can be referred to as such in other contexts in the poem. For example,

the hooves and tails in part 1 become the horse on the frieze and the horse that the Hittite is in love with, in part 4.

In sum there is a network of internal association which means that anything can be joined to anything or substituted for anything in an endless process of displacement. The poem culminates in an assertion of, and cancelling out of, all the possibilities. For the speaker has both lost his selves and must kill them , must create art but cannot remember it:

> And yet
> I have forgotten my loves, and chiefly that one, the
> cancerous
> statue which my body could no longer contain,
> against my will
> against my love
> become art,
> I could not change it into history
> and so remember it,
> and I have lost what is always and
> everywhere
> present, the scene of my selves, the occasion of these
> ruses
> which I myself and singly must now kill
> and save the serpent in their midst.

"In Memory of My Feelings", therefore, like "Chez Jane" both refers to and embodies its meaning. It refers to the multiplicity of self but it also takes us into the

activity of feeling: it make us as readers participate in how it feels to feel. The basis for the analysis of this poem would also be relevant to other similarly structured poems such as "Ode to Casuality" (CP, 302) and "Ode to Michael Goldberg". (CP, 290).

Easter

In some respects "Easter" (CP,96) is an archetypal surreal poem. Whereas Breton in "The Spectral Attitudes" normally brings together one new conjunction in a single line, O'Hara sometimes brings together several unexpected conjunctions within the line, thereby creating a very dense and accumulative affect e.g. "slowly bleeding a quiet filigree on the leaves of that souvenir" or "a self-coral serpent wrapped round an arm with no jujubes" or "a mast of the barcantine lost flaming bearers of the hurricanes", so that rapid refocusing takes place several times within a single line. This superimposition of one image over another blocks the referential possibilities of the image even further than in a standard surrealist poem like "The Spectral Attitudes" and creates an impression of accumulation and density.[12] In "Easter" bodily parts and functions, man-made products, natural objects and events are torn from their conventional contexts and meanings and joined together in new conjunctions such as "the perforated mountains of my saliva leave cities awash " or "floods of crocodile piss and pleasures of driving" to create a dense tumultuous landscape of natural and human parts. These conjunctions retain the non-hierarchical basis typical of surrealism: as for example in "shadows of

prairie pricks dancing". Consequently a greater sense of disparateness exists in "Easter" than in "In Memory of My Feelings" and even where there is repetition, immediate transformation of the conjunction resists the consistent impression that repetition might create:

> an army of frigates
> an army of cocks
> an army of wounds
> an army of young married couples' vanilla hemorrhages

However at the same time as pushing the surrealist mode to its furthest extreme O'Hara also exposes its limits. Nearly all the images contain bodily parts or functions. However much these may be presented in new conjunctions a strong impression of physical activity comes across which dominates the poem: all the bodily and natural parts are involved in compulsive dynamic activity which explicitly (shadows of prarie pricks dancing) or implicitly (the sea swallowing tumultuous islands) suggests sexual and excretory activity. Consequently a perverse unity of image arises, which is contrary to the project of surrealism and is akin to the unity of symbol, in that it suggests the possibility of an overall theme. This theme is the relationship of physical and spirtual existence suggested both by the title "Easter" and the reference to Easter near the end of the poem:

> I have sunk my tongue in the desperation of her blood
> strangely her features are Easter

and the balm of Easter floods, my tongue's host
a rivulet of purple blood runs over the wise hands
of sobbing infants.

Read in this way "Easter" seems to invert the traditional idea of Easter as resurrection of the body through the spirit and to set into motion images whose physicality suggest the resurrection of the spirit through the body, the rehabilitation of the world through bodily excess.[13]

The images in "Easter" therefore suggest a symbolic unity which arises in the midst of surrealist conjunctions. Again this occurs because of the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy. The landscape of:

floods of crocodile piss and pleasures of driving
shadows of prairie pricks dancing
of the roses of Pennsylvania looking in eyes noses and
ears

with its:

Boom of pregnant hillsides
awash with urine

is a conglomeration of parts and wholes; of the countryside and the city, of human beings and of the poet himself. Parts and wholes are joined on a non-hierachical basis since everything is

potentially a whole made up of parts and a part of the whole. So the whole world is seen performing a single act "when the world has walked the tightrope that ties up our eyes" . The parts are either parts of nature, of human beings , or of man-made objects, and the different parts are joined in an astonishing number of different ways. So the phrase "the perforated mountains of my saliva" moves from mountains (nature) to saliva (human) to cities (man-made). These parts hover on the brink of forming a new whole which is in fact a metaphor or symbol, an image of the whole engaged in unrelenting sexual activity. Though the unconventional conjunctions of parts continually pull the poem towards the surrealist pole, nevertheless in "Easter" parts of the body involved in sex (flesh, orifices, asses, buttocks, cocks, breast, pricks, cunts, scrotum); bodily secretions, (saliva, piss, urine, blood, come, shit, testicles) and words metonymically related because they suggest sexual activity (fucked, swallowing, appetites, relieving, pelted) are used so continuously and consistently that they have begun to fit together and to congeal referentially, reasserting themselves as part of a unifying metaphor. Interestingly then this poem demonstrates the reverse movement to that of "In Memory of My Feelings". Whereas in the latter poem symbolism turns over into surrealism, in "Easter" surrealism turns over into symbolism locating and activating the inevitable movement of accidental connection towards metaphorical association, of difference towards identity.

The Day Lady Died

"The Day Lady Died" (CP,325) involves a much less obvious interpenetration of modes than "Chez Jane", "In Memory of my Feelings" and "Easter" and is rather different. Its opening suggests that it will be as non-symbolic as any poem could possibly be.

> It is 12.20. in New York a Friday
> three days after Bastille day, yes
> it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
> because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton
> at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner
> and I don't know the people who will feed me

In "The Day Lady Died" the hamburger and malted the poet eats and the books he buys do not represent anything beyond themselves; they are the objects that fill his lunch hour. The poem is a catalogue of events that happen or are remembered or anticipated on a particular day, reported only because they did happen rather than because they stand for ideas outside the poem. However the necessities, pleasures and irritations of the poet's lunch hour culminate in his being confrcnted by the news of Billie Holiday's death, "A NEW YORK POST with her face on it". (Holiday is never mentioned during the poem but was known as Lady Day). The poet is temporarily shocked out of his concern with everyday matters as he digests the news of her death and this memory of Billie Holiday's singing lifts the the poem to a

level of new significance:

> and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
> leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
> while she whispered a song alongside the keyboard
> to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

This image, which suggests that Billie's singing had the power to stop normal physical processes, "everyone and I stopped breathing", tips this non-symbolic poem over into metaphor. The image signifies the mingling of the mundane and extraordinary, the remembered and present in our experience, and most of all, the power of death and art to both disfigure and transfigure our lives.

In addition, the details of the poem which seemed to be connected only because they were parts of the poet's day, now seem, as Alan Feldman has pointed out, to bear the mark of Billie's death, even to foreshadow it.[14] Billie Holiday was black, a drug addict and an outstanding singer: Bastille day suggests death and violence, the name Stillwagon could suggest a hearse, the tobacconist reminds us of Billie Holiday's drug addiction while the buying of the books foreshadows the memory of a particularly special artistic experience. The elements of the poem,which seemed to be there because they were events in the poet's life, suddenly seem to point almost symbolically to Billie's premature death.

How is it that a poem that is so rigorously non-symbolic can suddenly seem to be open to the suggestion of a symbolic

analysis? Again the poem locates and exploits the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy. The separate activities the poet engages in, such as having a shoeshine or going to the Bank, buying books or alcohol, become part of the whole which is the focus of the poem, the poet's day. But these same parts of the poet's life, Bastille day /Stillwagon /Ghana /Les Nègres /New York Times /Billie's singing, form an internal metonymic network within the poem, which because they all relate to another whole, Billie Holiday's life and death, fold back into a metaphor about the relationship of art and life, life and death. The metonymies in the poem do not shift position as they do in "In Memory of My feelings" so that our conception of the whole becomes increasingly blurred, so that referentiality is undermined and the metaphor widens out into surrealism. Instead the metonymical connections which make up the poet's life, shift into a network of internal metonymies which start to do the work of metaphor.

General implications of this analysis for O'Hara's work.

So far we have looked at the way modes in the poems open out into each other in O'Hara's poetry and at examples of poems where this is particularly pronounced. In conclusion, I want to consider the general implications of this for an appreciation of O'Hara's work.

Firstly, analysis of this kind can help us to understand the dynamic interaction between referring and non-referring in O'Hara's poetry, in poems where the interdependence of modes is

less pronounced than in the foregoing examples. It is present, for example, even in poems where the surrealism seems to be so extreme that we might think that the poem was "straight surrealism". For example on the face of it "Second Avenue" (CP,139) seems to be one of O'Hara's most surreal poems, dashing as it does from one new conjunction to the next:

> This thoroughness whose traditions have become so
> reflective
> your distinction is merely a quill at the bottom of the
> sea
> tracing forever the fabulous alarms of the mute
> so that in the limpid tosses of your violet dinginess
> a puss appears and lingers like a groan from the collar
> of a reproachful tree whose needles are tired of
> howling.
> One distinguishes merely the newspapers of a sediment,
> since going underground is like discovering something in
> your navel that has an odor and is able to fly away.

Though objects and events reappear in "Second Avenue" they always do so in new conjunctions and never settle into a unifying pattern as they do in "Easter". For example the "images of toothpaste falling on guitar strings" in Section 1 becomes "a guitar of toothpaste tubes and fingernails" in Section 10 while "the quill at the bottom of the sea" becomes "a sea of asphalt abuse" in Section 3 and "configurations and volutions of ribbed sand which the sea/never reaches" in Section 9. Consequently it

is much harder to see an underlying subject than in "Easter", except that in the most general terms the poem seems to be about change and instability. [15]

Yet our impression all the time we read "Second Avenue" is of underlying patterns of meaning: the poem does not release us from the resolution of meaning in the same way that a surrealist poem seems to do. The words slide over the meanings rather than totally dislocating them. Though the extravagance of the words means attempts to pin down meaning are constantly subverted, meaning reasserts itself as if in elaborate metaphors. A typical passage which illustrates this is:

> Blue negroes on the verge of a true foreigness
> escape nevertheless the chromaticism of occidental death
> by traffic, oh children bereaved of their doped carts
> and priests with lips like mutton in their bedroom at
> dawn!
> and falling into a sea of asphalt abuse which is
> precisely life
> in these provinces printed everywhere with the flag
> "Nobody,"
> and these are the true tillers of the spirit
> whose strangeness crushes in the only possible embrace,

At first this passage might seem to resist any attempt to pull it together into a pattern of meaning but nevertheless such meanings are present. Read in one way, this passage elaborately

describes life on the streets of New York: the cosmopolitan mix of people "blue negroes on the verge of a true foreigness"; the threatening traffic, "the chromaticism of occidental death/by traffic"; the noise and turmoil and the rudeness "asphalt abuse"; and the mixed feelings of anonymity, "Nobody´" and intimacy, "whose strangeness crushes in the only possible embrace" which the crowds induce. Read less specifically it is about an attitude towards life: the image "sea of asphalt abuse which is precisely life" suggests that in living there is always an element of defying public opinion but sometimes in order to achieve something one has to be "nobody" in the eyes of other people. The ability to do this is the real test of living ("the true tillers of the spirit") and openness to experience ("strangeness") is the only real way to live, ("possible embrace"). With some effort the components of the passage can be drawn together and can be read metaphorically. Meaning is multiple and heavily superimposed rather than totally dislocated.

Moreover the poem never loses contact with the landscape of a recognisable world in the way that we might expect a standard surreal poem to do. The above passage refers to life on the streets of New York while other passages include references to incidents involving O´Hara´s friends such as the passage about Grace Hartigan painting:

Grace destroys
the whirling faces in their dissonant gaiety where it´s
anxious,
lifted nasally to the heavens which is a carrousel

grinning
and spasmodically obliterated with loaves of greasy
white paint
and this becomes like love to her, is what I desire
and what you, to be able to throw something away without
yawning
"Oh Leaves of Grass! O Sylvette! oh Basket Weavers'
Conference.

Grace Hartigan recollects that the passage refers to a painting, with a carrousel in it, which she spasmodically overlaid with "loaves of greasy white paint" and finally totally cbliterated and threw away. Sylvette was a girdle-maker across the road from Larry Rivers' studio where the poem was written.[16]

"Second Avenue" then does not collect itself into any kind of unifying image and is further removed from the symbolic than either "Easter" or "In Memory of my Feelings". Nevertheless it shows how interestingly O'Hara could manipulate modes even where their interdependence is less pronounced, how he tended to bend back surrealist modes into more referential ones and how his poetry swings backwards and forwards between referring and non-referring. In this respect his poetry is very different from John Ashbery's in which there is both less metaphorical possibility and less metonymical connection. In Ashbery's "They Dream Only of America", [17] for example, the images (thirteen million pillars of grass, honey, a burning throat, darkness in

barns, a murderer's ash tray, the lake a lilac cube, a key, a drive through the night, a bedroom and a broken leg) are extremely disparate and seem to refer only to themselves. Apart from some very slight internal connection (the image of the key, for example, reappears and the honey as a food bears a connection to throat) the poem almost entirely successfully avoids the emergence of any inner network of metonymic internal connection which could turn over into metaphorical connection. Likewise in "Two Scenes" each image, despite the reiteration of "comes", seems essentially separate and discontinuous:[18]

> We see us as we truly behave :
> From every corner comes a distinctive offering
> the train comes bearing joy;
> the sparks it strikes illuminate the table.

The train which comes bearing joy in the first stanza might make the fumes of the stanza of the second stanza :

> This is perhaps a day of general honesty
> without example in the world's history
> Though the fumes are not of a singular authority
> are indeed as dry as poverty

but to make such a connection (and such connections are hard to find) is forced and artificial. In fact whereas Ashbery's early poetry engages the extremes of deconstruction of meaning, O'Hara's poetry enacts the movement between deconstruction and

reconstruction.[19]

This movement, in O'Hara's poetry, between deconstruction and reconstruction has the effect of very actively engaging the reader. The reader is pushed in and out of the very meaning of the poem, he/she is constantly caught up in the disintegration of meaning which nevertheless propels him/her towards another possibility of meaning, and as such he/she participates in the structure of the poem. It is interesting to compare the reader's role here with his/hers in the Ashbery poems discussed above: it might be argued that the greater disintegration of meaning in the Ashbery poems means that they force the reader more than O'Hara's poems do to compile meanings. However I would argue instead that because Ashbery's poems hold out fewer possibilities for the reconstitution of meaning they keep the reader more at arm's length. O'Hara's poems, on the other hand, move the reader in and out of difference and similarity whose interdependence they both refer to and embody. Consequently in O'Hara's poetry the reader is engaged in a dynamic activity: as he assembles the meanings of the poem he becomes caught up in the poem as structural arrangement. This restless oscillation between the poem as referring to the world and the poem as structural arrangement is one of the major sources of the interest and energy of O'Hara's poetry. It can be linked in a most interesting way with the the interdependence of abstraction and representation in painting, which will be discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

Notes.

1. O'Hara, Frank, Collected Poems, Allen, Donald, ed. New York, Knopf, 1979. p. 302. (Hereafter cited in the text as CP with page numbers).

2. Culler, Jonathan, Structuralist Poetics, pp.180-181.

3. de Man, Paul, Allegories of Reading, p. 57-68.

4. Williams, William Carlos, Selected Poems, London, Penguin, 1976. p.70.

5. Stevens, Wallace, Collected Poems, London, Faber and Faber, 1984.p. 209-210.

6. Breton, André, trans. David Gascoyne, in Germain, Edward B., ed. French and American Surrealist Poetry London, Penguin, 1978. pp.117-119.

7. Breton, André, trans. Antin, David, in Auster, Paul, ed. The Random House Book of Twentieth century French poetry with translations by American and British poets, New York, Vintage Books, 1984. p.183.

8. Desnos, Robert, trans. Auster, Paul in The Random House Book of Twentieth century p. 281.

9. I have chosen these poets to illustrate my argument rather than because of their connection with O´Hara. However O´Hara was certainly familiar with, and probably substantially influenced by, all four poets. O´Hara´s early reading is documented by Perloff in Frank O´Hara. However additional information I have obtained about O´Hara´s early reading etc. is as follows:

Bill Berkson, friend and collaborator with O´Hara, wrote in Answers for Hazel Smith, September 11th, 1986 San Francisco, California : "I think it´s French poetry (Apollinaire, Desnos, and then back to Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Racine, Villon...) that provided one gold mine, and then of course there´s a Russian vein, the German (Rilke and Hölderlin)" etc. Berkson also said that O´Hara had told him that when he first started writing he wrote some early e.e. cummings imitations which he threw away. In an interview with the author, 26th June 1986, New York City, Joe LeSueur mentioned the French Symbolists and Gertude Stein as writers O´Hara particularly esteemed and Yeats, Lowell and Dylan Thomas as writers he did not particularly care for. He also said that O´Hara loved to read the great Russian novels like Anna Karenina.

In the Frank O´Hara Archive in the Butler Library, University of Columbia, amongst the papers of Burton Aldrich Robie, a childhocd friend of O´Hara´s, is A New Anthology of Modern Poetry ed. Selden Rodman, The Modern Library New York 1938. which belonged to O´Hara and there is a note in it "Hope you like this- couldn´t resist marking my favourites." Poems selected and

marked include ones by James Joyce, Yeats, Pound, T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, C.Day Lewis, Ogden Nash, Stephen Spender, a large section of Auden and all of e.e. cummings poems in the volume.

O´Hara in a letter, New York City, July 15th 1959, to Jasper Johns, gives a list, with comments, of poets and novelists about whom who he is currently enthusiastic, including John Wieners, Mike McClure, Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen, Cregory Corso, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, John Ashbery, Herb Gold, James Baldwin, Laura Riding, Jane Bowles, Douglas Wolff, Ginsberg and also Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Michele Butor and André Pieyre de Mandiargue. He expresses interest in, though reservations about, Olson and Levertov and says he "can´t stand" Robert Duncan. He also says "you said you liked PATERSON; all the books of poems of WCW have great, great, great things in them, I don´t believe he ever wrote an uninteresting poem; the prose poems KORA IN HELL have recently been reprinted and are very good, interesting because very early and ambitious;" and he also says "I think everyone should read all of Samuel Beckett."(Part of this letter is reproduced in Perloff, Frank O´Hara p.203)

Interestingly in O´Hara´s letters, films, operas and ballets seem to be mentioned more than poetry or novels but there are frequent allusions to Williams, Beckett and Gide, as writers O´Hara was particularly interested in, enthusiastic mentions of other young poets such as Frank Lima and Jchn Wieners and of the great Russian writers such as Pasternak, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy.

10. Information about the origin of these details is given in Perloff, Frank O'Hara p. 63-65.

11. Alan Feldman, in Frank O'Hara U.S.A. Twayne Publishers, 1979 uses the same concept of image chains, though he does not analyse the poem in terms of wholes and parts in the way I am doing here. Marjorie Perloff's attempt to interpret the poem is, I think, unsuccessful since it involves drawing out single meanings from it such as "part one ends on a note of death; the poet's old self must die if it is to be reborn" In her opinion the poem ends triumphantly but in interpreting the poem in this way she is reducing it to the kind of symbolic scheme it seems to work against. Perloff, Frank O'Hara pp.141-146.

12. In the light of my argument throughout this chapter, that surrealism in O'Hara's work arises through non-specificity and multiplicity, it is interesting to consider O'Hara's remarks on Pollock's painting in Male and female (1942) in Art Chronicles, 1954-1966, New York, Braziller, 1975, p.20 (hereafter cited in the text as AC with page numbers). O'Hara says:

> The sexual imagery is extraordinarily complex in that it seems to be the result of the superimposition of the protagonists at different stages of their relationship. These are not double-images in the routine surrealist sense but have a multiplicity of attitudes. At different times one sees them facing each other, then both facing in the same direction (to the

left) then with their backs to each other, but with the memory of the confrontation vivid in their appearance.

Earlier in the same essay O´Hara talks about the major influence of surrealism:

The influence of surrealism, though as a movement it provoked few masterpieces, has been considerable and seldom has been given its just due. It is true that the Surrealist periods of Picasso, Miro, and others produced great works, but the powerful personalities of these artists, the broad sweep of their creativity, tends to minimise their debt to Surrealism. For American painters, I think, the importance of Surrealism´s influence lay in a less direct stimulation. For instance the whole basis of art-consciousness and art-confidence in America was changed by Surrealism, and even if more literary than painterly works influenced American life, the basic findings of the Surrealist struggle toward subliminal meaning has not failed to affect all modern art which is not commercial, and much that is ("the hidden persuaders," for instance). (AC,17).

13. Kenneth Koch´s comments on "Easter", in A Note on Frank O´Hara in the early Fifties, in Berkson, Bill and LeSueur Joe, ed. Homage to Frank O´Hara, Berkeley, Creative Arts Book Company, 1980, p.27 show a perception of the poem which is similar to my own (although it is difficult to see here why Koch says, "once Frank has said ´It is Easter!´ "when no such phrase exists in the poem):

Another of his works which burst upon us like a bomb then was "Easter", a wonderful, energetic and rather obscene poem of four or five pages, which consisted mainly of a procession of various bodily parts and other objects across a vast landscape. It was like Lorca and Whitman in some ways, but very original. I remember two things about it which were new: one was the phrase "the roses of Pennsylvania" and the other was the line in the middle of the poem which began "It is Easter!" (Easter, though it was the title, had not been mentioned before in the poem and apparently had nothing to do with it.) What I saw in these lines was 1) inspired irrelevance which turns out to be relevant (once Frank had said "It is Easter!" the whole poem was obviously abut death and resurrection); 2) the use of movie techniques in poetry (in this case coming down hard on the title in the middle of a work); 3) the detachment of words from traditional contexts and putting them in curious new American ones ("roses of Pennsylvania").

14. Feldman, Alan, Frank O'Hara, p. 121.

15. In an unpublished letter to Karl Shapiro August 13th 1954 (Special Collections,University of Chicago Library) O'Hara says, "It was kind of you to write me good luck in that Iowa Fellowship thing, I didn't get one but Robert Lowell wrote me about my manuscript of poems and that was even better. He liked, with reservations, the long poem I've included in this batch and thought it an advance, which is why I'm sending it; it isn't

anything you'll want to print, so if you are very busy you may want to skip it (Second Avenue)."

16. Grace Hartigan, interview with the author, Tivoli, New York State, August 12th 1986.

17. Ashbery, John, Selected Poems, London, Paladin, 1987 p. 33.

18. Ibid p.3.

19. In an interview with me, San Francisco, California, September 17th 1986, Bill Berkson made the interesting suggestion that some of O'Hara's later poems such as "What appears to be Yours", (CP,380) which consist of short phrases with gaps between them, were influenced by Ashbery's Tennis Court Oath and that "Maybe what he was doing was coming at it in a useful way second hand, seeing what other people including myself and Joe Cervalo and other younger poets had been getting from John, reading John through them and then coming out with his own version."

Chapter Two : The Self and Stances to the System: the role of the self and social and political attitudes.

"Yet I never wholly fear the romance/of my interior self" -Poem[1]

"a dream of contradictions"-Larry Rivers of O'Hara.[2]

"Grace/to be born and live as variously as possible"-In Memory of My Feelings (CP,252)

In Chapter One I was concerned with structural fluidity in Frank O'Hara's poems: one consequence of this structural fluidity was shown to be plurality of meaning. In this chapter I want to discuss the concept of the world these changing meanings convey and the kind of values they embody. I will argue that although O'Hara's poetry embraces contradiction and multiplicity, this does not mean (as Charles Altieri implies when he suggests that O'Hara's world may be superficial and impoverished), that it is value-less.[3] In O'Hara's world situations and relationships which disclose values are never permanent, single or enclosed but meaning and value are constantly regathering and reconstituting themselves within new (often humorously depicted) situations and relationships. O'Hara rejects what in "Ode to Willem de Kooning" he calls "the terrible systems of belief" or "the philosophical reduction of reality to a dealable system", that is, the attempt to permanently encapsulate experience in institutionalised or strait-jacketed forms of religion, politics, art or love and he

also rejects the idea that such topics always have to be treated humourlessly. However he still addresses these areas of experience: value in O'Hara poetry lies in the ability to involve oneself in what is happening now, to be open to change, without regard for permanence. My discussion of meaning and value in the O'Hara world centres on the self and and the attitudes towards the social and political system inscribed in the poems. I want to show how O'Hara's embrace of contradiction and change is not incompatible with (though it makes problematic) an active and decisive self and a political position.

The self in American art, poetry and music in the fifties and sixties

The idea of a unified self has been largely undermined by psychoanalysis and critical theory and much modernist art and writing which sees the self as split and multiple. However theorists have not attempted to deny the presence of the self as a subject who makes decisions and performs certain actions. As Derrida says, "The subject is absolutely indispensable. I don't destroy the subject; I situate it. That is to say, I believe that at a certain level both of experience and of philosophical and scientific discourse one cannot get along without the notion of the subject. It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions. Therefore I keep the concept of center, which I explained was indispensable, as well as that of the subject, ..."[4]

The dilemma of the self in the twentieth century then is how

to accept the multiplicity of self and yet still be able to be decisive and act. I want to show that in O'Hara's work a unified self is broken down into a decentred, multiple and ambivalent self which is, however, constantly regathering as the site of individual action. But first it is necessary to review the different attitudes towards the self in the other arts in America during the fifties and sixties so as to appreciate the context within which O'Hara's view of the self arises.

Attitudes towards the role of the self were going through a period of change with an increased emphasis by artists on the properties of the medium rather than on direct expression. The Abstract Expressionists saw their art as an outpouring of the self, created by personality through immediate experience. Motherwell says, "the need is for felt experience intense, immediate, direct, subtle, unified, warm, vivid, rhythmic."[5] But Abstract Expressionism contained its own reversals and contradictions: if it emphasised self-expression it also stressed the idea of the painting arising in the process and therefore implied that the painting did not represent the feelings of the painter in any direct way. The work of Johns and Rauschenberg often poked fun at and questioned the idea of individuality. Johns' thermometer (1959) includes a long thermometer for registering the heat of inspiration that is supposedly incorporated in a work of art.[6] Johns and Rauschenberg's use of found and familiar objects in their work tended to deconstruct the idea of the self-expression in works formed through choice, chance and transformation of the pre-existent. This kind of projection of a non-self and

subversion of the idea of direct personal expression reached its a peak with Andy Warhol, whose work often included multiples of commercial images and whc produced his work with a host of assistants.

In poetry Charles Olson´s "Projective Verse" essay, first published in 1951, was a major landmark in expanding and changing ideas of the role of the self. Olson´s objectism "the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego"[7] rejected the poet´s ego as the central focus of the poem. The poet should conceive of himself as an object among objects, "a participant in the larger force" then his "hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share."[8] Olson´s poetry projects a sense of the self as subject to constant change as for example in "The Kingfishers":[9]

> "Around an appearance, one common model, we grow up
> many. Else how is it,
> if we remain the same,
> we take pleasure now
> in what we did not take pleasure before? love
> contrary objects? admire and /or find fault? use
> other words, feel other passions, have
> nor figure, appearance, disposition, tissue
> the same?
>
> To be in different states without a change
>
> is not a possibility

In music John Cage was a leading figure in disseminating a new view of the self and Cage's influence spread to art and poetry. Cage, who had been very influenced by Duchamp said that pieces of music are "processes providing experiences not burdened by psychological intentions on the part of the composer".[10] In music the greatly increased role of the performer, who in many instances helped to compose the music, and the use of chance elements and all kinds of peripheral noises etc., radically undermined the role of the composer and the idea of music as the expression of self. Cage has also explained how when he first used chance procedures he hoped certain things would turn up. However as things turned up which were not in line with what he hoped they changed his awareness. "That is to say I saw that things which I didn't think would be pleasing were in fact pleasing and so my views gradually changed from particular ideas as to what would be pleasing to no ideas as to what would be pleasing."[11]

The self in O'Hara's manifestos, art criticism and poetry.

In O'Hara's manifestos and art criticism there is a tension between the idea of the self as expressive and central to the poem and a turning away from self. In "Statement for the New American Poetry" (CP,500) he says "I am mainly preoccupied with the world as I experience it" and also "What is happening to me, allowing for lies and exaggerations which I try to avoid, goes into my poems." Nevertheless his experiences "are just there in whatever form I can find them" and he rejects, in his characteristically ironic way, the idea of the self as prophet or

seer: "I don't think of fame or posterity (as Keats so grandly and genuinely did) nor do I care about clarifying experiences for anyone...". In his art criticism, when O'Hara talks about the relationship between the self and a work of art his language engages the idea of self-expression; it presumes the outpouring of personal feeling. Pollock's paintings, for example involve "the total engagement of the spirit in the expression of meaning" (AC,25). O'Hara also adheres to the traditional idea of the artist as someone who has undergone special experiences and suffering and therefore whose effort to reach "spiritual clarity" is "monumental and agonising"... (AC,25). However O'Hara also slightly modifies his language to imply a different view of the self, shifting the balance from self-expression to insight. Talking about how Pollock freed himself from the "external encumbrances which surround art" he says, "This is not automatism or self-expression, but insight. Insight, if it is occasional, functions critically; if it is causal, insight functions creatively. It is the latter which is characteristic of Pollock, who was its agent, and whose work is its evidence." (AC p. 13).

In O'Hara's poetry the concept of a unified self is broken down: the poems engage the welter of conflicting feelings to which the self is vulnerable and openness to these feelings is a source of value. But at the same time the poems stress the relentless activity of being a subject, of forging for oneself a purposeful and creative self so that there is a constant oscillation between the self as decentred and multiple and the

self as single and centred.

In some respects many of O´Hara´s poems seem as "self-centred", as dominated by the idea of a unified self, as poems could possibly be.[12] For a start they use extensive autobiographical material which keeps the poet at the centre of the poem and the pronoun "I" identifies the "I" of the poem with a real life person.

More significant than whether the material is autobiographical or not is the fact that poems such as "The Day Lady Died" (CP, 325) and "A Step Away from them" (CP, 257) convey a strong sense of events in the life of a particular person. It is the poet that puts the events together, it is to him that everything is happening. In addition the poems present a recognisably identifiable voice, ironic and idiosyncratic. The beginning of the poem "Anxiety"(CP, 268) is typical of this voice:

> I´m having a real day of it.
>
> There was
>
> something I had to do. But what?
> There are no alternatives, just
> the one something .
>
> I have a drink,
> it doesn´t help-far from it!
>
> I
>
> feel worse. I can´t remember how

I felt, so perhaps I feel better.

No. Just a little darker.

This is the O'Hara voice which we recognise from poem to poem, staccato, and lively, darting from one phrase to the next, full of humorous self-questioning and self-irony; it is the voice of someone trying to sort himself out. Furthermore most (though not all) of the poems use the first person quite consistently. This is quite different from the poetry of John Ashbery where the voice is more continuously deconstructed. Sometimes in Ashbery's poetry a collective but elusive "we" is used as in the opening of Two Scenes; "We see us as we truly behave".[13] Sometimes the pronoun "I" is collapsed into "you" as in "As One Put Drunk into the Packet-Boat" while "The Grapevine":

Of who we and all they are

You all now know.

almost parodies this kind of manuipulation of pronouns. In contrast in O'Hara's poems the "I" of the poem remains predominant enforcing our sense of a particular person at the centre of the poem. [14]

But this sense of self as presence and foundation in O'Hara is continually decentred, both through a concentration on a world of things which we find in poems such as "A Step Away From Them" (CP,257) and through the subversion of the world of

things where the normal relationships between objects and events are broken up as in "Second Avenue" (CP,139) and often these two modes combine to diffuse direct self-expression. For example, "In Memory of My Feelings" combines the recall of particular events and people with the activity of feeling rather than directly expressing certain feelings or showing them to result from particular events or relationships. In addition humorous self-deprecation, making comic what is serious and deeply felt, diffuses any potentially morbidly confessional tone to the poem:

> so I will be as unhappy as I damn well
> please and not make too much of it because I am
> really here and not in a novel or anything or a jet
> plane
> as I've gone away on a ladder, a taxi or a jet plane.
> (The Unfinished CP,317)

for the constant ability to laugh at oneself is itself an important source of value in O'Hara's poetry.

Moreover the experience of self is always multiple, fragmented ambivalent. Like Whitman O'Hara's self contains multitudes and lives in contradiction. In "In Memory of My Feelings" (CP,252) multiplicity of self is the subject (or one of the subjects of the poem). The poet, though he speaks in the first person with a single voice, refers to his different selves as separate beings:

> One of me rushes

to window #13 and one of me raises his whip and one of
me
flutters from the centre of the track amidst the pink
flamingoes

He talks of his characteristics as if they are separate as well as part of himself:

My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent
and carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the
streets

This splitting and multivalence of self does not only cause anxiety, however. More importantly it is a source of joy, humour, dynamism and vitality. So it is a form of grace "to be born and live as variously as possible" and to be able to play so many different roles:

I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don´t know what´s
blood
in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking
downstairs
in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking
a fall
I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the light
mist in which a face appears
and it is another face of blonde I am a baboon eating a

banana
I am a dictator looking at his wife I am a doctor eating
a child
and the child's mother smiling I am a Chinaman climbing
a mountain
I am a child smelling his father's underwear I am an
Indian
sleeping on a scalp

Furthermore the multiple selves keep regathering as the single "I" of the poem. For while O'Hara's poetry suggests that we must open ourselves to conflicting feelings and be courageous in the face of them, any individual must face these ambivalent feelings with composure, rejoice in the fact that he cannot know any permanent truth and be prepared to act, as the end of "In Memory of my Feelings" suggests:

and I have lost what is always and everywhere
present, the scene of my selves, the occasion of these
ruses
which I myself and singly must now kill
and save the serpent in their midst.

Likewise in "Joe's Jacket" (CP, 329) the self is caught between contradictory impulses, to deaden experience and therefore protect itself and to open itself up to experience. The poet wants to drink to "smother (my)sensitivity for a while" but he also fights against trying to fix experience in a symbol, "a

precaution I loathe." The poem is about the necessity of opening oneself to the kind of contradictory emotions which may cause conflict and may bring all sorts of difficulties (here the source of conflict is a new love-affair) and to work through them into a state of self-possession, a decisiveness which does not deny these experiences but is able to contain them:

> and soon I am rising for the less than average day, I
> have ccffee
> I prepare calmly to face almost everything that will
> come up I am calm
> but not as my bed was calm as it softly declined to
> to become a ship
> I borrow Joe's seersucker jacket though he is asleep I
> start out
> when I last borrcwed it I was leaving there it was on
> my Spanish plaza back
> and hid my shoulders from San Marco's pigeons was
> jostled on the Kurfürstendam
> and sat opposite Ashes in an enormous leather jacket in
> the Continental
> it is all enormity and life it has protected me and
> kept me here on
> many occasions as a symbol does when the heart is full
> and risks no speech
> a precaution I loathe as the pheasant loathes the season
> and is preserved

it will not be need, it will be just what it is and just
what happens

One of the consequences of the multiplicity of the self is that it can never find in love a firm unshakeable foundation. In Poem:When I am feeling depressed and anxious sullen" (CP,349) the attempts of the poet to express love and to imply that love makes him stronger and more stable so that he knows :

what is important to me above the intrusion
of incident and accidental relationships
which have nothing to do with my life

result in an exposure of his anxiety about the limits and instability of that love. Throughout the poem the poet's declaration of love seems to be in excess of its object. So the line "all you have to do is take your clothes off" reads two ways: while the speaker seems to intend an indication of the lover's power, the active nature of the poet's love (he is writing a poem about it) strongly contrasts with his lover's passivity (all he has to do is take his clothes off). Similarly it is the lover's presence rather than any of his particular actions which make the poet feel 'life is strong'. Throughout the poem the poet only seems to be able to describe his intense love for his lover by practically annihilating him. His overpowering claims employ and parody Metaphysical conceits:

sick logic and feeble reasoning are cured

by the perfect symmetry of ycur arms and legs
spread out making an eternal circle together
creating a golden pillar beside the Atlantic

which undermine themselves by trying to use physical characteristics to spiritual effect and by submitting to the illogicality which they claim to defeat (how can arms and legs form a circle and what is the connection between that and the golden pillar beside the Atlantic?). The statement that "all is wiped away" suggests that not only bad but good things are wiped away by the lover's presence, and assertions of the eternal nature of their love are followed by the statement that "together we will always be in this life" while it is the air which is infinite. Attempts to assert the power of love to unite, by defeating its enemies, result in an awareness of separateness "and all of ycurs and yours in you and me in mine ".[15]

Yet even though love cannot be stable and induces ambivalent feelings this is a love poem and love is an enduring value in the O'Hara world, in the sense of bringing (if not indefinitely) happiness, involvement and the possibility for emotional expression. Being hurt is part of the experience of love and shculd not prevent us from going into the experience again, for to stop trying is to cut cneself off from love altogether:

Shall we win at love or shall we love
can it be
that hurting and being hurt is a trick forcing the love

we want to appear, that the hurt is a card
and is it black? is it red?

(CP,150)

Moreover love does not have to be single in the sense of centred on one person, of being separate from friendship or of being a certain kind of love. O'Hara's poems are full of different people that he loved (Jane, Patsy, Grace, Joe, Bill, incent) and of different types of relationship, some sexual some not, some with men some with women.[16] Hence the poem "For Grace, After a Party ": (CP,214)

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

written for Grace Hartigan (according to her to placate her after O'Hara had been showing an interest in someone else at a party) is just as much a love poem as the poems for Vincent Warren but implies a different kind of love.[17] This kind of love-friendship is also closely linked with artistic creativity : friends are both the subjects and addressees of many of the poems. The sense of the poem being part of the act of friendship and a way of communicating is very strong, as in "Lines to a Depressed Friend" (CP,168) written for Joe LeSueur, in which the

poet tries to comfort through reminding his friend of the pleasure he gives:[18]

> And where
> emptiness appears bounding along, of
> unrest the most diligent athlete and keenest mate,
> remember the pleasure, even there, your beauty affords.

Yet however important the values of love and friendship are, lovers and friends change, for the self is diverse and changing. Likewise the self cannot root itself in a divine presence or institutionalised religion for this would be to thwart and close off experience rather than open it up. Nevertheless this does not mean the self cannot, in some senses, transcend itself. In O´Hara the idea of self-transcendence is very complex because it is closely linked with the imagination; discussion of self-transcendence in O´Hara may seem rather sententious because it, like many other "serious" subjects is humorously and ironically treated, but time and again in O´Hara´s poems allusions are made to the divine or transcendental: the"door to heaven" is 515 Madison Avenue. In the eye of the beholder objects, events and other human beings are often imbued with a certain grace or with magical powers in O´Hara´s poems. So in "A Step Away from Them" ordinary events, people and objects have a certain radiance (the dirty torsos of the labourers are glistening); in "Personal Poem" an old Roman coin and a bolt-head that broke off a packing case become charms while the hot weather

becomes "luminous humidity". Joe's jacket in the poem of that name has the power to protect, "it is all enormity and life"; in "The Day Lady Died" the singing of Billie Holiday has the power to stop everyone breathing. It is the power of the imagination to unite with the world which can turn life into art, art into life. In "In Memory of My Feelings", the phrase "Grace/to be born and live as variously as possible" unites physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual grace. Self-transcendence in the form of moments of illumination, a sense of the absolute, a sense of complete coherence, is often alluded to in O'Hara's poetry but it comes and goes as something which can be captured in specific moments rather than forming a fixed point in the universe: In "Ode to Mike Goldberg" ('s Birth and Other Birth's) (CP,290) "the temporary place of light" is a place "where a not totally imaginary ascent can begin all over again". The coherence and an absolute in "Joe's Jacket" comes at dawn, it is "just that time as four o'clock goes by." Most of all art can help the self to transcend itself but again only in the constant involvement in acts of creation rather than in recreation of a past tradition or in excessive involvement in the poet's own past: the artist as seer, prophet or confessor is continually deconstructed in O'Hara's work and often ironically debunked, as in the opening of "Ode to Mike Goldberg"('s Birth and other births) (CP,290) where the poet fails to clearly remember his past:

I don't remember anything of then, down there around the magnolias
where I was no more comfortable than I've been

since

though aware of a certain neutrality called

satisfaction

sometimes

Moreover in O'Hara the world of the imagination must always be balanced by participation in this world, the world of dreams must be balanced by the world of waking, the site of the active self. So in "Sleeping on the Wing " (CP,235) the self soaring above the city in sleep must descend and wake and the closed world of subjectivity must open out into participation in a diversity of choices and events:

> And, swooping,
> you relinquish all that you have made your own,
> the kingdom of your self sailing, for you must awake
> and breathe your warmth in this beloved image
> whether it's dead or merely disappearing ,
> as space is disappearing and your singularity

Nevertheless the self can never be completely free for personal freedom is tempered by fate. God is rarely mentioned in O'Hara's poems but the gods are often alluded to. Again the treatment of this is humorous and ironic, the gods are humanised, they are fallible, reflective "speculating, bemused" "Sleeping on the Wing" (CP,235). But at the same time they are not totally benign, when they chose to exercise their powers

they can seem arbitary, unconcerned and cruel as when they kill James Dean but leave other beings untouched. In O´Hara the gods embody fate: human beings can plead and bargain with fate but they cannot finally control it. A strong sense of individual freedom and the ability and necessity to make one´s own life, conflicts with sense of life uncontrollably taking its own course. So in "Joe´s Jacket", "the forceful histories of myself and Vincent " conflict with the speaker´s sense that he can control his own destiny as he rises to the "less than average day".

In fact such is the power of fate that we cannot always be sure of the consequences of our actions and intentions: the "person" who in "The ´Unfinished´" (CP, 327) decides to make a pomander, takes an orange and sticks cloves in it, then realises he´s killed it, finds that the effect of his actions is the opposite of what he expected:

> a person who one day in a fit of idleness decides to make
> a pomander like the one that granny used to have around the
> house in Old New England and so he takes an orange and sticks
> a lot of cloves in it and then he looks at it and realises
> that he´s killed the orange , his favourite which came from
> the Malay Archipelago and was even loved in Ancient

China

and he quickly pulls out all the cloves, but it's too late! Orange is bleeding in my hand!

Impotence in the face of fate is most obvious in the case of death which overshadows present events. As the poet walks through the streets in "A Step Away From Them" he thinks of his dead friends:

First
Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?

Yet death can also be positive because it can highlight the vitality of life which makes the poet value pleasures of the day and the walk. What is important is to come out of the experience of death with a renewed vigour for life. So in "The 'Unfinished'" (CP, 317), an indirect elegy for Bunny Lang, the poet's depression must be transformed into a way forward :

I'm not depressed any more, because Gregory has had
the same
experience with oranges, and is alive

And maybe complete freedom is not totally desirable either. It is the struggle within life, the activity of striving which

makes it interesting, dynamic: total freedom is inhuman, colourless, uncommitted. Most important is to have the courage both to feel and to act which risks a certain curtailment of freedom but results in positive involvement. So in "Sleeping on the Wing" (CP,235) the speaker realises:

> 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!

At the end of "Ode to Michael Goldberg" (CP,290) (C's Birth and Other Birth's) the balancing of images of captivity and liberty, stillness and movement engages the oscillation between reflecting and acting self, restriction and freedom:

> for flowing
> as it must throughout the miserable, clear and
> willful
> life we love beneath the blue,
> a fleece of pure intention sailing like
> a pinto in a barque of slaves
> who soon will turn upon their captors
> lower anchor, found a city riding there
> of poverty and sweetness paralleled
> among the races without time,
> and one alone will speak of being
> born in pain

and he will be the wings of an extraordinary
liberty.

****

In the previous sections I have argued that the self's multiplicity in O'Hara's poetry does not stop it from from being active and decisive or from valuing certain areas of experience and I now want to extend this argument to social and political attitudes. O'Hara's poetry does not have a political programme and the political attitudes within it are conflicting and inconsistent (and sometimes consequently fall back into merely being accommodating to the status quo). I want to argue, however, that despite these contradictions and inconsistencies a political stance does emerge within the poems which has some elements which are oppositional to the social and political formation. My discussion of this inevitably involves some general issues which I will discuss briefly before applying the argument to O'Hara's poetry.

Politics and poetry.

At the centre of my argument is the idea that although singleness may be needed for political action, the social formation is itself extremely diverse and contains many inner contradictions and counter-currents. As Raymond Williams says "A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realised complex

of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits. In practice, that is, hegemony can never be singular...We have then to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are real and persistent elements of practice."[19] An appreciation of these contradictions is therefore necessary and desirable for consideration of political issues and is not necessarily incompatible with being prepared to act politically or with persuading others to act politically.

Likewise, although all texts are political, to some extent, in that language is socially produced, received and circulated, the political positions they contain may be fragmented or contradictory. In fact within literature some plurality is inevitable because literary texts point both outwards to the world and inwards to themselves and this is particularly extreme in the case of poems, which tend to be particularly dense with unstable elements which may partially undermine any single point of view. Any poem therefore, though it explicitly or implicitly contains political attitudes, to some degree disrupts its own political programme.

Because contradiction and diversity is fundamental to the social formation, necessary to political thought and integral to poetry, establishing whether any cultural trend or object is oppositional to the dominant culture or may accommodated within it, is a complex matter. As Raymond Williams says:

The major theoretical problem , with immediate effect on methods of analysis, is to distinguish between alternative and

oppositional initiatives and contributions which are made within or against a specific hegemony (which then sets certain limits to them or which can succeed in neutralizing, changing or actually incorporating them) and other kinds of initiative and contribution which are reducible to the terms of the original or the adaptive hegemony, and are in that sense independent. It can be persuasively argued that all or nearly all initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter culture. ...It would be wrong to overlook the importance of works and ideas which, while clearly affected by hegemonic limits and pressures, are at least in part significant breaks beyond them, which may again in part be neutralised, reduced, or incorporated, but which in their most active elements nevertheless come through as independent and original.[20]

A poet may try to be oppositional in the sense of speaking out against the dominant culture (though what is intended as oppositional may not necessarily be received as such.) However a poet may be equally oppositional in the sense of refusing to speak within that culture. Conversely a poet who does not adopt an oppositional stance may by implication, even if inadvertently, identify him or herself with the status quo. Or he/she may manage to be oppositional without necessarily being overtly so. Moreover there are different ways of being oppositional, different issues

about which a poet may chose to be oppositional and different forms that opposition can take within different contexts. During every period certain forms have been seen as oppositional and this has been particularly true in the twentieth century where poets (such as the French Surrealists and the American language poets) have claimed that the break down of accepted modes of signification is politically radical: however it is probably dangerous to assume that the employment of certain technical devices automatically guarantees a radical political position. In sum the work of any poet is unlikely to be entirely oppositional, even the most radical poet may have some accommodating attitudes or use some accommodating techniques.

Political, Social and Artistic Background.

The important issues of the contemporary political scene in the United States during the fifties and early sixties were the civil rights movement, the Cold War and the escalation of the Vietnam war. But I want to emphasise here not the events themselves but the attitudes towards them within the society. Godfrey Hodgson has documented the consensus of liberal ideology during the period and how the left, (that is a group calling for far-reaching social and institutional change and upholding the interests of the disadvantaged against the more powerful groups in scciety) more or less ceased to be operative in American political life.[21] He points out how intellectuals turned way from the left to a liberal ideology which could never replace it because it held "that American capitialism was a revolutionary force for social change, that economic growth was supremely good

because it obviated the need for redistribution and social conflict, that class had no place in American politics" and used these beliefs as a rationale for avoiding fundamental change.[22] The effect was that "In 1932 those who endorsed the Communist party's candidate for President of the United States included Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Langston Hughes, Theodore Dreiser,Erskine Caldwell, Lincoln Steffens, Richard White, Katherine Anne Porter, Edmund Wilson, Nathanael West and Malcolm Cowley. Twenty years later, scarcely an intellectual with a shred of reputation could be found even to raise a voice against the outlawing of that same party. The change is measured, too, by the trajectory, in hardly more than a decade of Partisan Review, the most admired highbrow periodical of the time, from dutiful Stalinism through Trotskyite heresy to the bleakest Cold War anti-communist orthodoxy."[23] Hodgson also documents the break up of the consensus which began around the time of the Kennedy assassination but was accelerated by the growing opposition to the Vietnam war. He describes the split in American society that followed and the growth of a counter-culture consisting of a mixture of radicals and rebels of which the Beat movement was a part.[24]

Another important issue which must concern us here was the political position of homosexuals before the Stonewall riots of 1969 when they were under considerable threat.[25] Homosexuals at that time were very much on the fringes of society because it was difficult for them to be fully open about their sexuality. Gay men met in bars and cafes but often did not disclose their

sexuality in the society at large. A mixture of social estrangement and integration seems to have marked the position of homosexuals, since they needed to be able to recognise each other but to conceal their identity from others who might be hostile to it. Homosexuals to some degree developed their own culture of gay codes and language but homosexual culture was also assimilated and diffused within the heterosexual community. This diffusion of a gay sensibility into the society as a whole, whereby it became accommodated within that society and therefore less threatening to it, is characterised by Susan Sontag in "Notes on Camp" as a camp sensibility. Among the characteristics of camp outlined by Sontag are artifice and exaggeration, seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon, being frivolous about the serious and serious about the frivolous, and depoliticisation.[26]

In the visual arts the modernist aesthetic, exemplified in New York by Abstract Expressionism, was strongly influenced by romanticism: it perpetuated the idea of the artist as a unique human being and art as an order which was above politics. Modernist technique exemplified fragmentation and plurality rather than the unity of perspective which might provide a firm political position, nevertheless modernism did strive for a coherence which could, in theory, be compatible with a political position. Modernist criticism, in the formalist approach exemplified by Clement Greenberg, emphasised the medium, "The arts, then, have been hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated and defined. It is by virtue of its medium that each art is unique and strictly itself."[27] But modernist criticism also detached avant-garde

art from any political position since the art object was analysed as a self-contained object without any reference to the social formation. Abstract Expressionism itself was caught up in political contradiction. Many abstract expressionist artists believed that art could be moral and ethical without having any subject matter which directly related to political matters. For example Barnett Newman in a television interview with O'Hara says that he hopes that his work is both ethical and moral.[28] In an interview with Dorothy Seckler Newman also said about his painting "It is full of meaning, but the meaning must come from the seeing, not from the talking. I feel, however, that one of its implications is its assertion of freedom, its denial of dogmatic principles, its repudiation of all dogmatic life. Almost fifteen years ago Harold Rosenberg challenged me to explain what one of my paintings could possibly mean to the world. My answer was that if he and others could read it properly it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism." [29] But in fact the use of the word "freedom" was part of cold war ideology and Abstract Expressionism was being used by the establishment to promote Cold War tactics. Recently many critics have drawn attention to the coercion of MOMA in government politics during the Cold War. Eva Cockcroft stressing the involvement of the Rockefellers including Nelson, in MOMA and the involvement of MOMA with USA foreign policy during the war, goes on to say:

> After the war, staff from the Inter-American Affairs

Office were transferred to MOMA's foreign activities. Rene d'Harnoncourt, who had proven himself an expert in the organization and installation of art exhibits when he helped American Ambassador Dwight Morrow cultivate the Mexican Muralists at the time Mexico's oil nationalism threatened Rockefeller oil interests, was appointed head of the art section of Nelson's Office of Inter-American Affairs in 1943. A year later he was brought to MOMA as vice-president in charge of foreign activities. In 1949 D'Harnoncourt became MOMA's director. The man who was to direct MOMA's international programme in the 1950's, Porter McCray, also worked in the Office of Inter-American Affairs during the War.[30]

According to Cockcroft, MOMA'S subsequent promotion of art internationally went hand in hand with the CIA's desire to "influence the foreign intellectual community and to present a strong image of the United States as a 'free society' as opposed to the 'regimented' communist bloc."[31] As Serge Guilbaut points out "abstract expressionism was for many people an expression of freedom...freedom was the symbol most enthusiatically promoted by the new liberalism during the Cold War."[32] In addition the pop art of Andy Warhol or the new realism of Johns and Rauschenberg, brought back urban imagery and objects and events from the contemporary world, but the political import of much of this work was highly ambiguous (John's flag is neither obviously patriotic nor subversive) and did not necessarily undermine the status quo.

In literature there was a more complete split between the

established academic poets such as Robert Lowell and the non-establishment poets such as the New York poets who were given very little recognition. This split occurred because only certain types of subject matter and style were considered acceptable to the literary establishment. This meant that any poetry which broke out of pre-conceived forms and "significant" subject matter was to some extent in opposition to the established literary order.[33]

O'Hara: Social and Political Milieu

There is no evidence from Frank O'Hara's letters or essays that he was active in politics though he showed some interest in and concern about such matters. In particular he was concerned about Civil Rights and was a friend and supporter of LeRoi Jones.[34] Like many artists of his time O'Hara felt that work that was artistically innovative was a challenge to society irrespective of direct political subject matter and in an interview with me Larry Rivers said that he thought O'Hara and he probably both believed that Abstract Expressionism, in itself, represented radical thinking.35

In interviews with me most of O'Hara's friends such a Joe LeSueur claimed O'Hara was a liberal but opinions varied from "completely apolitical" (Grace Hartigan) to "radical" David Shapiro, to "as far to the left as you can get in Americn politics" (John Ashbery).[36] As an employee of the MOMA (he was employed by Porter McCray as part of the international programme) he was implicated in the establishment Cold War policy

of pushing American art internationally as a symbol of American values. On the other hand as a homosexual he was part of a group which was being supressed in the society. (Though O´Hara was also highly assimilated into heterosexual society and his sexuality seems to have been a complex one not easily categorisable as homosexual).[37] As a writer O´Hara was rejected by the literary establishment but well-recognised within his own circle.[38] So O´Hara was both integrated into and outlawed by the power structures of New York society.

More generally, O´Hara´s letters show his greatest concerns to be his immediate circle of friends and their and his own artistic efforts: the sense of participating in an artistic culture and also of engaging a number of people in intense personal friendships seems to have been very important to him. The letters also show evidence of his involvement in a busy social round of parties, gossip, heavy drinking, weekends on Long Island and cultural interests which include the radical but tend as far as music and film are concerned towards the middle of the road (with a strong attraction towards opera and ballet). O´Hara´s idols, mentioned in these letters include Puccini, Verdi, Balanchine, Garbo, Dietrich, Ben Weber, Schumann, Nureyev, Debussy, Dostoyevsky, Truffaut, Brahms, Feldman, Leontyne Price, Boulez, Ronald Firbank, Milhaud and Beckett. The letters show an almost obsessive, though semi-serious interest in Hollywood, often containing long re-runs of films O´Hara has just seen including stars such as Monroe, Garbo and Dietrich. (In a letter to Grace Hartigan a photo of Margaret Lion and Marlene Dietrich is enclosed with the words "I´m hoping you´ll

immortalise them both in paint.")[39] The milieu was in many respects non-intellectual; in interviews with me some of O´Hara´s friends and collaborators implied that there was not much analytical discussion of creative procedure.[40] "Camping it up" which included love of ironising, extravagance, theatricalising, adulation of film-stars, making up feminine names for each other and debunking the serious (including one´s own seriousness) was an important aspect of the social milieu, and is evident in the tone and style of the letters.

In his "manifestos" O´Hara shows his antipathy towards turning his poetry into any kind of programme including a political one. For example in "The Statement for The New American Poetry" (CP,500) he says that he does not care about "bettering (other than accidentally) anyone´s state or social relation..." And in "Personism: A Manifesto" (CP,498) he says:

> 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.

In "American Art and Non-American Art" [41] O´Hara takes a somewhat passive attitude towards the role of art in society.

Though he points to art as a response to violence in the city "violence is the atmosphere in which much of it is created ", he does not see art so much as a way of changing that violence but of helping us to "bear and understand it". In other words he sees the role of art as absorbing, transforming and dissipating the problems of society rather than rising up against them. He also implies in the same essay that political impotence is an advantage in the production of art. "No American committee of writers is going to get anybody out of jail. Few Americans consider a great artist a source of national pride, and certainly the government is not going to reward him. This is all a great advantage which has been put to good use". In Art Chronicle 1 (AC, 5-6) he distances himself from both capitalism and communism:

In a capitalist country everything is fun. Fun is the only justification for the acquisitive impulse... Abstract expressionism is not (fun) and its justifications must be found elsewhere. Not to say it as justification, but simply as fact, Abstract expressionism is tbe art of serious men. They are serious because they are <u>not</u> isolated. So out of this populated cavern of self come brilliant uncomfortable works, works that don´t reflect you or your life, though you can know them. Art is not <u>your</u> life, it is someone else´s. Something very difficult for the acquisitive impulse to understand, and for that matter the spirit of joinership that animates communism. But it´s there.

O´Hara does not totally detach the idea of art from society,

rather he puts faith in the idea that art is more more powerful than politics: in "American Art and non-American art" he says, "The State department wouldn't be so upset about satellites if it knew more about art, which will all stay 'up' longer than any of the projects planned by scientists to date. If any of us do get into the future it won't be by means of a lot of spheres and tank suits". In a television appearance in which he interviews David Smith he implies after an initial reference to "our excessively materialistic society" that art has a social role because it reflects and reveals truths about society:

But apart from such ideas there is one quality which is shared by all great art that we know, and that quality is attention. Not attention to society, or its needs, but attention to the quality of life itself. A major artist may reveal in his work more of the actual characteristics of that society than the most active sociologist or politician, if those characteristics appear in his conscious or subconscious conception of life itself; at no point can the artist, as a living human being, be totally divorced from his social existence. There are a few characteristics which apply to major artists of every period or epoch. For purposes of teaching and criticism it is the differences between periods which are usually emphasised, and these differences coincide with the historical differences in political thinking, social development, dress and manners, even religious convictions. In this way art becomes the aesthetic manifestation of whatever the culture presents or represents. It

is the aesthetic illustration of that culture, just as Napoleons's career may be the political illustration of a certain period in French History, or Mozart the evocation of precious, and temporary Viennese supremacy. [42]

In fact O'Hara in his prose writing and scripts shows a certain naivety about the social function of art which is symptomatic of the artists of his time. While not divorcing the artist from society he implies, without really arguing for or being able to to support such a position,. that good art will almost automatically reveal certain truths about that society. He does not address the problem of the manipulation of art by the political system and his opinions do nothing to refute or cut through cold-war ideology.

Politics and society in O'Hara's poetry.

In O'Hara's poetry, unlike John Ashbery's, which Eric Mottram has said "at times approaches the hermetic" there are many references, direct or oblique to politically-charged events.[43] However they do not resonate in the direction of a programme for social reform. O'Hara is never forceful and direct in condemnation of America in the way, for example, that Ginsberg is in "Howl". Instead his poems demonstrate what Raymond Williams has called "structures of feeling"... meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt".[44] For example in "Personal Poem", (CP p.335), the beating up of Miles Davis and the reference to the black activist Le Roi Jones evoke the issue of racial inequality. But these references are packed in between

numerous other observations that the poet makes and other thoughts that pass through his mind including ruminations on his own personal happiness (what he wants to know is who out of 8,000,000 people is thinking of him.)

Because it does not have a political programme O'Hara's work is often regarded as being apolitical or his poetry is taken to be an outright celebration of American life. I want to show that although O'Hara's poetry contains oscillating and conflicting social and political attitudes a political stance does emerge which is, in some respects, oppositional to the political and social formation. To do this I want to move from poems which (despite a certain ambivalence towards it) can more easily be accommodated within the society in which they were produced, to others which I see as much more oppositional to it. I want to begin with two poems which though they celebrate American society also show ambivalence towards it, that is distrust of it as well as delight in it. But I also want to show that this distrust never goes as far as real opposition and can therefore be contained within the liberal consensus. In "A Step Away from Them" (CP p.257) the landscape is that of New York with all the paraphernalia of modern America such as Coca Cola and cheeseburgers but O'Hara walks through the streets in the manner of Walter Benjamin's flâneur. The poet encourages us to see what he sees but at the same time he invests everything he sees round him with magical qualities: the torsos of the workers glisten, the sound of traffic is music which "suddenly honks" and the movement of the traffic dance-like, "the cabs stir up

the air". The poem transforms traffic, crowds and commerce by investing them with sensual appeal and by using the walk to connect isolated events into a fluid picture of life in the city. The poem undermines the opposition between city and country by imbueing the city with many of the magical qualities which have been traditionally attributed to the countryside. In this sense the poem is a celebration of life in the streets of New York and of the implied capitalist system which underpins it, but a certain air of ambivalence hangs over the poem. Violence and death are unavoidably present in the death of friends but also in the violence of society itself, characterised in the Bullfight and the tearing down of the warehouse. Camp ironising, a spirit of fun and an enjoyment of excess goes hand in hand with a sense of waste and exploitation: "neon in daylight " may be "a great pleasure" but it is also rather unnecessary, like having the light bulb on during the day, as are the furs a rich lady wears on a hot day. However these observations are not pushed towards any claim for the necessity of changing society: instead death appears as a universal human condition and art maintains its traditional role of the power to transform. Consequently a universal fellow feeling emerges in the poem but this is largely accommodated within the assumptions of the liberal consensus rather than challenging it.

A similar ambivalence emerges in "To the Film Industry in Crisis". (C.P. page 232). On the one hand the poem is a jovial "camp" celebration of one of the gods of American society, and of the love of the extravagance and excess of the film industry. It is in a poem such as this that O'Hara comes nearest to the

glorification of the superficial which his detractors have raised against him and which, I would concede, his continuous exploration of the boundaries between the significant and trivial, serious and humourous occasionally lead him into. But even in this poem the film-makers, actors etc. are both image-makers and iconoclasts. The "camp" hyperbole in the poem turns back on itself, and it is part of its humour to suggest that the film-industry is seedy, materialistic and escapist:

> Long may you illumine space with your marvellous
> appearances, delays
> and enunciations, and may the money of the world
> glitteringly cover you
> as you rest after a long day under the kleig lights
> with your faces
> in packs for our edification, the way the clouds come
> often at night
> but the heavens operate on the star system. It is a
> divine precedent
> you perpetuate! Rolls on, reels of celluloid, as the
> great earth rolls on

Hollywood is exposed as needing "the money of the world" to cover it; its illumination of space glitters rather than shines; the actors have to put their faces in packs afterwards; the witty pun on "star system" only accentuates the non-heavenly nature of the film-stars themselves and "sends up" the film

industry. But again O'Hara's facility for inflating language until it actually inverts suggests ambivalence rather than a desire for social change.

In "Ode: Salute to The French Negro Poets" (CP,305) O'Hara goes much further towards being overtly critical of the political formation: he talks of "the terrible western world" and of how "to love at all's to be a politician" and he also identifies himself with Whitman. Here O'Hara's ethic of friendship opens up into an expansive camaraderie, an infinite sociability which extends to society at large. This finds expression in the poem in a call for universal co-operation and racial equality:

> I call
> to the spirits of other lands to make fecund my
> existence.

but this universal co-operation can only occur through personal contact, "face to face". Whereas we usually feel that O'Hara's poems see friendship as more important than social action and reform, and his circle of friends seems an exclusive elite into which strangers cannot enter, this poem implies that it should be possible for personal love to interact with a larger more general love; it should not be the case that "one specific love's traduced/by shame for what you love more generally and never would avoid".

Throughout the poem, but particularly at the end, personal relationships, art and social equality are shown to be equally important and interdependent but the struggle to reconstitute

them as values is never-ending :

> the only truth is face to face, the poem whose words
> become your mouth
> and dying in black and white we fight for what we love,
> not are.

"Ode to the French Negro Poets" is probably O'Hara's most political poem in the conventional sense. However it can still be accommodated within a society whose values it does not really subvert.

It is however when they deal with homosexual relationships that O'Hara's poems most call into question and oppose the social structures which restrict those relationships. Again there is no political programme in that the poems do not advocate homosexuality, argue for it in any way, try to evoke sympathy for homosexuals or present a picture of repressed homosexuality. But the poems are radical for their time, both in taking homosexuality as their subject, in conveying the impression that homosexuality is completely natural and socially acceptable and in directly presenting the physical aspects of such relationships. Here O'Hara is oppositional, not by being overtly confrontational but by taking homosexuality for granted.

A powerful aspect of the homosexual love poems, is the way that they make us as readers participate. The use of the word "you" here is a powerful means of engaging the reader. In "Poem: When I am feeling depressed and anxious sullen" (CP, 349)

the poet addresses his lover but also engages the audience as sexual partner:

> When I am feeling depressed and anxious sullen
> all you have to do is take your clothes off
> and all is wiped away revealing life's tenderness
> that we are flesh and breathe and are near us
> as you are really as you are I become as I

while in "You are Gorgeous and I'm coming" the reader is engaged in a metaphorical orgasm, "the past falling away as an acceleration of nerves thundering and shaking" which takes him/her into the sexual experience itself.

It is an interesting feature of these poems that it is never stated that both lovers are male though most readers of O'Hara's poetry would now be aware that these relationships were homosexual. While some of the imagery strongly suggests male sexuality:

> jetting I commit the immortal spark jetting
> you give that form to my life the Ancients loved
> "Poem" (Twin spheres full of fur and noise) (CP, 405)

The language and aura is that of heterosexual romantic love:

> that mouth that is used in talking too much
> speaks at last of the tenderness of Ancient China
> and the love of form the Odyssies

while the uncertainies and instabilities which I discussed earlier are also those of heterosexual love. Such poems seem to assume that homosexuality is so much part of the natural order of things that it does not need to be stated. It also interesting that in these poem O´Hara drops any camp mannerisms which might allow the reader the opportunity to stereo-type homosexual behaviour and thereby distance himself from it.

The treatment of homosexuality is very different from the approach used by Allen Ginsberg in "Many Loves" where the maleness of the lovers is openly and directly emphasised.[45] But the O´Hara poems may be ultimately more effective in undermining prejudice against homosexuality by refusing to acknowledge any essential difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality: taking the (non-gay) reader unawares the poems make him/her participate in an experience he/she might be normally tempted to regard as foreign to his own. In contrast the Ginsberg poem forces the reader to be a voyeur, a role he/she may withdraw from in distaste. The details in the Ginsberg are more objectively related but are less seductive. If we compare Ginsberg´s:

> our bellies together nestling, loins touched together, pressing and knowledgable each other´s hardness, and mine stuck out of my underwear

with O´Hara´s:

Twin spheres full of fur and noise
rolling softly up my belly beddening on my chest
and then my mouth is full of suns
that softness seems so anterior to that hardness

from "Poem: Twin spheres full of fur and noise" (CP, p.405) the physical details in the O´Hara poem seems more persuasive and more erotic. This poem also makes with a link with heterosexual sex by emphasising the interaction of "feminine" and "masculine" elements softness and hardness in any sexual act, even those involving two men and using images which specifically suggest femininity "twin spheres."

Bruce Boone takes the matter of homosexuality as oppositional within the poems further by maintaining that O´Hara uses a gay language which is oppositional. This is an interesting area for research. However although Boone is probably right in thinking that O´Hara did use, in part, a gay language, the evidence he produces for this and his analysis of it are weak (he mainly just states that the poetry sounds gay). His argument that it is oppositional is also unconvincing for the examples he uses such as "At the Old Place" (CP, 223) and "Poem :Lana Turner has collapsed" (CP,449) would probably be perceived less as oppositional than ´camp´ which I have already suggested was more easily accommodated into the society. Furthermore it sees unlikely that gay language is more than a small element of O´Hara´s langauge which involves a cross-over of many different types of language. It seems to me that homosexuality as subject matter is more important in O´Hara´s poems than his use of gay

language and that by concentrating on gay language Boone is deflecting attention from the important use of homosexuality as subject matter.[46]

Homosexuality apart, O'Hara's work can also be seen to be oppositional in the way his subject matter and forms so often cut across the cherished assumptions of society.There recurs throughout O'Hara's poetry a continual inversion of accepted moral and ethical standards and of "normal" behaviour which is all the more subversive for refusing to see itself as such and for being casual and light-hearted.

In "Ave Maria" (CP, 371) O'Hara wittily flouts convention by seeming to suggest that children might benefit form a sexual enounter in the cinema:

> oh mothers you will have made the little tykes
> so happy because if nobody does pick them up in the movies
> they won't know the difference
> and if somebcdy dces it'll be sheer gravy
> and they'll have been truly entertained either way
> instead of hanging round the yard

Equally unacceptable to conventional standards is the way O'Hara's poems often do not stick to "serious" issues even where they are ostensibly engaging them. So in "Should we legalise abortion" (CP, 482) the poet makes various "abortive" attempts to

discuss the issue but keeps wandering from the point.

In addition O'Hara refuses to take the political establishment at all seriously or in Ashbery's words he "ignores its right to exist".[47] In "Poem:Khrushchev is Coming on the Right Day!" he debunks political protocol:

> and Khrushchev was probaby being carped at
> in Washington, no politesse

while in "Image of the Bhudda Preaching" (CP,323) he wittily deflates the gross arrogance of western imperialism by inverting it:

> I am very happy to be to be here at the Villa Hugel
> And Prime Minister Nehru has asked me tc greet the
> people of Essen
> and to tell you how powerfully affected we in India
> have been by Germany's philosophy, traditions and
> mythology
> though our lucidity and our concentration on archetypes
> put us in a class by ourself

Furthermore O'Hara's use of non-poetic subject matter, his levelling out of the relationship between the serious and the trivial, his conception of the poem as immediate and improvisatory, his radical break down of the conventional structures of language and accepted modes and his use of so-called obscene language in a poem such as "Easter", all of which are discussed in more detail throughout this thesis, places

his poetry in opposition to the norms of academic poetry and implicitly to the commercial and political structures of which such a poetry is a part.

O'Hara and Ginsberg.

I have argued that social and political attitudes in O'Hara's poetry emerge in conflicting perspectives which nevertheless are by no means wholly admiring of the society in which they are produced and which include some poems which have an oppositional content. I want in conclusion to compare a poem of O'Hara's with one of Allen Ginsberg's since Ginsberg would normally be regarded as the much more political of the two. In making this comparison I will also be returning to the issue of the relationship between politics and poetry which I addressed at the beginning of this section and to the idea of contradiction within political thought and the tendency of poetry to undercut its own assumptions. O'Hara and Ginsberg are usually seen as fundamentally different and in many respects they are. They have radically different styles, Ginsberg is forceful and polemical O'Hara is witty and politically evasive. Ginsberg speaks for his generation, O'Hara for his friends and anyone who happens to be listening. Stylistically Ginsberg's metaphorical, rhetorical sentences are in contrast to O'Hara's unpredictable images and choppy syntax. What I want to argue here, however, is that they also share a certain common ground, for Ginsberg's poetry like O'Hara's involves elements of inversion. Here I am reverting to the point I made earlier that even the most

political poetry bears the seeds of its own contradiction. A comparison of Ginsberg´s "Howl"[48] and O´Hara´s "Ode to Joy" illustrates this. "Ode to Joy" ostensibly depicts a utopia, where "we shall have everything we want and there´ll be no more dying" and on one level it is a witty, hedonistic celebration of excess extravagance and physical pleasure. But everything in this utopia is also a kind of hell where we would be tied to physical and material pleasure:

> for our symbol, we´ll acknowledge . vulgar materialistic
> laughter
> over an insatiable sexual appetite

and where the imagination itself will "stagger like a tired paramour". The heros will be the criminal, the self-loving and the commercially successful:

> and the photographs of murderers and narcissists and
> movie stars
> will swell from the walls and books alive in steaming
> rooms
> to press against our burning flesh not once but
> interminably

and art itself will come to a standstill:

> and there´ll be no more music but the ears in lips and
> no more wit
> but tongues in ears and no more drums but ears to thighs

Ultimately then, though it may be desired, a world where physical and material delights are taken to such excess could be a barren world of loveless isolation and abnegation of moral and social responsibility:

> a lava flows up and over the far-down somnolent city's
> abdication
> and the hermit always wanting to be lone is lone at
> last
> and the weight of external crushes the heat-hating
> Puritan
> whose self-defeating vice becomes a proper sepulchre at
> last
> that love may live

Ginsberg's poem starts from the opposite position, that of an outright condemnation of American society. The poet who condemns "Moloch ! Solitude!Filth ! Ugliness!" has seen "the best minds of (his) generation destroyed by madness": but in this poem the opposite inversion seems to occur. For a poem about the hell of modern life in the city results in a glorification of a counter-culture which this society has produced: the hipsters are angel-headed and burn, "for the ancient heavenly connection" sex, drugs and alcohol (rather than political action) seem like the new religious values. with possibilities for self-transcendence, raised consciousness and dynamism which

seem to lift them beyond the limitations of modern life :

> who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz
>
> who bared their brains to heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,
>
> who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war,
>
> (p.126)

or

> who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym of consciousness,
>
> (p. 128)

This inversion, in the sense that the poem seems to glorify the values which it claims society must be condemned for creating, in seeming to celebrate behaviour which evades the kind of concerted political action which might be necessary for change, is also built into the imagery of the poem which works against itself. While O'Hara's more abstract poem turns to concrete images of the city, for example, "buildings will go up into the dizzy air as love itself goes in" and "as they rise like

buildings to the needs of temporary neighbours." Ginsberg's images of the city continually move away into more abstract concepts :

> who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time, & alarm clocks fell on their heads every day for the next decade
>
> (p.129)

The point I want to emphasise here is that both O'Hara and Ginsberg in "Ode to Joy" and "Howl" draw our attention, in their different ways, to the kind of inversion of values which is taking place in modern society (where the ideal of spiritual satisfaction is in physical and material pleasure but where such pleasures are unable to sustain the kind of spiritual appetite they generate) but at the same time both men are participating in those values. As a result both poems demonstrate the contradictory elements in political programmes which the aesthetic function of poetry has the capacity to explore. The comparison demonstrates that any clear-cut definition of O'Hara as completely apolitical and Ginsberg as political is somewhat simplistic and does not take complete account of the complexities both of the social situation and of poetic form. To sum up, I hope I have shown in the this chapter that the ambivalent and multiple self is also an active and decisive one, and that O'Hara's poetry, even if it does evade a political programme and

is "affected by hegemonic limits and pressures" is critical of, and does in some respects oppose itself to, the political and social structure in which it is produced.

Notes

1. O'Hara, Frank, Poems Retrieved ed. Allen, Donald Bolinas, California, Grey Fox Press, 1977. p. 141. Hereafter cited as PR with page numbers in the text.

2.Rivers, Larry, Speech Read at Springs, in Berkson, Bill, LeSueur, Joe ed. Homage to Frank O'Hara, Berkeley, Creative Arts Book Company, 1980. p. 135.

3. Altieri, Charles, Enlarging the Temple p. 118.

4. Derrida, Jacques. in The Structuralist Controversy: p.271.

5. Sandler,Irving, The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism, London, Harper and Row, 1970, p. 30.

6. Hobbs, Robert. Rewriting History:Artistic Collaboration since 1960 in McCabe, Cynthia Jaffee ed. Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century, Washington, Smithsonian Institution press, 1984. Catalogue for an exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. p. 70.

7. Olson, Charles, Projective Verse in Allen, Donald and Tallman, Warren, ed. The Poetics of the New American Poetry, New York, 1979, p.156.

8. Ibid.

9. Olson, Charles. "The Kingfishers" in Allen, Donald, ed. The New American Poetry, New York, Grove Press, 1960.

10. Cage, John, Silence: Lectures and Writing, Cambride, Mass, M.I.T.Press, 1967, p. 71.

11. Cage, John. An interview with Roger Reynolds, in Schwarz, Elliot, Childs, Barney, ed. Contemporary Composers and Contemporary Composition, New York ,Da Capo Press, 1967, p. 336.

12.There is a considerable amount of information about autobiographical aspects of the poetry in both Perloff, Frank O´Hara and in Berkson, , LeSueur Homage to Frank O´Hara.

In interviews with me friends and colleagues of O´Hara often alluded to the autobiographical nature of the poems. For example Donald Allen in an interview, San Francisco, 17th September 1986 said that "Hotel Transylvanie" was written one day when O´Hara had had a row with Vincent Warren. Grace Hartigan, in an interview, Tivoli, New York State, 12th August 1986, said that that the passage in the poem "Day and Night in 1952" (CP, p.93) "Grace may secretly distrust me but we are both so close to the abyss that we must see a lot of each other, grinning and carrying on as if it were a picnic given by somebody else´s church" was a very accurate description of their relationship. "At a certain point I felt his rage and his criticism and I feared it."

In more general terms, and with reference to my discussion of

ambivalence and multiplicity of self in O'Hara's poetry, O'Hara's friends and colleagues, in interviews with me , stressed O'Hara's sharp changes of mood, his openness to his own feelings. In an interview with me, Southampton, New York State, July 31st 1986, Larry Rivers said O'Hara gave everybody "a slightly shaky feeling". Generally they attributed his changes of mood to near alcoholism.

In an interview with me, New York City, 26th August 1986, Joe LeSueur also said that O'Hara did not talk much about his past although he encouraged Joe to do so. An interesting aspect of O'Hara's letters is that although he sometimes refers to his mood (sometimes to say he was depressed) he rarely discusses it at length or in detail.

13. Ashbery, John, Selected Poems, London, Paladin, 1987, p.3.

14. Ibid, p.9.

15. Although he is not mentioned in it, Vincent Warren, the dancer with whom O'Hara had an affair, is the addressee of this poem. In an interview with me, Joe LeSueur, New York City, August 26th 1986 said Vincent's name did not appear in this and other poems because he wanted the poems kept anonymous. O'Hara's letters often express anxiety about his relationship with Vincent. For example, in a letter to Grace Hartigan, New York City, July 27th 1960, among the papers of Grace Hartigan, George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y., he says, "But I miss him a lot , and it was very nerve-racking going

up there, but it turned out fine. I don't know why I was so apprehensive about it. Life! one never learns (I mean I don't)."

16. Frank O'Hara's strong friendships are evident throughout his poems and letters, are documented in Berkson, LeSueur, Homage to Frank O'Hara and were attested to in every interview by the author with his friends and colleagues.

17. Grace Hartigan, interview with the author, Tivoli, New York State, August 12th 1986.

18. This poem was originally called "To Joe".

19. Williams, Raymond, Marxism and Literature, Oxford, Oxford Univerity Press, 1977, p.112.

20. Williams, p.114.

21. Hodgson, Godfrey, America in Our Time, New York, Vintage Books, 1978.

22. Ibid p.89.

23. Ibid p.94.

24. Ibid pp. 326-364.

25. Boone, Bruce. Gay Language as Political Praxis: The poetry of Frank O'Hara in Social Text, Winter 1979, pp.59-92. The situation of gay men pre-Stonewall is referred to on p. 86.

26. Sontag, Susan. Notes on Camp, in A Susan Sontag Reader, England, Penguin, 1982. pp. 105-119.

27. Greenberg, Clement, "Towards a Newer Lacocoon" in Frascina, Francis, ed. Pollock and After: The Critical Debate, London, Harper and Row, 1985.p. 42.

28. O'Hara, interview with Barnett Newman, The Continuity of Vision, in the series Art: New York produced by Colin Clark for Channel 13/WNDT-TV, Newark,N.J. (assoc. producer, William Berkson) directed by Bruce Minnix (assoc. director, Ina Korek). First televised on 8th December,1964. In the Film Department of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

29. Barnett Newman interview with Dorothy Seckler cited in Tuchman, Maurice, ed. The New York School: Abstract Expressionism in the 40's and 50's, London, Thames and Hudson, (no date of publication). p. 112.

30. Cockcroft Eva. Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War, in Frascina, Francis, ed. Pollock and After: The Critical Debate, p. 127.

31. Ibid pp.128-129.

32. Guilbaut,Serge. The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America., ibid p. 163

33. Boone. Gay language p.29.

34. O´Hara seems to have had a strong friendship with Jones and to have been very enthusiastic about his work. According to Larry Rivers, (interview with the author Southampton, 31st July 1986, O´Hara would hear no wrong said of LeRoi. In an unpublished letter to Vincent Warren, New York City, 17th July 1961 O´Hara says that he thinks LeRoi´s "The system of Dante´s Inferno" is one of the best and most important works of our time.O´Hara is mentioned in In LeRoi Jones, Autobiography, Freundlich Books, New York,1984. This letter appears in the collected unpublished Letters of Frank O´Hara ed. Allen Donald, in the Special Collections Department of University Connecticut Library, Storrs Connecticut.All unpublished letters cited will be from this collection unless also stated to be in another public collection.

35. Larry Rivers, interview with the author, Southampton, 31st July 1986.

36. Interviews with the author: Joe LeSueur, New York City, August 26th 1986 Grace Hartigan, Tivoli, August 12th 1986; David Shapiro, New York City, July 22nd 1986; John Ashbery, New York

City, September 3rd 1986, and Bill Berkson, San Francisco, 17th September 1986.

37. O´Hara seems to have had a complex sexuality which involved intense relationships with men, such as Bill Berkson, as well as with women, which were non-sexual. In an interview by John Gruen in The Party´s Over Now, New York, Viking Press 1972, Bill Berkson says, "I guess a lot of people would categorise Frank as a homosexual. I don´t believe he was. I think he was supersexual...In his poems for example there isn´t the constant relish of the idea of sex. Sex doesn´t always seem like such a great thing. Frank just had an affection for people and this affection became a super, or superlative thing." In Berkson, LeSueur, Homage to Frank O´Hara p.42, John Button also says, "three of his profoundly engaged love affairs were platonic and were with men who did not share Frank´s erotic interests. If, in these cases, there was little or no sex, there surely was all the passion of love".

38. Boone, Gay Language p.66-71.

39. Unpublished letter to Grace Hartigan, New York City, September 12th 1955. George Arents library, University of Syracuse.

40. In an interview with the author Grace Hartigan said artistic interaction took the form of metaphors and jokes rather than analytical discussion.

41. O'Hara, Frank, American and Non-American Art in Allen, Donald ed Standing Still and Walking in New York San Francisco, Grey Fox Press, 1983. Hereafter cited in the text as SS with page numbers.

42. Papers relating to O'Hara's interview of David Smith, David Smith:Sculpting Master of Bolton Landing, televised on 11th November 1964 for the Art:New York series,on Channel 13 /WNDT-TV, are among the papers of Bill Berkson Special Collections, University of Connecticut Library, Storrs, Connecticut. (Berkson was associate producer of the programme.)The film itself is in the Film Department of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

43. Mottram, Eric. John Ashbery: All in the refined, Assimilable state, Poetry Information, 1979 Vol. 21 p.31-52. Mottram also interestingly draws attention to Ashbery's "innate conservatism".

44. Williams, Marxism and Literature, p.132.

45. Ginsberg, Allen, Collected Poems, London Penguin, 1987, p.156.

46. Boone. Gay Language, p.59-92.

47. Ashbery takes up this matter in a letter to Louis Simpson in Nation CCIV.8th May 1967. He upbraids Simpson for taking exception (in his article, "Dead Horse and Live Issues") to Ashbery's remarks about the lack of explicit programme in Frank O'Hara' poetry. In response to Simpson Ashbery quotes from the article of his own which he says Simpson has misrepresented. The quotation is as follows:

Frank O'Hara's poetry has no program and therefore it cannot be joined. It does not advocate sex and dope as a panacea for the ills of modern society; it does not speak out against the war in Vietnam or in favour of civil rights; it does not paint gothic vignettes of the post-atomic age; in a word it does not attack the establishment, it merely ignores its right to exist, and is thus a source of annoyance to partisans of every stripe...it is not surprising that critics have found him self-indulgent; his culte-du-moi is overpowering; his poems are all about him and the people and images who wheel through his consciousness, and they seek no further justification; "This is me and I'm poetry, Baby", seem to be their message, and unlike the message of committed poetry, it incites one to all the programs of committment as well as to every other form of self-realisation: interpersonal, dionysian, occult or abstract.

After quoting this Ashbery goes on to comment:

It should be evident from the foregoing that I am not

"sneering at the conscience of other poets" but praising Frank O'Hara for giving a unique voice to his conscience, far more effective than most of the protest poetry being written today...poetry is poetry. Protest is protest. I believe in both forms of action..." (he lists his own political activities.)

48. Ginsberg, Alan, Collected Poems, London, Penguin, 1987, p.126. Further page numbers given in the text.

Chapter Three:The Poet-Improvisor: working methods, talk and performance

"poetry or talking talking poetry poetry and talking"-David Antin[1]

"You just go on your nerve"- Personism: A Manifesto (CP,498)

So far I have mainly concentrated on the way in which O´Hara´s poetry is never fixed in terms of either structure, meaning or value. But paradoxically, in order to analyse the poems I have had to fix them in the sense of viewing them as verbal constructions which we read retrospectively. This kind of textual analysis has certain limitations in that it detaches the poem from the whole process of how the poem was made, and certain aspects of how it communicates, the impression it creates. This chapter will reinstate O´Hara´s poems into this process of conception and reception and show how they interrogate the idea of the poem as a construction which is detached from the process in which it is formed and received. It will speculate on the kind of processes that go into the writing of the poems and their effect, and show how the written poem revives and reinforces the impression of the process, of the poem unfolding and happening before us.

I will argue that in O´Hara´s poems this process of working and reception is particularly integral and overt. Consequently, I want, in this chapter, to use the concept of improvisation to discuss the poetry. O´Hara´s poems have often been called improvisational but there has been little attempt by those who

have written about him to analyse what improvisation really is and therefore what the term improvisation means when applied to him. In improvisation the process becomes inseparable from the work of art it produces, the process becomes the work of art. For improvisation occurs when the artist creates in a certain time-frame, when he/she produces work at speed, without specific preparation and without revision. In its most fundamental form improvisation takes place in real time and involves the simultaneous production and reception of the work: conversation is a form of improvisation in which we all engage. Therefore the most radical form of verbal improvisation is an act in which the poet or performer gets up in front of an audience and talks to his audience as David Antin does. However the idea of poetry in performance has not in the post-Renaissance Western tradition been integral to the conception of poetry, at least until quite recently. Therefore many writers have engaged in activities which do not involve speech or performance but which nevertheless are improvisatory in the sense that they involve working at speed with self-imposed limits on revision: this was the basis of surrealist automatic writing. O'Hara is clearly not an improvisor in the sense of actually talking to an audience (in which case we would have to work from recordings and transcriptions of recordings rather than written texts). But my contention will be that the process whereby he wrote his poems was fundamentally an improvisatory one in the sense of relying on speed, lack of revision and sometimes involving the presence of other people and that the poems themselves give a

strong impression, albeit an illusory one, of live communication.[2]

Improvisation can have a range of different effects on the work of art produced, though these are of course difficult to gauge. An improvisation is more likely to produce logical discontinuites since the speed the improvisor works at bypasses rationalising procedures. On the other hand the devices an improvisor learns to help him work at speed may produce structural continuities: contrary to popular belief improvisations are usually as highly structured, or more so, than works of art conceived at leisure and improvising is a learned and acquired skill. An improvisor is also likely to be influenced by, and bring into the improvisation, external events which occur as he/she improvises and also thoughts which occur to him/her during it. I will therefore argue that important and distinctive features of O'Hara's poetry arise at least in part from his involvement with improvisatory techniques and effects.

Improvisation and process in American music, poetry and art.

Before discussing the role of improvisatory techniques and effects in O'Hara's poem however I want to review briefly some of the ways in which improvisation was important in music, poetry and the visual arts during the period. Music of course is particularly well adapted to improvisation since musical performance can become composition, thereby turning process into product. In the fifties and sixties major breakthroughs occurred in jazz improvisation as jazz musicians freed themselves from self-imposed restraints to allow for much freer

improvisation.[3] The result of this development, in which Lennie Tristano, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman and Sun Ra were major figures, was the break down of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic constraints, more formal experiment, a greater emphasis on equality of improvising roles and new developments in instrumental technique. The old theme-improvisation-theme format in which the chord progressions and metrical scheme implied by the theme were used as the basis of the improvisation was replaced by modal improvising, of which the major landmark was the recording of "Milestones" in 1958;[4] improvising on tonal centres, for example, in early Ornette Coleman recordings such as "The shape of Jazz to Come"and "Change of the Century";[5] atonality, already present in "Cecil Taylor in Transition in 1955"[6] and melodic and motivic improvising exemplified in Ornette Coleman's "Free Jazz" 1960.[7] In addition, and in conjunction with this, a much greater degree of rhythmic freedom developed whereby players either adhered to a set pulse but disguised it with complicated cross rhythms and accentuation or disregarded the idea of a set pulse altogether. One of the results of the break up of these musical constraints was the development of highly energetic playing, of which Cecil Taylor was a major exponent.

In experimental music, the emphasis on what John Cage called pieces "indeterminate of (their) performance" in the work of composers such as Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff and Earle Brown, left some of the composing of the music up to the performers and meant that the evolution of the composition took

place at least partly during the performance.[8] Some parameters of the piece might be "fixed", others might be free; the degree of freedom for the performer could be very great, so that he had to generate a good deal of his own material or might be quite limited, so that he only had to rearrange or permute elements of the composition. For example in Cage's "Concert"[9] the player has a largely notated part but he can play any part of it and at his own speed while in Earle Brown's "Four Systems", for piano(s) and/or other instruments or sound-producing media, the graphic score consists of horizontal lines of varying length and thickness and the instructions on the score say that it "maybe played in any sequence, either side up, at any tempo(i).The continuous line from far left to far right defines the outer limits of the keyboard. Thickness may indicate dynamics or clusters."[10]. Some compositions might direct the performer to make certain decisions before the performance, others may force him to make decisions during it. For example Christian Wolff's "Duo for Pianists" uses a cueing system, so that what and when the performer plays depends on what he/she hears, forcinghim/her to respond during the course of the performance.[11] In either case the composition would be different and unpredictable (in most cases very substantially different) from performance to performance.

In poetry Olson's "Projective verse" essay and his concept of composition by field was very influential in the movement towards regarding the poem as process. In "Projective Verse" Olson says:

And I think it can be boiled down to one statement (first

pounded into my head by Edward Dahlberg): ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at all points (even, I should say, of our management of daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, 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 must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!"[12]

Olson's concept of open field encouraged the breaking open of pre-conceived forms for as Eric Mottram says, open field is "a gestalt which encourages the inventive imagination rather than imitative recognition patterns."[13] This conception of the poem as process was also fundamental to the work of Jack Kerouac, who in his poetry and prose also fostered improvisation as a technique and rejected revision. In "The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose " Kerouac wrote:

If possible write "without consciousness" in semitrance (as Yeats' later trance writing) allowing subconscious in its own uninhibited interesting necessary and so "modern " language what conscious art would censor, and write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typing-cramps, in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm, Reich's 'beclouding of consciousness' Come from within, out-to relaxed and said." [14]

Ginsberg, influenced by Kerouac, used a similar technique for the writing of "Howl" and sending Kerouac what he called the "100 per cent original draft. There is no pre-existent version", wrote in a letter, "I realise how right you are, that was the first time I sat down to blow, it came out in your method, sounding like you, an imitation practically."[15] Kerouac and Ginsberg's interest in improvisation in writing was in part a legacy of the surrealists and of automatism, for Breton actually equated surrealism with automatism:

"Surrealism,n.-Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing or by other means, the real functioning of thought. The dictation of thought, in the absence of all control exercised by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations".[16]

Similarly O'Hara's fellow writer Kenneth Koch has said, "when I evolved a style of my own that I liked, for years I found that in the best things that I wrote, I had no idea what I was saying while I was saying it, or certainly before. I found out while I was writing it-it was happening in the process."[17] More recently poetry has pursued the idea of improvisation much more vigorously through poems which rely on a performer to improvise on elements in them. Here the concept of improvisation and the process as the poem has been adapted in a different way than in O'Hara's poems. Jackson Mac Low's "A Word Event for George Brecht" and "Word Event(s) for Bici Forbes" consist of instructions for the performer, verbal scores, on which he /she

improvises.[18] This emphasis on process and performance has resulted in a convergence of poetry with music. In Mac Low's "A Notated Vocabulary for Eve Rosenthal", for example, the performers may combine words made and notes based on the name "Eve Rosenthal" from a score with instructions which balances freedom and constraint.[19] Other poets such as David Antin have worked in the form of spontaneous talks rather than written poems.

In painting the application of the term improvisation is more complicated. Though Abstract Expressionism has often been said to be improvisatory, and was also influenced by surrealist automatism, not all the Abstract Expressionists worked by improvisatory procedures in the sense of working at speed. Jackson Pollock, for example, could take many months to complete his paintings.[20] The overlaying which was characteristic of Abstract Expressionist painting inevitably meant that a certain element of revision and transformation were present in the way the painting was conceived. However the stance prevalent among Abstract Expressionist painters that the painting was to be found in the process, that it should not be based on pre-conceived ideas and that the process could be part of the subject of the painting, makes an important link with improvisation. The emphasis in Abstract Expressionism on immediacy and surface, on splashing and drip techniques and on the unfinished quality of the paintings all bear witness to this. The importance of process in general terms is abundantly clear in Jackson Pollock's famous statement :

When I am in my painting, I´m not aware of what I´m doing. It is only after a sort of ´get acquainted´ period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc. because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well. (AC, 36).

Improvisation in O´Hara´s work.

Given O´Hara´s extreme interest in the present moment it is not surprising that improvisation, the fusion of the process with the product, should have attracted him. O´Hara in his manifestos tends to imply that events go into his work as they happen to him, he says "What is happening to me, allowing for lies and exaggerations which I try to avoid, goes into my poems" and in "Personism : A Manifesto" he says, "you just go on your nerve". (CP,488-489). O´Hara was probably influenced by the automatic writing of the surrealists and his intense involvement with all the arts meant that he was fully aware of the importance of improvisation.[21]

O´Hara´s work, I will argue, exploits two aspects of improvisation in using some improvisatory approaches to write the poems and also in trying to create in the poems the impression of immediate composition through live talk. My discussion of O´Hara´s improvisatory approaches will therefore fall into two parts, in the first half I will give the available information and also new information I have gained about his

working methods and speculate on their possible effects. In the second half I will demonstrate how O´Hara makes the poems seem improvisatory, by creating the impression of live presence in the poems and then relate the poems to his own performances of them.

Working methods.

According to numerous reports O´Hara wrote his poems extremely quickly and usually in one draft, (though in interviews with me David Shapiro and Grace Hartigan suggested longer poems were probably written over a longer period and revised).[22] In an interview with Edward Lucie-Smith O´Hara says, "I don´t believe in reworking-too much. And what really makes me happy is when something just falls into place as if it were a conversation or something." (SS,21) In conversation he apparently also used the term "staying on the boards".[23]

In an interview with me Kenneth Koch said that O´Hara would sometimes write several poems one after the other on the same piece of paper in quick succession, and he also said that O´Hara "wasn´t one to write one line and then wait for the next day for the next one, he wrote very fast". Koch also recalled how O´Hara and himself once wrote together in competition on two typewriters in the same room and how O´Hara wrote extremely fast on that occasion.[24] In "Four Apartments" [25] Joe LeSueur, O´Hara´s close friend with whom he shared various apartments, has related how O´Hara wrote fast and without revision, "Not that he needed much time, because he usually got what he was after in one

draft, and he could type very fast, hunt-and-peck fashion."[26] LeSueur also relates the now well-known story about O'Hara writing the poem "Lana Turner has collapsed" on the Staten Island Ferry on the way to read with Lowell.[27] He also writes of how one day he rang O'Hara less than an hour before they were due to meet Norman Bluhm for lunch: since Norman was leaving for Paris LeSueur suggested writing a poem for him. O'Hara produced "Adieu to Norman, Bonjour to Joan and Jean-Paul" within the hour.[28]

In "Poet among Painters" James Schuyler recalls:

One Saturday noon I was having coffee with Frank and Joe LeSueur... Joe and I began to twit him about his ability to write a poem any time, any place. Frank gave us a look-both hot and cold-got up, went into his bedroom and wrote "Sleeping on the Wing" a beauty, in a matter of minutes."[29]

In "Frank O'Hara" Joe Brainard similarly recalls:

I remember seeing Frank O'Hara write a poem once. We were watching a western on T.V. and he got up as though to answer the telephone or to get a drink but instead he went over to the typewriter, leaned over a bit, and typed for four or five minutes standing up. Then he pulled the piece of paper out of the typewriter and handed it to me to read. Then he lay back down to watch more T.V. I don't remember the poem except that it had some cowboy dialect in it.[30]

Interestingly the speed with which O´Hara wrote in his poems was in marked contrast to his speed in writing his art criticism. Manscripts of his articles on Motherwell for instance bear witness to extensive rewriting and cutting.[31] In an interview with me Waldo Rasmussen, who worked with O´Hara at MOMA ,recalled his difficulty in writing prose.[32]

O´Hara also often wrote poems in contexts normally considered unsuitable for creativity, for example, with other people in the room and during a relatively short time span. In an interview with me Grace Hartigan related how he would write in a bar while she was talking to painters and how he wrote one poem on a paper bag;[33] similarly in an interview with me Kenneth Koch related how he would write a poem in the middle of a group of people at a party.[34] In "A Note on Frank O´Hara in the early fifties" Koch says, "One of the most startling things about Frank in the period when I first knew him was his ability to write a poem when other poeple were talking, or even to get up in the middle of a conversation, get his typewriter, and write a poem, sometimes participating in the conversation while doing so. This may sound affected when I describe it, but it wasn´t so at all. The poems he wrote in this way were usually very good poems.I was electrified by his ability to do this and at once tried to do it myself-(with considerably less success)."[35]

Many poems were written while other people were present. For instance "Second Avenue" was written in Larry Rivers studio on Second Avenue.[36] In the film "U.S.A.:Poetry: Frank O´Hara and Ed Saunders" O´Hara is seen discussing the dialogue for a film he

was going to make with Alfred Leslie and typing at the same time as he is talking to Leslie. Leslie explains as he talks to O´Hara that one of the aspects of the scenario is that "it´s nobody elses´ business what people do when they are alone" and when O´Hara reads back the script he has just written it includes Leslie´s sentence.[37] In an interview with me Kenneth Koch also mentioned that O´Hara liked to write with music on.

O´Hara´s manuscripts do not give evidence of extensive revision. In manuscripts available at the University of Connecticut at Storrs [38] there are no changes in several poems: "Adieu to Norman and Bonjour to Joan and Jean Paul"; "Thankgiving" ; "Aggression" ; "Beer for Breakfast"; "Easter", "Getting up Ahead of Someone", "Hotel Particular", "A Little Travel Diary", "L´Amour Avait Passé Par La"; "My Heart"; "Naptha", "Poem: I don´t know as I get what D.H. Lawrence is driving at"; "Poem en Forme de Saw"; "Poem read at Joan Mitchell´s", "Post me Lake Poet´s ballad"; "Present"; "Saint"; "Savoy". In some poems the only changes marked regard the spacing and some of these changes may have been made by Donald Allen. These poems are "Ode on Causality" ; "Hotel Transylvanie" , "In Favour of One´s Time"; "Joe´s Jacket" ; "Ode to Mike Goldberg"; "Poem: Khrushchev is coming on the right day" and "Variations on Pasternak". In some poems there are slight changes with words written in usually in hand: "Ode to the French Negro poets" was changed from "En Salut aux poètes Nègres Francaises"; " Poem: "Hate is only one of many responses" was changed from "To Another´s Fear". "To You " has the titles "To You" and "Painting" crossed out and changed to "Poem" (but was later

published as "To You"):the second to last line "as long as our strengthened time allows" is also crossed out and at the side are the words, "like a couple of painters in neon allowing", written in hand. In "Second Avenue" the dedication to Willem de Kooning is crossed out and "In memory of Vladimir Mayakovsky" is substituted for it. In "Personal Poem" the last two lines "it would probably be only the one person / who gave me a blue whistle from a crackerjack box" are cut.

The photocopies of manuscripts made available as part of the exhibition Art with the Touch of a Poet: Frank O'Hara create a similar impression though some of these manuscripts were presumably chosen for the exhibition because they did show signs of changes.[39] There are no changes in "A Step Away from Them"; in "Poem: Khrushchev is coming on the right day" the words "deposits of light" are inserted in hand after the words "ozone stalagmites". "To Gottfried Benn" is written in hand with only one small crossing out: "Poetry is not (an) instruments" in the first line. In "Radio" the words "week" "from" and "you" which begin lines five, six and seven were originally each on a previous line. In "Little Elegy for Antonio Machado" there are larger alterations: a passage of four lines is removed between "negotiable ambitions" and "we shall continue", there are several rewritings of "colder prides" (the previous words, instead of colder were lurid and vaster) and the last line originally "in the night and enveloping ours in praise like salt" becomes after several changes "in the night and developing our own in salt-like praise". In "With Barbara in Paris" couplets at the

end of the first and second stanza "we will ever/ with a sweet distemper" and "neither modest / ncr identifiably west" are cut.

In general, O'Hara seems to have made mainly small changes when he was writing and these changes (which were normally handwritten) were obviously made retrospectively: most commonly the changes would involve cutting of the poem or a change of title. Sometimes as in the case of "The Little Elegy for Antonio Machado" he seems to change the original words to something which is near to the original in sound rather than in meaning, on other occasions, for example, in "With Barbara in Paris" he cuts a weak line to make the poem tighter. The changes he makes do not seem to radically change the overall structure or import of the poem.

One major difficulty of using the manuscripts as evidence however is establishing whether their content is the same as the first draft or whether they were the end-product of a considerable amount of working now invisible to us. Since there are several manuscripts of some of the poems O'Hara obviously typed them more than once and it is likely that some alterations were made that are not apparent to us. In an interview with me however, Donald Allen whc had access to O'Hara's papers for the purposes of editing said that he believed there were no other papers other than the manuscripts. He also said that O'Hara scmetimes left mistakes as they arose in his poems, for example, "a certain kneeness" in "Ode to Mike Goldberg" was originally supposd to be keenness but when O'Hara hit the wrong keys on the typewriter and it turned out to be kneeness he just left it.[40] Bill Berkson, when asked by me whether he thought the

manuscripts were the "full story" said "Nobody knows, but given the surprising amount that he saved I think yes. Though he made a remark to me one time, 'because you don't throw it away it's a poem'. So there may have been work that he just threw in the wastepaper but it does seem as if he saved the odd thing that had something: they are all among the papers those poems which are false starts, even parts of poems that didn't come together as whole poems."[41]

It seems then, taking the evidence of some of the manuscripts in conjunction with eye-witness reports and other information that improvisatory methods seem to have, at least, played a significant part in the writing of the poems. O'Hara does not seem to have been adverse to making some changes himself occasionally sometimes in response to comments from friends. Kenneth Koch aptly suggested a change for the title of "Meditations on an Emergency" to "Meditations in an Emergency"; a title which in its changed form implies improvisation.[42] However in the main changes were either non-existent or small and lack of revision was the order of the day.

Effects of the working methods on the poems.

So far we have looked at evidence for the kind of working methods O'Hara employed. Now I want to speculate on the way that improvisatory techniques, in the sense I have defined, might have affected O'Hara's mode of composition. One of the most obvious and evident effects of these working methods is the weaving into the poem of events which were actually happening

while the poet was writing it and the inclusion in the poem of his responses to those external events: their affects on his thought processes. For example in "On Rachmaninoff´s Birthday # 158" (CP,418) the poet is listening to Rachmaninoff on the radio and says in the course of the poem :

> I am sad
> I better hurry and finish this
> before your 3rd goes off the radio
> or I won´t know what I´m feeling...

In "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" (CP,328) (which we know was written in time to meet Norman for Lunch) the poet brings into the poem his reflections on what is happening as it is happening, "It is 12:10 in New York and I am wondering /if I will finish this in time to meet Norman for lunch" and also his thoughts about what is just about to happen such as who is coming for lunch:

> and Joe has a cold and is not coming to Kenneth´s
> although he is coming to lunch with Norman
> I suspect he is making a distinction
> well who isn´t

Similarly in "Ode (To Joe LeSueur) on the Arrow that Flieth by Day" (CP, 300) the poet uses as his starting point the situation he is writing in:

To humble yourself before a radio on a Sunday
it´s amusing, like dying after a party
"click"/and you´re dead from fall-out, hang-over
or something hyphenated ...

and then weaves into the poem the events of the day. In "Four Apartments" Joe LeSueur has given a description of how the poem came about on Mother´s day 1958:

Frank was struck by the title of a Times book review, "The Arrow that flieth by day" and said he´d like to appropriate it for a poem. I agreed that the phrase had a nice ring and I asked him for a second time what I should do about Mother´s Day which I´d forgotten all about. "Oh, send your mother a telegram", he said. But I couldn´t hit upon a combination of words that didn´t revolt me and Western Union´s prepared messages sounded too maudlin even for my mother. "You think of a message for my mother and I´ll think of one for yours," I suggested. We then proceeded to try to top each other with apposite messages that would have made Philip Wylie applaud. Then it was time to go and hear a performance of Aaron Copland´s piano fantasy by Noel Lee. "It´s raining I don´t want to go," Frank said. So he stayed at home and wrote "Ode on the Arrow That Flieth by Day" which refers to the Fantasy, Western Union, the rain, and Mother´s Day. [43]

A reading of the poem shows how what is happening now (the

radio is on, it is raining and Joe is at a concert where Copland's Piano fantasy is being played) is brought together with what has happened or been observed or invented that day (the Times book review, the Western Union messages and the improvised messages). Not only is this material brought into the poem but it is developed and extended so "the arrow that flieth by day" reappears as:

> for God's sake fly the other way
> leave me standing alone crumbling in the new sky of the
> Wide World
> without passage, without breath

while wounds and flying suggest wounds and missiles:

> if Joan says I'm wounded, then I'm wounded
> and not like La Pucelle or André Gide
> not by moral issues or the intercontinental ballistics
> missile

Another possible effect of improvising in O'Hara's poems is a sense of the poem being kept in motion. In "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" (CP, 328) the very images of reeling seems both to employ and be about the improvisational process of keeping going, of continuing, of giving oneself up to the process:

> I wish I were reeling around Paris

instead of reeling around New York
I wish I weren't reeling at all

and the long passage on continuing:

the only thing to do is simply continue
is that simple
yes, it is simple because it is the only thing to do
can you do it
yes, you can because it is the only thing to do
blue light over the Bois de Boulogne it continues
the Seine continues
the Louvre stays open it continues it hardly closes at all
the Bar Américain continues to be French
de Gaulle continues to be Algerian as does Camus
Shirley Goldfarb continues to be Shirley Goldfarb
and Jane Hazan continues to be Jane Freilicher (I think!)
and so do I (sometimes I think I'm in love with painting
and surely the Piscine Deligny continues to have water in it
and the Flore continues to have tables and newspapers and people under them

and surely we shall not continue to be unhappy

we shall be happy

but we shall continue to be ourselves everything

continues to be possible

This sense of "staying on the boards" as he put it, is often present in O'Hara's poems, in a sense of the poem generating itself at that moment in the poet's thought processes, for example, in the likes and don't likes in "Personal Poem" (CP,335):

we go eat some fish and some ale it's
cool but crowded we don't like Lionel Trilling
we decide we like Donald 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

Similar effects arise in the use of repetition to start the poem rolling in "Biotherm (For Bill Berkson)" (CP,436):

The best thing in the world but I better be quick

about it

better be gone tomorrow

better be gone last night and

next Thursday better be gone

better be

Improvisation may in fact have helped to generate the dynamic interaction of the disparate and cohesive, the unconnected and connected which is so characteristic of O'Hara's work. On the one hand speed would have predisposed the poet towards using material which is readily available but unconnected outside the poem (such as the different elements of "Ode (to Joe LeSueur) On the Arrow that Flieth by Day" or towards using words in unusual conjunctions which do not have to be logically cohesive (as in "Second Avenue"). On the other hand any poet who was improvising would need to have at his disposal certain devices to keep him or herself going at speed. This may have predisposed O'Hara towards the kind of structural continuities, the strings of metonymic connections analysed in Chapter One, which can be generated by a system of internal suggestion and association very similar to that of motivic development in music. In particular these strings of metonymic connections are rather like the motivic development used by improvisers such a Ornette Coleman and Sonny Rollins, the device which Ekkehard Jost calls "motivic chain association" and which has been extensively analysed by Jost and by Gunther Schuller.[44]

Improvisatory techniques may also have affected O'Hara's writing in helping to generate the high energy level of the poems which is akin to the energetic playing of the free jazz musician. For example, the strong pushing forwards movement in "You Are Gorgeous and I'm Coming" (CP,331) where the rush of words creates a sensation of live improvisation:

Vaguely I hear the purple roar of the torn-down Third
Avenue El
it sways slightly but firmly like a hand or a
golden-downed thigh
normally I don't think of sounds as coloured unless I'm
feeling corrupt

Or the sheer exuberance of the opening of "Blocks" (CP,108):

Yippee! she is shooting in the harbor! he is jumping up to the maelstrom! she is leaning over the giant's cart of tears which like a lava cone let fall to fly from the cross-eyed tantrum-tousled ninth grader's splayed fist is freezing on the cement! he is throwing up his arms in heavenly desperation, spacious Y of his tumultuous love-nerves flailing like a poinsettia in its own nailish storm against the glass door of the cumulus which is witholding her from these divine pastures she has filled with the flesh of men as stones!

O fatal eagerness!

It is the same exuberance that we find from time to time in O'Hara's letters:

What should appear to my astonished eyes but a great army of tearoses! Like the interior of a sunset, each crying some extravagant praise of existence and of many another thing! My

eyes filled like cinders in vain, and with each petal´s opening something became clearer and more beautiful to me. The Chrysler Building began to smile in the window, and each stem supported a world of affection and desire, could barely support the sentiments which it aroused.[45]

or

Martin and Lewis! Shall we ever relive those moments of truly modern uneasiness on the fire-escapes of Michigan lake? I like to believe they will be perpetuated in the anxieties of Larry Rivers and Kenneth Koch! Twin exemplars of the ´in dream the hunt for responsibility booms on apace´ theory of glazing. Do you recall that ardent instant when Mark cried ´where´s this hoop!´ and I nudged you silently! Similarly this morning Karl Shapiro accepted ´Ann Arbour Variations as a POEM it seems to me now that you must have written it while I am in class.[46]

Even in poems with less of a high energy feel the rhythm tends to propel itself forward so that meaning never sits still and the poem always seems to be moving forward, as in "Poem: Hate is only one of many responses": (CP,333)

Hate is only one of many responses
true, hurt and hate go hand in hand
but why be afraid of hate, it is only there
think of filth, is it really awesome
neither is hate

Talk and the impression of direct communication in O'Hara's poetry

I have argued up till now that O'Hara used improvisation as a procedure and that this has an important effect on the form and content of the poems. However the effect of immediacy and spontaneity which these improvisatory methods create in the poems is not easily distinguishable from the other sense in which O'Hara's poems can be said to bear the mark of improvisation, that is, that they give the illusion of being improvised before our eyes, of unfolding in our presence (and of course some of the previously mentioned results of improvisation way well be partly generated by the poet consciously as effects). However I want now to discuss some of the ways in which I think O'Hara gives the impression of live communication in the poems especially through his use of talk in poetry.

O'Hara's meaningful joke in "Personism: A Manifesto" (CP,498) that he could talk on the telephone instead of writing a poem suggests how much he saw a correlation between poetry and live talk. This interest in "talk" is also evident in the letters, both in their highly conversational manner which is full of gossip and talk about what is happening, and in the way O'Hara often dramatises situations (including imaginary ones) and puts them into dialogue. For example in a letter to James Schuyler he jokingly dramatises a conversation between Bunny Lang and Martin Halpern about his poetry which includes some derisory comments from Halpern, [47] while in a letter to Grace Hartigan he dramatises what he calls "Amusing conversations of the month" between John Myers, Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher and

himself.[48] O´Hara apparently loved to talk and is described by Joe LeSueur in "Four Apartments" as a "born talker".[49] In an interview with me Kenneth Koch also said that O´Hara´s talk was "wonderful"and that it was full of references and allusions as his poetry is.[50]

O´Hara is not talking live to his audience to his audience as David Antin does, nevertheless he manages to inject the impression of live talk. He uses the first person so that the poem feels as if it is happening <u>now</u>:

> It´s my lunch hour, so I go
> for a walk among the hum-colcured
> cabs. First, down the sidewalk
> where the labourers feed their dirty
> glistening torsos sandwiches
> and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
> on.

"A Step Away From Them" (CP,257)

He also employs a casual informal style which makes us feel that he is actually speaking to us about things as they happen or occur to him. He uses colloqualisms or conversational interjections such as "Ah Jean Dubuffet" (Naptha, CP,337) or "Ah nuts! It´s boring reading French newspapers (Les Luths,CP,343), inserts of conversation (Biotherm, CP,436) "´who did you have

lunch with?´ ´you´ ´oops!´ how ARE you ", fill-ins and asides:

I go on to the bank
And Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)

"The Day Lady Died" (CP,325)

self-ironising and understatement in the midst of the poem:

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

"Post The Lake Poet´s Ballad" (CP,336)

These are all hallmarks of O´Hara´s poetry and contribute to the impression of immediacy. Often the poet manages to create the impression of someone in transition; the voice is of someone trying to come to terms with his situation as he is speaking to us and while we are listening:

I´m having a real day of it.
There was
something I had to do. But what?
There are no alternatives, just
the one something.

"Anxiety" (CP,268)

the vcice wavering und unsure:

I am ill today but I am not
too ill. I am not ill at all.
It is a perfect day, warm
for winter, cold for fall.

"Digression" on Number 1 1948 (CP,260)

or trying to get to grips with a particular idea:

I don´t know as I get what D. H. Laurence is driving at
when he writes of lust springing from the bowels
or do I

"Poem"(CP,334).

or correcting the implications of what he is saying as he says it because it isn´t quite what he meant to say:

I have always wanted to be near it
though the day is long (and I don´t mean Madiscn Avenue)

"Rhapsody"(CP,326).

Humour plays a part in all these examples: the poet makes us

laugh with him at himself as he exposes the ludicrous indecisions and weakenesses that mark his behaviour. The voice verges on chatter and seems to be not only talking but thinking aloud, letting one thought suggest the next (though the chatter may have threatening implications):

> The apartment was vacated by a gay couple
> who moved to the country for fun
> they moved a day too soon
> even the stabbings are helping the population explosion
> though in the wrong country
>
> "Steps" (CP,370)

while the poet's use of the pronoun "you" makes us feel as if we are being personally and directly addressed even where the text implies that the poet may be addressing a specific person:

> yet you will always live in a jealous society of
> accident
> you will never know how beautiful you are or how
> beautiful
> the other is, you will continue to die for yourself
> you will continue to sing on trying to cheer everyone
> up

The talking voice however does not leave behind the surprising image, surrealism and the entire artistic and literary heritage of which O'Hara is a part. It embraces it, "naturalises

it" and make it part of the speaking pattern, so that image and talking manner fuse together in a most original way, as for example in the opening passage of "The 'Unfinished'":

> As happiness takes off the tie it borrowed from me
> and gets into bed and pretends to be asleep-and-awake
> or pulls an orange poncho over its blonde Jay-Thorped
> curls
> and goes off to cocktails without telling me why
> it's so depressing
>
> "The 'Unfinished'" (CP,317)

Here the anthropomorphism of happiness (not the kind of image we would find in day to day conversation) acquires a degree of informality through the kind of behaviour attributed to happiness (he behaves like a fickle lover), the use of the present tense and the immediate follow up to the image in the poet's direct response, "its so depressing". Consequently, even where the imagery is elaborate and unlike normal conversation we often feel as if we are hearing the poems rather than reading them, we are more aware of the poet's voice than of his writing style. This tends to create an impression of spontaneity and continuously intervenes between us and the "literary" aspect of written text.

A sense of immediacy, of the poem unfolding before us, also arises in some of the poems because the passage of time is actually thematised. So in "A Step away from Them" (CP,257) the

poem begins, "It's my lunch hour" making us feel not only that the poem is happening at a specific time, but that the time is limited: the reminder later in the poem that it is 12.40 makes us feel that time is passing way. Similarly in "The Day Lady Died" (CP,325) we are told that it is 12.20 and in "Personal Poem" (CP,335) the poem is framed by the lunch hour beginning "Now when I walk around at lunchtime " and ending:

> I wonder if one person cut of 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.

In these poems we feel as if the poet is looking round him and actually thinking while he is walking.

O'Hara's readings of his poems.

We have looked at some of the ways in which O'Hara's work can be said to be improvised in method and ways in which it might be said to give the impression of being improvised, of being "talked" direct. So we should now consider whether O'Hara's reading of his poems adds to a sense of live communication, as this is an aspect of O'Hara's work which is normally neglected in critical writing. Interestingly O'Hara's reading of the poem's on tape or record do not give (and do not seem to try to give) the impression of being composed in performance, rather they reinforce the impression that he is reading a previously written text. They are very much readings rather than performances and

they do not fully exploit the various possibilities that performance offers, such as speed and voice variation, to full effect.[51]

There is some variation however in the way O'Hara reads from poem to poem and performance to performance. For example his rendering of "Ode to Joy" is at a steady speed, with studied gaps between the stanzas, which if anything, tends to underplay the dizzy effect of the poem when read silently by the reader.[52] The reading of "Fantasy" however is more relaxed and jaunty while "The Day Lady Died" is read very plainly almost flatly (possibly to play down any possibility of sentimentality).[53] These differences are presumably partly due to the differences between the poems themselves though they may also be caused by the fact that O'Hara obviously did not feel at ease when reading. There are a number of allusions in the letters he wrote to the fact that he did not regard himself as a good reader and in fact there is nothing to indicate that he felt that his own readings of his poems were particularly definitive.[54]

These readings however have a number of interesting features. Firstly they sometimes leave out parts of the written text. For example in O'Hara's reading of "To Hell with it" the Mock Poem and Little Elegy which are part of the text in the Collected Poems, are not included.[55] This could possibly indicate that O'Hara felt that reading the poem out loud would create a different impression from silent reading and that the poem should be modified for that purpose (in this case it makes

the poem shorter and less diffuse.) There are also a number of minor changes tc the text in the readings. For example in "To Hell With it" in the passage:

> nothing now can be changed, as if
> last crying no tears will dry
> and Bunny never change her writing of
> the Bear, nor Gregory bear me
> any gift further, beyond liking my poems
> (no new poems for him.) and
> a large red railroad handkerchief from the country in his
> sportscar

there are a number of minor deviations from the written text: in the line "ncthing now can be changed, as if" the word "if" does not appear; in the line "and Bunny never change her writing of" O´Hara inserts the word "will" between Bunny and never; in the line "the Bear nor Gregory bear me" Gregory is shcrtened tc Greg and in "a large red railroad handkerchief from the country in his sportscar" "big" takes the place of "large". These cculd either be mistakes or indications that O´Hara did not think that sticking to exactly the original words was essential.

On the whole though O´Hara tends to read what is there and in the way it is put dcwn on the page. He attempts to slightly change his voice (sometimes rather self-consciously) when he reads phrases that are in brackets or when reading something in quotation marks (like the beginning of "To Hell with it") and interestingly he keeps mainly to his own line breaks: this is

particularly noticeable in his reading of "Mozart Chemisier " and reinforces the impression of an accumulation of disparate material in the poem.[56] (Though there are some interesting instances of unexpected breaks, for example, in his rendering of "The Day Lady Died" in the lines "while she whispered a song along the keyboard/to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing" where the break comes after Waldron).

In general the recordings produce a sense of someone reading a written text. Perhaps one conclusion we can draw from this is that the performance element is written into O'Hara's poems and communicates best in the written text. O'Hara's poems are written to be read and are part of a written tradition from which they borrow many literary devices. The improvisatory techniques and effects and the talking manner of the poems are amongst their most salient characteristics, but essentially the poems are designed to communicate most directly and do communicate most directly when read.

O'Hara and David Antin

I have demonstrated the importance of improvisation in the work of Frank O'Hara in two ways: in the use of improvisatory procedures and their effects and in the impression of direct communication they create. But my analysis has shown that these cannot be completely separated. For example the poet's talking stance is used by him as a device to give the impression of live communication but it may also be the style which comes most easily to him when writing at speed. I want in

conclusion very briefly to compare O'Hara's "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean Paul" (CP,328) with David Antin's what am i doing here", for Antin, as I said earlier, does improvise in the sense of talking before an audience in a way that O'Hara clearly does not.

In some ways the talk and the poem are similar. Both men engage disparate and changing materials, in Antin's case the anecdotes about Candy, George Oppen and Dick Berlinger, in O'Hara's case thoughts concerning who is coming for lunch, compiling a book of poems, the coming weekend etc. Both weld their material together using cross-reference and repetition. So in Antin's talk the science fiction on page 1 becomes science myth on page 8 and turns eventually into a scientic story about electrons and about scientific discourse while the story of Dick Berlinger driving a car transforms into:

> it seemed to me that the american government was not one hand on the driving wheel but lots of hands and hands that were intermittently reaching for that drivers wheel
>
> (what am i doing here, page 20)

Similarly in "Adieu To Norman Bon Jour to Joan and Jean Paul" the changing images are hinged on repetition of the idea of reeling and continuing, the recurring references to lunch and the names of friends. Both men use material about incidents that have happened to them and both poem and talk use humour to keep their audience entertained: O'Hara in the form of witty

self-deflation, Antin more in the form of "I´ll tell you the story about" of the professional comedian or confident socialite.

However there are important differences between the talk and the poem which emphasise the different ways that the two men are using improvisatary techniques and effects. If we compare the structure of Antin´s talk and O´Hara´s poems, Antin´s talk fills a longer time span, consists of sets of anecdotes and topics which slowly unfold and uses a syntax which is less compressed and therefore nearer to prose:

> and there we are we´ve got a memory and a story and im talking about it and there are some elements in this that are true because that i can remember it at all i imagine it to have in it a core of truth and i remember it this way
>
> (page 15)

O´Hara´s poem is comprised of sets of quickly moving images:

> yesterday I looked up the rue Frémicourt on a map
> and was happy to find it like a bird
> flying over Paris et ses environs
> which unfortunately did not include the Seine-et-Oise
> which I don´t know
> as well as a number of other things

In fact both men focus on two different but complementary aspects of thought. O'Hara captures the swift movement of thought, and his poem darts from one image to the next: he enacts the process of thought before it is encapsulated by rationality. Even where he uses a repetitive construction on which to hang his images those images themselves are constantly changing :

> and surely the Piscine Deligny continues to have water
> in it
> and the Flore continues to have tables and newspapers
> and people under them
> and surely we cannot continue to be unhappy

Antin on the other hand engages the slow spreading of thought round a particular topic, moving forward and also doubling back on itself: his talk occupies the space where thought meets rationality:

> there was talking before there was writing before
> there was talking there wasnt talking before there
> was writing there was talking this may not be an
> immense hypothesis but its certainly true and
> it has consequences there are certainly consequences
> I can draw from this that before there was
> writing down and locking up there was remembering
> when you talked about something that wasn't there you
> had to remember it and you couldn't write it down
> and when you talked about something that wasn't there

the only way that it was there was somehow it manifested itself in your mouth and before it manifested itself in your mouth it didn't always do that

Consequently Antin uses the talk to slowly explore certain ideas such as the relationship of language to truth, the limitations of scientific discourse.

Another interesting aspect of the comparison is that Antin does not cultivate such an idiosyncratic talking manner as O'Hara. Though Antin sometimes corrects himself, interjections like those in the O'Hara poem, "ah lunch!" or "yes, it is simple because it is the only thing to do" which suggest modulations of the speaking voice, are noticeably absent from Antin's talk. Possibly this is because Antin is actually talking and not having to create the impression that he is. In addition Antin's story-telling, though it is live, is retrospective, "so let me remember a situation and inspect it" (what am i doing here ? p.11) while O'Hara concentrates more on what is happening now and what he is thinking about now so that even though we read the poem retrospectively we feel as if it is happening as we read it. One interesting consequence of these differences in talking manner and relationship to the present is that Antin's talk, though it is given live, does not create such an immediate impression or seem to be so caught up with the immediate situation (when read) as O'Hara's. In some ways O'Hara seems nearer to the "interruptible discourse " Antin mentions at the

end of "what am i doing here " than Antin himself.

On the one hand, then, O´Hara seems to take advantage of the possibilities of improvisation for quickly catching the process of thought and for creating the impression of live talk. On the other hand, Antin´s talk takes advantage of the live situation for an extended and thought-provoking and probing round-up of ideas rather like a one-man discussion. Ultimately we cannot simply contrast the talk and the poem as genre, or O´Hara with Antin, nor can we necessarily say that one is superior to the other. For Antin´s talk and O´Hara´s poem represent two different faces of improvisation and talk. Their comparison shows that the foregoing analysis of O´Hara as an improvising poet is part both of the much larger subject of improvisation in all the arts and of the complex relationship of talk to writing.

Notes

1. Antin, David, talking at the boundaries, New York, New Directions, 1976. p.23. Hereafter cited with page numbers in the text.

2. I have found useful in thinking about improvisation Bailey, Derek, Improvisation: its nature and practice in music, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, Moorland Publishing, 1980. and Dean, Roger, Creative Improvisation: jazz, contemporary music and beyond, Milton Keynes, Open University Press 1989, in press.

3. Jost, Ekkehard, Free Jazz, Graz, Universal Edition, 1974.

4. Davis, Miles, Milestones, Columbia, CL, 1193, 1958.

5. Coleman, Ornette, The Shape of Jazz to Come, Atlantic, 1317, 1959 and Change of the Century, Atlantic 1327, 1959.

6. Taylor Cecil, Cecil Taylor in Transition, United Music and Records Group, Recorded in 1955 and 1959.

7. Coleman, Ornette, Free Jazz, Atlantic 1364, 1960.

8. Nyman, Michael, Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond, New York, Schirmer Books, 1974.

9. Cage, Concert for Piano and Orchestra, New York, Henmar

Press, (now Peters), 1960.

10. Earle Brown, Four Systems, New York, Associated Music Publishers, 1961.

11. Christian Wolff, Duo for Pianists 11, New York, Peters, 1958.

12. Olson, Charles, Projective Verse in Allen, Donald and Tallman, Warren,ed. The Poetics of The New American Poetry, New York, Grove Press, 1973. p.149.

13. Mottram,Eric, Open Field Poetry, Poetry Information, Summer 1977, pp.3-21

14. Tytell, John, Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation, New York, Grove Press, 1986 p.142.

15. ibid p. 217.

16. Breton Andre. What is Surrealism? in What is Surrealism ? Rosemont, Franklin, ed. London, Pluto Press, 1978.p. 122.

17."A conversation with Kenneth Koch". Interview with Helen Harrison in Larry Rivers: Performing for the Family: An Exhibition of Paintings, Sculptures, Drawings, Mixed-Media Works, Film and Video 1951-1981, Guild Hall of East Hampton,

1983. pp. 9-12.

18. Mac Low, Jackson, Representative Works, 1938-85 New York, Roof Books, 1986 pp. 134-5.

19. Mac Low, Jackson,"A Notated Vocabulary for Eve Rosenthal", in Ott,Gill, ed. Paper Air , 1980 Vol 2. No.3 p. 61.

20. In informal conversation with me British painter Alan Davie, working at the same time as the American Abstract Expressionists, said that he had completed several paintings (which he called improvisations) in minutes, illustrating the point that improvisation can occur in painting.

21. There is no evidence however that O´Hara was particularly interested in jazz. Larry Rivers, himself a jazz musician, in an interview with the author Southampton, New York State, 31st July 1986 said Frank "wasn´t keen on jazz." Koch and Rivers ran a joint poetry and jazz series at the the jazz venue "The 5 Spot" but in interviews with the author neither was able to remember if O´Hara took part.

In a letter by O´Hara to Bill Berkson, August 12th 1962 reproduced in Berkson, Bill, Talk, in Perleman, Bob, ed. Talks Hills 6/7, 1980 O´Hara alludes to what he thinks is the highly structured nature of all music including improvisation:

We didn´t finish talking about the "unplanned image" in music, I want to add to, which is simply to point out that

musical composition, of all the "compositional" arts, is the most governed by formal disciplines. Even improvisations, or impromptus, as a genre, have their compositional rules, because music, as a medium governed by time, must have occasional references, as you know from our 4-hand improvisations: the tendency is always to make a "piece" of some sort, and you don't know whether it's a piece or not unless some convention is at least referred to.

22. Grace Hartigan interview with the author,Tivoli, New York State, 12th August 1986 and David Shapiro, interview with the author, New York City, July 22nd 1986.

23. Bill Berkson, interview with the author, San Francisco, California, 17th September 1986.

24. Kenneth Koch, interview with the author, Bridgehampton, New York State, July 30th, 1986.

25 LeSueur, Joe, Four Apartments in Berkson, LeSueur, Homage to Frank O'Hara

26. ibid p. 48

27. ibid

28. ibid p. 58.

29. Schuyler, James, To Frank O'Hara, in Berkson, LeSueur, Homage to Frank O'Hara p. 187.

30. Brainard, Joe, Frank O'Hara, in Berkson, LeSueur, Homage to Frank O'Hara p. 161.

31. Manuscript in Frank O'Hara Archive, Special Collections, The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.

32. Waldo Rasmussen, interview with the author, August 18th, New York City, 1986.

33. Grace Hartigan interview with the author, Tivoli, New York State, August 12th 1986.

34. Kenneth Koch, interview with the author, Bridgehampton, New York State, July 30th 1986.

35. Koch, Kenneth, A Note on Frank O'Hara in the Early Fifties in Berkson, LeSueur, Homage to Frank O'Hara. pp. 26-28.

36. Larry Rivers interview with the author, Southampton New York State, 30th July 1986.

37. U.S.A. Poetry:Frank O'Hara and Ed Saunders. No. 11 in a series of filmed interviews and readings,produced and directed by Richard Moore for KQED-TV, San Francisco, 1966.

38. Amongst the papers of Donald Allen and Bill Berkson, Special Collections, University of Connecticut Library, Storrs, Connecticut.

39. Art with the touch of a Poet: Frank O'Hara. An exhibition at The William Benton Museum of Art, The University of Connecticut, Storrs. January 24th-March 13th 1983. Folders of papers were given to those attending the exhibition.

40. Donald Allen, interview with the author, 17th September 1986, San Francisco, California, interview with the author.

41. Bill Berkson interview with the author 17th September 1986, San Francisco, California, with the author.

42. Kenneth Koch interview with the author, Bridgehampton, New York State, 30th July 1986.

43. LeSueur, Joe, Four Apartments, in Berkson, LeSueur, Homage to Frank O'Hara. p.52

44. Jost, Free Jazz. p. 50; Schuller, Gunter, Sonny Rollins and Thematic Improvising, in Williams, Martin, ed. Jazz Panorama, Collier Books, 1964. pp. 239-253.

45. O'Hara, unpublished letter to Robert Fizdale, New York City,

26th December, 1953.

46. O'Hara, unpublished letter to Jane Freilicher, Ann Arbour, Summer, 1951.

47. O'Hara, unpublished letter to James Schuyler, Cambridge, Mass, 11th February 1956.

48. O'Hara, unpublished letter to Grace Hartigan, New York City,May 24th 1951. Among the papers of Grace Hartigan, George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.

49. Four apartments in Berkson, LeSueur, Homage to Frank O'Hara. p. 51.

50. Kenneth Koch, interview with the author, July 30th 1986.

51. Among the recordings O'Hara made is a tape "Evergreen Review Presents: Poems to Music and Laughter" recorded at John Gruen's appartment, New York, including "To the Film Industry in Crisis". Describing the making of this tape O'Hara writes, in a letter to Grace Hartigan 20th December 1957 among the papers of Grace Hartigan in the George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University and reproduced in Smith, Alexander Jnr., A Comprehensive Bibliography, p. 159.

I have been working hard on recording some poems with John Gruen, improvisations on tape or a record Barney will

probably bring out. We don´t know quite yet how they´ve come out, but some of them seem very interesting and John G is very good at improvising just the kind of relaxed music (slightly like Poulenc often) which I think goes with my poems better than say, jazz, (which is what Barney had in mind.) We probably won´t have quite enough for two sides in which case I´ll read one of the longer ones solo I think. Best of all, (John Gruen) doesn´t overinterpret in the music, or make too thorough a setting. We tried to make them a distinct experience itself, rather than just a document of how the poet reads out loud. After all, I´m not W.B. Yeats."

52. The Dial-A-Poem Poets Giorno poetry Systems New York originally recorded in New York 1963.

53. Frank O´Hara and Ed.Saunders: poetry associated with both film and rock music, 10161, Hollywood California, The center for Cassette Studies, 1966.

54. O´Hara´s letters, such as a letter to John Ashbery April 11th 1962 reveal that he was unsure and unconfident about his public readings. The letters contain references to a number of readings, including one with Kerouac and Corso, which annoyed O´Hara because Kerouac heckled him, and one with Roger Shattuck.

55. Dial-a-poem-poets Giorno Poetry Systems, New York, originally recorded in New York , 1963.

56. Frank O´Hara and Ed. Saunders: poetry associated with both film and rock music, 10161, Hollywood California, The center for Cassette Studies. 1966.

Chapter Four:The Collaborations: self, text and difference

"Poetry belongs to Me, Larry and Painting to you"- "US" from the Stones collaborations.

In Chapter One I discussed the interpenetration of modes in O'Hara's poetry and showed how modes were continually being broken down and reassembled as other modes; in Chapter Two I discussed the way in which a unified self is broken down and reconstituted as an acting self. I now want to extend this discussion to the collaborations of Frank O'Hara with painters and with other poets, for these collaborations again call into question the idea of a unified self, by bringing two artists together, and also demonstrate the interpenetration of the characteristics of poetry and painting.

Collaborations of this type interrogate the idea of creativity as individualism and the autonomy of any artistic medium and in so doing they draw attention to problems of the self, the relationship between verbal texts and other types of text and the operation of identity and difference within any artistic system. However collaboration is a neglected critical area, especially in terms of an integrated perspective on its theoretical implications, so I will begin by drawing up a general framework for considering verbal and visual-verbal collaborations. Some remarks relating the social and artistic context to the collaborations and some general information about the working methods of collaborations will then act as a link to an analysis of four of them : "US", from the Stones lithograph

collaborations with Larry Rivers; "Somewhere Outside Yourself" from a series of poem-paintings with Norman Bluhm; and two collaborative poems: "The Mirror Naturally Stripped" with Kenneth Koch and "St. Bridget's Hymn to Willem de Kooning" from Hymns of St. Bridget with Bill Berkson.

The Self in Collaboration.

Artistic collaboration calls into question the idea of a work of art as the unique expression of a particular individual. Contemporary artistic endeavour, and contemporary theory have all largely broken down concepts of an autonomous unified self, but these problems of self are central to collaboration where the work of one collaborator is not necessarily distinguishable from the work of the other or others involved in it.[1] However if collaboration interrogates concepts of creativity as individual self-expression, it can also be a means of extending the creative range of an individual by forcing him into new artistic choices.

In single-medium collaborations such as collaborative poems each collaborator has a choice of stance towards the text. The collaborators may adopt a common code making their contributions alike, or they may each adopt several different stances, some in common, some not. However even if they try to keep their stances distinct from each other the close proximity of their contributions is still likely to make them seem to converge. Differences between people in collaboration therefore have a

tendency to dissolve within the text itself. A factor affecting the degree to which the collaborators merge their stance in the text may be the working methods of the collaboration: the more closely the collaborators work together the more their contributions are likely to become assimilated.

Since it involves more than one person, collaboration is inevitably a social as well as an artistic interaction. As such it undermines the Romantic concept of the isolated artist and can be set in the context of the undermining of the art/society opposition by Marxist theorists and historians.[2] Involving a small-scale social interaction, an artistic collaboration can either work in opposition to, or in co-operation with, large-scale political and social structures.

The relationship of Poetry and Painting.

Mixed-media collaborations between painters and poets inevitably throw up problems of the relationships between text and image which form the basis of the inter-artistic comparison between poetry and painting. Fundamental to this comparison is the nature of the system on which each is based.[3] As we saw in Chapter One a text is made from language, itself composed of discrete units words whose aural and visual forms are signifiers. In a poem a network of signifiers produce signifieds, with which they have only an arbitary connection. This means that however much they may appear to refer to objects and events outside the poem they are always disjunct from them. A painting, on the other hand, is a complex of visual images whose elements are not

discrete units, making it difficult to know what the basic element in a painting is or how to identify each instance of that element. In addition there is a less arbitary connection between signifier and signified, image and object; for example a picture of a chair is experienced as closer to an actual chair than the word chair. Painting is therefore in one sense felt to be more natural, or to use the critical theory term, more "motivated" than its verbal counterpart.

This led traditional theorists to maintain that painting had a more natural link with the world than poetry but modern theory has emphasised that any picture, however natural it may appear to be, is still always a sign. As such it is man-made and artificial and involves artistic conventions and artistic structuring, that is, manipulation of its sign-system. A representation of a chair, for example, however similar to an actual chair it may be, involves some artistic structuring, so that a difference from the original always emerges. Furthermore, abstract painting relies on structural arrangement rather than similarity.

On the other hand a poem as a whole can appear much more natural or 'motivated' than the conventional structures of language might seem to allow, that is it can seem to have a non-arbitary connection with what it signifies. The grammatical and syntactical structures of language may be used to describe a chair in such a vivid and concentrated manner that the process of signification becomes largely invisible and we feel that we are directly experiencing the object, rather than the linguistic

concept of it (in prose this would be known a realism). Conversely the grammatical and syntactical structures can be broken up so much that the connection between signifiers and signified becomes progressively ruptured, for example in the construction 'chair reach chain'. When this occurs a new arrangement of signifiers arises whose signified breaks free from the impression of reference which language normally creates and is analogous to the signified in an abstract painting.[4]

Poems and paintings then are alike in that they are signs but conceal their sign-functions so that an appearance of naturalness occurs. But the preceding argument also culminates in a deconstruction of the terms representation and abstraction: both poems and paintings oscillate between representational and abstract modes because these modes are interdependent. In paintings all representations depart from similarity with the world and involve an element of structural arrangement, of abstraction, while all abstractions have elements which seem similar to objects and events outside the painting. But a similar interdependence is present in poetry: this returns us to the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy raised in Chapter One. For in a poem any unifying metaphor is based on a similarity which can unravel into metonymies and ultimately into difference, dissociation. Conversely, when a poet breaks up the conventional associations between signifiers and signifieds, accidental connection will produce some metonymic connection which can turn back eventually into metaphorical association and reference to the world.

The other major issue at stake in the painting-poetry

comparison is whether painting is different from poetry because it is a spatial art while poetry is temporal. Both Mitchell and Steiner have pointed out that spatial and temporal elements are present in both painting or poetry, but the debate is further complicated by the fact that spatial is not the opposite of temporal (its opposite being atemporal).[5] I therefore prefer to see the issue in terms of successivity and simultaneity and their interdependence. The point to be made then is that simultaneity is not exclusive to painting nor successivity to poetry. The scanning of the surface of a picture takes place through a succession of moments in time while the act of reading a text from beginning to end involves simultaneous perception of various elements which are removed in time. Moreover the necessity for simultaneous perception of disparate and heterogeneous elements once the work of art has been successively perceived is common to both arts. "The intricate structuring of art, with its redundancy and overdetermination is designed... to enlarge our ability to turn sequence into simultaneity, to allow us to form ever larger temporal flows into unified, atemporal structures."[6]

Artistic conventions are of course inextricably bound up with social conventions and if this is more apparent in poems because they use language, it is still pervasive in painting. Therefore the terms abstraction, representation, spatial and temporal are not value-free and do not only encompass artistic concepts. As Mitchell has pointed out the comparison between poetry and painting has itself often been used ideologically, to

prioritise one form over another, for instance by maintaining that painting is superior to poetry because it has a more natural link with the world.[7] Collaborations involving poetry and painting will tend in general to involve some merging of text and image. So the prioritising of one art form over another can be effectively undermined by collaborative work which has the opportunity to bring text and image together on equal terms.

Collaboration then, involving as it does separate artists and separate media pivots on difference and likeness, separation and merging, and demonstrates their interdependence. But we have already seen, differences between the mediums can be conceived of as differences within them: poems and paintings are in many respects alike because they are internally different, that is, they are not identical with themselves. An important factor in considering collaboration therefore must be the role of shared internal difference as part of the process of merging in collaboration. Here my framework for considering collaboration makes a link with Derridean différance and with the work of Barbara Johnson who sees the differences between entities as differences within them.[8]

The O'Hara Collaborations: Social and Artistic Context.

O'Hara's collaborations were extremely extensive and were carried out with film-makers, painters, musicians and other writers. They include poems written with Kenneth Koch, Bill Berkson and Tony Towle, poem-paintings with Norman Bluhm, cartoons with Joe Brainard, lithographs with Larry Rivers, a film

with Alfred Leslie "The Last Clean Shirt", numerous plays written with Larry Rivers, Kenneth Koch, Bill Berkson and others and a song cycle with Ned Rorem.[9] The flexibility and diversity of O'Hara's writing approach, relying heavily, as I suggested in Chapter Three on improvisation and finding the poem in the process, made him able to adopt the various stances towards writing which collaboration might suggest, and inter-artistic collaboration was an obvious and highly attractive possibility for him. As assistant curator of art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the fifties and sixties O'Hara arranged exhibitions of the work of Franz Kline and David Smith, and wrote art criticism including a monograph on Jackson Pollock: he had strong friendships with many painters including de Kooning, Michael Goldberg, Norman Buhm, Larry Rivers and Grace Hartigan. He majored in music at Harvard, wrote some musical compositions, played the piano and was fanatically interested in ballet and opera. He therefore had a broad understanding of the other arts and an unusually high degree of involvement in them which is apparent throughout his poetry. However he never pursued creative work very far in another medium, which probably also heavily motivated him in the direction of mixed-media collaboration.

The O'Hara collaborations occurred during a period when concepts of a unified self were being broken down in all the arts and when there was greater inter-artistic reciprocation and experiment. Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century, by Cynthia Jaffee McCabe, shows that the renewal of interest in it had its roots in the surrealist collaborations of the twenties

and thirties.[10] In other essays in the same volume as McCabe's, David Shapiro and Robert Hobbs set the collaborations of the fifties and sixties within their own social and artistic climate. Hobbs sees the growth of collaboration since the fifties as a reaction against superficial concepts of individuality prized by a consumer society.[11] Shapiro suggests that collaboration could be a response to alienation in the modern city and the false collectivism of authoritarian regimes. Though such theories can only be speculative and are sometimes reductive, they are stimulating in suggesting that artistic collaboration is part of a social, critical and artist complex which stresses plurality, feedback and interaction. [12]

All the collaborations I will be discussing here were born out of friendships and were a continuation of social life.[13] Bill Berkson co-author of several collaborations with O'Hara said to me, "I think what interested O'Hara about collaboration was art and life: art and social life was very continuous for him and writing was his natural occupation, so if he was with someone who was a writer it made sense for the two of them to extend their conversation in the form of a poem or play." According to Berkson this was all part of O'Hara's desire to "aestheticise life and enliven art."[14] O'Hara himself stressed what he felt to be the very personal nature of collaboration in a letter to Larry Rivers "After all each collaboration or whatever it is, is unique and can exist only between the two people that do it depending on their emotional relationship, perhaps most on that."[15] Shared social and artistic background were central to the collaborations which

include many in-jokes and personal references with which the outsider feels in a double relationship of inclusion and exclusion. As already discussed in Chapter Two, homosexuality was an important element of the social milieu (though many of the collaborators were heterosexual) and the strong interest in collaboration can perhaps be partially linked with the need of homosexuals to keep together and support each other at a time before the Stonewall riots of 1969 when they were under a considerable threat.

Working methods.

O'Hara's collaborations were produced by a large variety of different working methods; in some cases such as the collaborations with Joe Brainard and Alfred Leslie the artists worked separately, in other cases they worked together.[16] All the collaborations I have chosen to talk about here in detail were executed as joint work by the two artists working directly together. The working methods of the collaborations, of which more details are given in the notes, in general stress immediacy and close interactiveness. The immediacy occurs through the close proximity of the collaborators, through lack of revision and by investing the procedures with a theatrical or performance element.

In Location Larry Rivers documents the interactive nature of the working methods in the Stones collaborations:

Sometimes I would designate an area that I was sure I was going to leave empty. He might write there or if I did put

something down I would direct him to write whatever he wished but ask that it start at a specific place and end up a square or rectangular thin or fat shape of words around my image.[17]

The continual pressure of the presence of the other person could push each artists into new stances towards his medium and a new awareness of the possibilities of that medium but could also bypass rationalising the procedure. Rivers says:

I think the charged breath of making something on my neck kept me from reacting other than, "What can I use in his words to begin." I hardly saw it as a poem. They weren't poems. After a stone was finished I read his poems in a more normal way. They delighted me or made me think of Frank. I had no idea of their emotional content. I never entertained the idea of matching the "mood" of his words. It was always some specific object I could think about doing...[18]

The visual and the verbal were seen as interacting:

We were fully aware by now that Frank with his limited means was almost as important as myself in the overall visual force of the print...Frank without realising it was being called upon to think of things outside poetry. Besides what they seemed to mean he was using his words as a visual element. The size of his letters, the density of the color brought on by how hard or softly he pressed on the crayon, where it went on the stone (which many times was left up to him) were not things that

remained separated from my scratches and smudges. Frank by this time had been around my painting and N.Y. painting for quite a while and was assistant curator at the Museum of Modern Art. The general conception of flat space in painting was already as much a part of him as it was of me. If a self-conscious display of growing grass can be presented as an experience and shown in an art gallery and we seriously consider a composer's score as a visual phenomenon, it is apparent that a poet will begin to see his writing in a little wider scope than the level of his semantic struggle, especially if he is writing in the presence of another spirit and especially if his words get beyond the scale of typewriter letters. [19]

Rivers also draws attention to the way it is not possible to revise when working on a lithograph:

The lithograph stone surface is very smooth. The marks going on it can be made with a rather difficult to handle, almost rubbery crayon or with a dark liquid called Touche. I had never seen any of the necessary equipment before this and if I wasn't thinking about a Picasso or Matisse print I thought printmaking the dull ocupation of pipe-smoking corduroy deep-type artisans. Whatever you do comes out the opposite to the way you put it down. In order for the writing to be read it must be done backwards. It is almost impossible to erase, one of my more important crutches. Technically it was a really cumbersome task. One needed the patience of another age, but our ignorance and

enthusiasm allowed us to jump into it without thinking about the details and difficulties.[20]

In his description of the genesis of "US" Rivers talks about the evolution of the subject matter and the close working co-operation of the two men:

Each time we got together we decided to choose some very definite subject and since there was nothing we had more access to than ourselves the first stone was going to be called "US". Oh yes, the title always came first. It was the only way we could get started. U and S were written on the top center of the stone backwards. I don't know if he wrote it. I remember decorating the letters to resemble some kind of flag and made it seem like the letters of our our country. Then I put something down to do with his broken nose and bumpy forehead and stopped. From a round hand-mirror I eked out a few scratches to represent my face. The combination of the decorated U and S, his face and mine, made Frank write "...they call us the farters of our country..." I did something, whatever I could, which related to the title of the stone and he either commented on what I had done or took it somewhere else in any way he felt like. If something in the drawing embarrassed him he could alter the quality by the quality of his words or vice versa. Sometimes I would designate an area that I was sure I was going to leave empty. He might write there or if I did put something down I would direct him to write whatever he wished but ask that it start at a specific place and end up a square or rectangular thin or fat shape of words over or

around my image. With these images vague or not vague and his words we were at once remarking about some subject and decorating the surface of the stone. 21

In an interview with me (Southampton, 31st July 1986) Larry Rivers compared the work methods of the Stones lithographs to jazz improvisation, 22 but the working methods of the collaboration seem to have been a mixture of the improvisatory and quite slow. Though Rivers says nothing about it in Location there is in fact a preparatory sketch for "US" which undermines the idea of the collaboration as completely improvisatory. Nevertheless it is much less abstracted than the finished version and much of the interesting detail is left out.23

In a letter to Henry Rago O'Hara relates how the pressure of working in a new medium could create new pressures in one's own and also how he and Rivers wanted to keep the two mediums on a level of equal importance and also stresses the lack of revision possible on the stone":

I made some lithographs (12) which are called Stones. The idea of this was that we would improvise what went on the lithographic stone to avoid illustration, that is, I would not have a poem or he a drawing in mind when we got together and we would take turns starting the first thing on the stone. This entailed my learning to write backwards with a grease pencil and all that. This was sort of nerve-wracking since it is hard enough

to get a good poem if you work over it, and several times we got together and produced nothing and he did some lithographic drawings which became independent prints. But anyway it turned out to be a series of twelve "things" with text mingled with drawing or surrounded by drawing or surrounding drawing. [24]

Of his Poem-Painting collaborations with O'Hara, Bluhm says:

Frank and I enjoyed music. We used to meet Sunday mornings at my studio, listen to music and talk and look at paintings, and then go to my house and listen to records. One time, listening to opera (Toti del Monte, the famous 300-pound soprano, singing Madame Butterfly), I said to Frank: I have all this paper, let's put it on the wall." And we decided we'd like listening to the music and playing around with words and paint. But it wasn't a serious art project. We just wanted to do something while the music was going on. For instance if we were listening to a Prokofiev symphony, you could feel the boots in my painting.[25]

Talking more specifically about the technical basis of the collaboration Bluhm (like O'Hara writing about Stones) stressed their wish to keep the verbal and visual on equal terms:

we tried to keep the art as just a gesture (hence the decisions to use only black paint) not an illustration of the poem. The idea was to make the gesture relate, in an abstract way, to the idea of the poem. Only rarely did we do a thing à la

Dali where you pick up the drip and throw it into the word." Bluhm also called the collaborations "a terrific event, a Happening-a way of amusing ourselves. [26]

A different account is given by Bill Berkson on how the Bluhm-O´Hara collaboration evolved:

One dreary Sunday midday in October 1960, the painter Norman Bluhm and Frank O´Hara poet and self-confessed balayeur des artistes, met at Bluhm´s studio in the old Tiffany Building on Park Avenue South, and as the inclement weather wasn´t helping either´s mood for conversation, they decided to get on with a collaboration project they had talked about weeks before. A few hours later, they had made these twenty-six poem-paintings.

O´Hara did the writing and Bluhm the painting-each with characteristic style and gusto and both, as Bluhm says, "spontaneously, with humour and cynicism at the same time." In some, Bluhm directed O´Hara where to put his words; in others the poet had a free rein, the spaces between words or phrases indicating to the painter areas he might decorate. A certain liveliness of surface results from the fact that neither had qualms about jumping, or even crashing through, the other´s fences. There was an easy give-and-take about what territory belonged to whom.[27]

Berkson goes on to say later:

Bluhm and O'Hara had been friends since 1955, and their friendship shows up in O'Hara's lines with mention of Chicago (where Bluhm grew up) the Cedar Tavern (then still on Eighth Street and still a major drop of the talk of "The New York School"), such Bluhm-isms as "Sale Morbidité" (a Gabin-erie picked up during his decade in Paris) and the happy dishing of one or two mutual acquaintances.

Regarding the genesis of "The Mirror Naturally Stripped" Kenneth Koch in an interview with me said that O'Hara and himself took turns during the collaboration, writing a line each.[28] Collaboration was part of a more general interaction between Koch and O'Hara of showing and reading their work to each other.

The genesis of the St. Bridget collaborations is described by O'Hara in a letter to Barney Rossett.[29] "

I'm enclosing a set of poems Bill Berkson and I wrote together and which we'd like to submit for consideration of the Evergreen Review. They're about St. Bridget's Church which is on the east side of Tompkins Square park at Avenue B and 9th Street and which has a crooked steeple. I first noticed it years ago when I went to walk George in that park with Joan, and now I live near it. Later Bill noticed that the steeple tips slightly towards uptown, and that's how we started the hymns.

If you like them enough to feature them perhaps you would consider using a photograph of the church, which is very interesting and has a nice peculiar quality."

In a note placed with his papers at the University of Connecticut Bill Berkson describes how all the St.Bridget poems were written jointly, except for "Hymn to St. Bridget's steeple" written by him alone.[30] In an interview with me Berkson said that The Hymns of St Bridget "were written on the typewriter, one person would start something going and he would get up and the other person would go on a bit- like choruses in improvised music." [31] Berkson also said that they often had music on while they were writing them. They were written according to Berkson without revision though Berkson attempted some revision after O'Hara's death. Berkson said the first of the St. Bridget poems was written by him alone but he said that since it was an outright imitation of Frank O'Hara it was in a sense written by him too.

I want now to show in detail how O'Hara's collaborations explore problems of the self and the relationship of text and image and in the process enact the relationship of difference and similarity. An important aspect of this argument will be that the poetry-painting comparison is relevant to the poem collaborations as well as the mixed-media collaborations.

"US" by Larry Rivers and Frank O'Hara.

The lithograph "US" made with Larry Rivers is first of the Stones series of thirteen lithographs.[32] In the lithograph

the relationship of the self to others and the relationship between poetry and painting are introduced as fragmented thematic elements which jostle together and can be freely ordered by the spectator. The lithograph produces a dynamic multiple network of likenesses and differences, continuities and discontinuities, which, while acknowledging the differences between creative artists and media, undermines their isolation and separation.

For example, the lithograph calls into question artistic individuality by introducing the collaborators themselves into it and at the same time merging their identities: this implies that while collaboration engages individuals it involves a common goal. On the one hand by using illustrations of the two men (O´Hara´s broken nose is well in evidence) the lithograph appears to be emphasising their different personalities with "Rivers" in full view and "O´Hara" in side view. In the top half of the picture they are shown individually and not looking at each other with O´Hara drinking on his own. At the same time however their identities seem to converge. The face to the immediate left of the emblem US seems to be Rivers and bears a photographic resemblance to him but it is certainly not identical to the image on the immediate right of the emblem. This image on the right in fact moves River´s identity closer to that of O´Hara, whose profile while he is drinking is merged with Rivers own by various partially abstracted superimposed images. In the bottom right hand corner, the features of the two men are sufficiently indistinct to make it impossible to tell which is which. Furthermore, the way in which O´Hara is always shown in profile and Rivers in full face, seems to suggest a partial or

half view of the self which can more easily merge with the equally incomplete self of the other. Throughout the lithograph hands, fingers and abstract hand-like and finger-like shapes, which ambiguously, could belong to either O'Hara or Rivers, again emphasise the links between them. In addition the close emotional relationship of the two men is emphasised, and the sculptural image in the bottom left hand corner suggests both sexual and artistic joining. Collaboration here is identified with sexual activity, both involving the merging of the boundaries of self.

The identities of the two men are also merged in the recurring use of the word "US", which in turn brings out the relationship of the collaborators to American society by punning on us and U.S.and also playing on the idea of us and them. For the contradictory clues in the lithograph, which can be brought together in a number of different ways, demonstrate the ambivalence of the two men towards their position in society. On the one hand they feel they form a social and artistic unit which is in opposition to the establishment which rejects them because they are bohemians and homosexuals, "They call us the farters of our country" and see themselves as great artists apart from the rest of society. On the other hand the lithograph shows them to be thoroughly Americanised, interested in drinking parties rather than political parties and integrated into the values of a society where popular culture takes the place of high art and where James Dean is a hero. The decorative flag emblem brings out these highly ambivalent attitudes: in one way it points to the artists' identification with and enthusiasm for American society,

in another way it adopts an anarchistic position which trivialises and humorously dismisses the importance of the State by suggesting that the State is subordinate to art and collaboration. The style of the lithograph itself incorporates the signs of high art within those of low art and resembles a comic strip. Likewise "camping it up" is a way of making gestures of serious import, while openly displaying a homosexual relationship as cosy and affectionate is a subversive act in a society so repressive towards homosexuality.

Thematically the relationship between poetry and painting is introduced into the lithograph by superimposing the differences and similarities between them. "Poetry belongs to Me, Larry and Painting to you" humorously emphasises that though poetry and painting belong to different spheres it is difficult to keep them apart. More significantly, the whole lithograph involves the thematic cross over of text and image. In a process somewhat analogous to that of the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy in O´Hara´s poems the representations are broken down into a huge cross over of visual-verbal metonymies, for example the image of O´Hara drinking, which could be seen to relate to "Parties were given we went"; synecdoches, for example the disembodied hands which could belong to either painter or poet, as well as the visual representation of verbal elements, such as the depiction of O´Hara in heroic pose which relates to the word "hero".

While the lithograph seems to consist of some writing and some visual images, in fact these interpenetrate and overlap with each other, sometimes partially obscuring or transforming the

lettering itself,as in the words "look where it got them " which are partially smudged. The visual aspect of the words is increased in the use of handwriting, underlining, capital letters, blackened emphasis and smudging, implying that poetry can do anything that painting can do. The visual images on the other hand are perceived in the light of the implications of the words.

But the technical cross over of the visual and verbal can only occur because of the differences within painting and poetry which they share and which means that both mediums oscillate between representation and abstraction. On the one hand the apparently greater capacity of visual images for resembling is taken to extreme lengths by the almost photographic shots of Rivers and O'Hara which contrast with the verbal references to them which can only point to them by name. But these visual representations are in fact partially abstracted and it is, of course, the abstraction of the images which causes the merging of the identities of the two men mentioned earlier. On the other hand, the power of words to "represent" rather than to seem to merely point to their apparent referents is increased, not only by emphasising their visual aspect, but through the brevity, simplicity and ideogrammatic nature of the verbal messages which are text insertions rather than complete poems. The text insertions also participate in the overall, fairly symmetrical, structural arrangement of the lithograph. Because both text and image oscillate between representation and abstraction they can be freely exchanged. The kisses at the end of the James Dean

letter, for example, become visual representations which are then taken up by the artist and abstracted and used elsewhere in the lithograph. The visual and verbal meet and become identical in the sign US.

Another aspect of the cross-over between the verbal and the visual in the lithograph is the interaction of spatial and temporal elements within each medium. The text and images have to be read and ordered successively, though the order of succession is free and contributes to mobility of meaning. But at the same time the circular distribution of the images round the edge of the picture and the short terse nature of the text makes it easy to simultaneously perceive the elements. Text and image give the impression of being both still and in flux.

"US" illustrates both thematically and technically the merging of individuals and of text and image which I argued to be a feature of poetry-painting collaborations. The format of the lithograph is one which emphasises interaction, making merging and separation part of its process. Consequently it reveals that artistic collaboration is itself part of a whole network of social, historic and artistic interactions: of the four collaborations "US" most explicitly introduces the art-society relationship.

Poem-Painting with Norman Bluhm :Somewhere Outside Yourself

The poem-painting "Somewhere Outside Yourself" is from a series of poem-paintings executed by O'Hara with the Abstract Expressionist painter Norman Bluhm.[33] This collaboration also

calls into question concepts of individuality in art though with less direct reference to the collaborators. The poem speaks of individuality but suggests that it is frail because conflict is necessary to maintain it. The boundaries of the self are unclear, the small silent cry which seems an expression of the self lies in fact "outside yourself". At the same time the poem uses the first person plural, as if individuality was something which could be assumed by two people:

now that we
are almost at war and have
again become individuals

This use of the first person plural is also interesting because it conveys the impression that the poet is talking for both of them, as if he is the one who must speak because it is he who uses words. Yet the relationship is still problematic: even if the painter is silent it is unclear whether or not the poet is speaking for both of them, or for himself and someone else. Furthermore, when he says "somewhere outside yourself" we do not know whether or not he is addressing his collaborator or including both himself and his collaborator in the "you". These same words, nevertheless, have reverberations which connect the collaboration with the world outside it, the passage quoted above suggests the darker side of the words "war" and "individual". There are suggestions of war between nations, or implied "cold" war (nearly at war) and of individuality as the self-interest

which war promotes. The small silent cry waiting to become part of "the universal attention" could suggest the gulf between the artist and the society in which he lives and the desire to integrate them.

The outlay of the collaboration is more formal than "US" and seems at first clearly divided into a painting and poem, with vertical lines characterising the painting, and horizontal lines the poem. The visual part is apparently completely abstract, while the text seems more like a complete poem than the text in "US". But again there is a merging of text and image. In the first place the difference between the visual and verbal parts is not as clear as it might seem to be. There is a spattering of paint on the poem which is in black ink and is therefore continuous visually with the painting. Secondly there is a merging of the poem and painting due to the differences within each medium which oscillate between abstraction and representation. For example, the words in lines like:

Somewhere outside yourself
there is a small silent cry
waiting
to become part of the
universal attention

can make us see certain aspects of the painting as representational. So because of "univeral attention" we may be more likely to see the oval shape near the top of the picture as

an eye. Or the mention of the words "sale morbidité" may make us think of the black gestures as signifying death. At the same time the proximity of the abstract painting emphasises the "abstract" aspect of the poem which despite metonymical associations e.g. yourself/universal/individuals or war/die/morbidité dispels narrative continuity or metaphorical coherence. And again in the poem-painting, despite a more regular lay out than we find in "US", the temporal and spatial elements interpenetrate each other: in the light of the poem we find ourselves "reading" the poem-painting and in the light of the painting "viewing" it as structural arrangement.

In "Somewhere Outside Yourself" the consequences of collaboration are less heavily emphasised than in "US". The collaboration is structured differently; text and image are more independent and more internally consistent in style. So the poem-painting demonstrates the tendency of text and poem to merge in a collaboration, even where the differences within each medium are less forcefully exposed.

The Mirror Naturally Stripped by Kenneth Koch and Frank O´Hara

"The Mirror Naturally Stripped" by Frank O´Hara and Kenneth Koch is one of four collaborations written by them.[34]

The title of this poem was possibly inspired by Marcel Duchamp´s "The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors" and plays on the concepts of identity and resemblance. One of the striking aspects of this poem is that although it is written by two people

it uses the first person singular rather than the first person plural. This makes ambiguous who the first person is, whether the "I" is one or both authors, continuous or changing. It also raises questions of what it means to collaborate if the joint authorship is to be concealed. The questions marks and use of the word "you" are also highly ambiguous, we do not know whether the collaborators are addressing each other or someone outside the poem. The sudden use of the first person plural in "you do intend to love us like a helicopter landing" because we have become attuned to the first person singular, strikes us as a disruption of the prevailing mode. No impression of a unified self arises out of the poem because the first person is not used as a means of integrating thoughts or actions.

In fact although "The Mirror Naturally Stripped" was written by two people it appears to be a seamless text. It is not easy to tell who has written what. We are struck by the similarity in the style of the lines rather than the difference caused by joint authorship. Nor does the poem attract attention to itself as collaboration, the nearest we come to any reference to the collaboration is the word "criss-crosses". Instead it foregrounds the dissolution of the difference between people through the adoption of a common literary code and a fabric of shared experience and reference. It has artistic affiliations with both surrealism and dada and is full of new conjunctions: "the empire of phosporus cheescake", "O marinated herring of these twelve blue eyes!", "teasing neck-sacks" "motors of velvet" "displaced piano etc."

The interesting point is that the frame in which the

collaborators find themselves and in which their differences are dissolved is itself one of difference, accidental association. The poem keeps referentiality at bay by dispersing it, using words sequentially which are as unconnected in meaning as possible from each other so that the parts do not fit readily into a recognisable whole. Words often follow each other through association of sound over sense, which propels the poem forwards without a chance for meaning to settle and concentrate. Time and place keep changing: history, itself debunked as a debate about daffodil seeds, is continually in the present as we move from California, to Everest, to the Mediterranean. Some conjunctions take surrealism past its own extremes, in their dense clusters of words disjunct in meaning e.g. "the steep side of California-happy gypsy dominoes", and some of the sentences are not constructed with regard to conventional syntax:

> Quaff these jewelled belches
> for isn't there whichness in the thinking apparatus
> that glides towards cruelty as commonly as a bench.

However the degree of dissociation oscillates. At one extreme the poem breaks into a dadaesque association mainly by sound:

> Aren't you William Tell?
> Will you em tell? Oh it wool int. baby ex fair ill nnnn
> tell

and it is true or my name isn´t ick. Well, ick then.

Ick.

Nice coolness oh erp, axe, fair, fare,pink,trees!pangs!

oh its jamas

At the other extreme a few chance associations begin very slightly to align as metonymical connections between the words e.g. debating/thinking/inverting (all arguably members of the same class) in the first stanza. When this occurs the poem starts to assume some traces of metaphorical coherence. So the first five lines could be seen to be a comment on the writing of the poem itself, which does not prioritise one word over another but "glides towards cruelty as commonly as a bench" and turns everything upside down, "Yes I am inverting my bricks". Here dissociation turns back, to a slight extent, into association, similarity. A visual analogy is apt here: we have already seen how in paintings and in poetry-painting collaborations abstraction and representation are present in each other. This poem demonstrates the analogous process in poetry where there is a tendency for accidental connection to hover on the brink of turning back into metaphorical connection in the way discussed in Chapter One. The movement back towards metaphor is however very slight compared to that in O´Hara´s single-author poems: the poem moves much further in the direction of abstraction than most of O´Hara´s single-author poems and does not question the boundaries between between metaphor and metonymy. Presumably this difference from O´Hara´s single-author poems is one of the results of the collaborative procedure and of the combined resources of the two

men. It is also easy to see how a collaborative procedure which involved writing one line each might result in a high level of accidental connection being maintained. In addition the poem exploits spatiality in poetry. For the difficulty of sustaining meanings for the reader means that the elements of the poem will be more readily perceived simultaneously. The use of repeated words such as "basement" or "daisy", which do nothing to further or emphasise an overall meaning, foreground this "spatial" effect.

"The Mirror Naturally Stripped" demonstrates that the contributions of the collaborators can become even more indistinguishable from each other in a poem collaboration than in a poetry-painting collaboration. At the same time we can see how an appreciation of the relationship between text and image can also be relevant to our perception of O´Hara´s poem collaborations as well as his mixed-media collaborations.

St Bridget´s Hymn to Willem de Kooning by Frank O´Hara and Bill Berkson.

This poem was written in 1962 and is taken from The Hymns of St Bridget written jointly by O´Hara and Bill Berkson between 1960 and 1962. [35]

In "St. Bridget´s Hymn to Willem de Kooning" the first person is again used by the collaborators, but the "I" is a construct which registers and keeps in motion a flow of impressions. The construct does not convey the impression of a consistent self and cannot be easily identified with one or other

of the two collaborators, in fact it is likely that its identity changes in the course of the poem. Similarly the identity of "you", the addressee is ambiguous, it could be the collaborator, de Kooning, St Bridget or a friend. The identity of the "you" seems to change: whereas at the beginning the "you" could be de Kooning, by the end the person who is suspected "of going into the other room to cry" is likely to be the other collaborator. The second person singular is also used to address both objects and people whose categorisation as such is wittily undermined: St. Bridget takes on human characteristics and personality in the poem while the human being, de Kooning is increasingly identified with his paintings. So when the poem talks of "the three of us" it is not clear which the three are, of the possible choices of the collaborators, de Kooning and St. Bridget. Again the collaboration is part of a huge fabric of shared allusions, jokes and references:to painting and music and opera (de Kooning, Ravel, Fidelio); to the immediate landscape of New York (St. Bridget) and the imagined and distant landscape of Russia; and to other collaborations by O´Hara and Berkson:the Angelicus and Fidelio Fobb letters.

The poem makes the relationship of the collaborators part of its subject, still however, keeping it veiled who is "I" and who is "you".

I said we should fall apart like a Tinguely and
you said we should reinforce like a de Kooning

The collaborative relationship is taken up further in the

passage:

> Two becomes one often
> enough to keep the floodgates closed against art
> or any abstraction which might make us one
> instead of two steeples necessarily
> together.

which implies that the collaborative process demands both the retention and subjugation of individuality, but also suggests that plurality and unity are interdependent in all works of art and in the procedures which bring them about. The poem goes on to then speak of "the two natures of my personality", thereby collapsing the differences between the two collaborators into difference within both of them, making them "two in one".

This collaboration also demonstrates difference within language itself but in quite a different way from the Koch-O´Hara poem. In fact in many ways it demonstrates the reverse movement. It has a more objective starting point in its use of St Bridget and de Kooning as subject matter, and these form part of a large complex of open and overlapping metaphors which run through the poem,(though just as in O´Hara´s single-author poems the difference between literal and metaphorical is blurred.) There is the "St Bridget" metaphor, the "operatic" metaphor, the "weather" chain and the "city" metaphor.

However the poem never becomes a metaphorical or symbolic

whole for the metaphors are continually merging into and diverging from each other. For example in the beginning, the Russian and St Bridget metaphors produce overlapping metonymies "field" and "asphalt" while at the end the two collaborators are "two singular steeples necessarily/together". In the course of the poem St. Bridget is associated with the rural landscape of Eastern Europe, "Russian mush"; with art, "St. Bridget up there all abstracted"; with creativity, "I didn´t know my voice could go way up /there above the steeples and swoop around and then"; with the landscape of the city, "asphalt threshold"; with collaboration, "two singular steeples"; with spiritualism and spirituality "your mediums your beads"; with human characteristics and feelings, "your feet are longer and narrower than mine...you love me" and with one of the collaborators, "my bower next to your beautiful self". The result is a continuous merging and separation which produces changing relationships between art, the individual, society and the environment. Ying is opposed to yang and at the same time is yang. The fields of rural Russia and the asphalt of urban New York may seem to be topologically and politically opposed but the merging of their natural environment (the weather) and their man-made environment (the railroad) suggests that they have much in common.

As is obvious from the above examples a metonymic network is operating here but it is not so rigorously applied as in O´Hara´s single-author poems such as "In Memory of My Feelings" or "Chez Jane" and there are more disparate elements in the poem such the giant tortoise or the old man with a piano which are left disparate rather than being brought back as a component of

another metaphor. This poem though it employs metonymical connection does not exploit it to the same degree as O'Hara's single-author poems or locate with such subtlety the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy. Here again perhaps collaboration tends to diffuse these characteristic aspects of O'Hara's work. The poem uses much less striking and suggestive images than for example "In Memory of my Feelings" and sometimes degenerates into a rather inbred inconsequentiality.

However it is interesting to consider a visual analogy here. The poem is much more representational than the Koch but its images are superimposed and merge in such a way as to create the impression of abstraction. The poem itself draws attention to the possibility of a visual parallel in its reference to "St. Bridget all abstracted", and in its title "St. Bridget's Hymn to Willem de Kooning", since much of de Kooning's own work emphasised the interplay between abstraction and representation. Like the Koch poem it displays the importance of the "spatial" in poetry: the use of superimposed intersecting image chains forces us to simultaneously perceive its multiple elements.

"St. Bridget's Hymn to Willem de Kooning" introduces the relationship between the collaborators, and differences within the self more explicitly than the Koch poem though a visual analogy can again be seen to be relevant. The mobility produced by its multiple changing elements, makes a link between it and the Stones collaboration, "US".

In dealing with O'Hara's collaborations I have only been

concerned with collaborations between poets and poets and painters, but in general terms an interesting way to extend this framework, outside O´Hara´s work would be to examine other types of collaboration such as the performance poetry known as text-sound which has such interesting implications for the role of the author by dramatically reducing his control over the final product. At the same time collaboration has relevance for mixed-media work by one person and for single-author poems where problems of self, text, image and difference may often be present but much more more concealed. This returns us to our principal concern, O´Hara´s work: his collaborations sharpen our awareness of his own poems. To study the collaborations is to go back to a poem with an increased awareness of their proximity to a painting:a matter I will take further in the next chapter.

Notes

1. Shapiro, David, Art as Collaboration: Towards a theory of Pluralist Aesthetics:1950-1980", in McCabe, Cynthia Jaffee, ed. Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century, Washington , Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984. Catalogue for an exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington. p. 45.

2. Hobbs, Robert, Rewriting History:Artistic Collaboration since 1960, in McCabe, Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century p. 63.

3. Steiner, Wendy, The Colours of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting, Chicago, Chicago Press, 1982 and Mitchell, W.J.T, Iconography : Image, Text and Ideology, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986.

4. A way of distinguishing between the two different systems (language and visual images) and one that Wendy Steiner employs in The Colours of Rhetoric is C.S. Pierce´s categorisation of different types of signs. In Pierce´s definition a symbol is a sign which is related to its referent only by arbitary association and the icon is a sign which resembles or incorporates its referent which can be objects, events, ideas or attitudes. One way of distinguishing between poetry and painting then is to say that verbal texts are more symbolic while visual images are more iconic and one way of emphasising their similarity is to say that both consist of mixed signs. However

since the word icon is sometimes used by theorists to describe an artistic representation and sometimes used to describe the impression of naturalness that a work of art creates even when it is non-representational, the term iconic can create a certain amount of confusion, which is why I have avoided using the term in the main text.

5. In The Colours of Rhetoric p.37-38 Steiner discusses the difficulties of the word spatial which is often used to mean atemporal. Mitchell in Iconography p.98 argues that all poems and paintings are spatial-temporal constructs. I have preferred to use the terms successive and simultaneous.

6. Steiner, The Colours of Rhetoric p. 37.

7. Mitchell, Iconography p.95-149.

8.Johnson, Barbara, The Critical Difference, Baltimore, John Hopkins, 1980. Opening remarks. In using the term différance Derrida plays on the meanings of the words différence (difference) and différance (deferral). Derrida, Jacques, trans. Bass, Alan, Writing and Difference, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Introduction, page,xvi.

9. Details of the collaborations are given in Alexander Smith, Jnr., Frank O'Hara: A Comprehensive Bibliography, New York, Garland, 1979. The collaboration with Ned Rorem, Four Dialogues for Two Voices and Two Pianos, Boosey and Hawkes, New York, 1969. is available on CMS Records Inc. Stereo DC7101 and was recorded in 1970. On the sleeve notes Rorem says that O'Hara first called it the "Quarrel Sonata". Rorem adds that

the dialogues are "of a nameless genre that falls somewhere between concert cantata and staged opera." The dialogues are in rhyming verse: O'Hara's frivolous scenario and Rorem's conventional musical style make a rather uneasy mix.

The film, "The Last Clean Shirt", produced and photographed and edited by Alfred Leslie with sub-titles by O'Hara and made between 1963 and 1964 consists of three repetitions of the same visual scenario (a negro and a woman driving through New York traffic) with different subtitles superimposed on the second and third repetitions. The sound-track, (by Leslie) includes the woman babbling in nonesense language, a range of sound effects including traffic noises and sounds like gun-fire, the pop song "The Last Clean Shirt" and a voice which interjects with the words "from dust to dust, from ashes to ashes". The soundtrack, subtitles and the photography all work against each, producing extreme multiplicity of meaning. This film which is experimental in character, is in my opinion one of the most interesting of the collaborations. Unfortunately it is unavailable in this country at the moment.

There also seem to have been a number of collaborations which were discussed but never came to fruition. In an interview with me in Buffalo, September 29th 1986, Morton Feldman said that O'Hara and he had discussed a collaboration which was an adaption of Gide's Strait as the Gate, and showed me a copy of the novel with marked passages, but the project never took shape. In 1959 O'Hara applied to the Ford Foundation for a grant to "write a libretto for a grand opera", with Ben Weber as his first choice as composer and Ned Rorem, Charles Turner or Morton Feldman as

further possible choices. However he was not a recipient of a grant. This letter, undated, is in the archives of the Ford Foundation, New York.

10. McCabe, Cynthia Jaffee, Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century:The Period between Two Wars, in Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century p. 15.

11. Hobbs, Robert, in McCabe, Artistic collaboration p.68-69.

12. Shapiro, David, in McCabe, Artistic Collaboration p.48.

13. Some of O´Hara collaborations took the form of correspondence between friends either in the form of poem letters which reply to each other (Collected Proses and Collected Poems with Kenneth Koch in Semi-Colon) or as scenarios in which the correspondents adopt roles e.g. the Angelicus and Fidelio Fobb letters with Bill Berkson. (Some of these letters, the originals of which are among the paper of Bill Berkson in the Special Collections, University of Connecticut are published in ZZZZ, Z Press, Calais, Vermont, 1975.) In an unpublished letter to John Ashbery, New York City, 10th July, 1961, O´Hara says "The St. Bridget poems and a few others are actual collaborations line for line or passage for passage, but the Fobb (our initials) poems are mostly a bunch of "answer"poems (like Collected Poems and Collected Prose)".

14. Berkson, Bill, Interview with the author, 17th September,

1986.

15. O'Hara, letter to Larry Rivers, New York City, 21st July 1961.

16. In an interview with me, Leslie said that he completed the visual part of the film and the sound-track and that O'Hara then watched it and wrote the subtitles for it.

17. Rivers, Larry. Life Among the Stones, Location, Summer 1963, Vol.1 No 1 pp.90-98.

18. ibid p.96.

19. ibid 94-95.

20. ibid p.93.

21. ibid p.94.

22. Larry Rivers, interview with the author, Southampton, New York State, 31st July, 1986.

23. Harrison, Helen A., Larry Rivers, New York, Harper and Row, 1979, p.47.

24. Letter to Henry Rago, then editor of Poetry magazine. In the Special Collections, University Chicago Library, reproduced

in Smith, A Comprehensive Bibliography. p. 166.

25. Perloff, Frank O'Hara p. 106.

26. ibid p.106-107.

27. Berkson, Bill, Notes to Exhibition catalogue of Poem-Paintings, Loeb Student centre, New York University, January 9-February 5th, 1967.

28. Kenneth Koch interview with the author, Bridgehampton, New York State, 30th July, 1986.

29. Unpublished letter to Barney Rossett, New York City, July 27th 1961. In the uncatalogued correspondence of the Evergreen Review, George Arents Research Library, University of Syracuse.(This letter does not appear in the Donald Allen edited unpublished collection of letters.)

30. Among the papers of Bill Berkson, Special Collections, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut.

31. Bill Berkson, interview with the author, San Francisco, 17th September, 1986.

32. "US", 1957 from Stones, 13 lithographs printed in black from one stone, 1957-1959. In the collection of the Museum of

Modern Art, New York. Reproduced in Perloff, Frank O'Hara plate 3 and in Location, page 93.

33. "Somewhere Outside Yourself", gouache on paper Oct. 1960,from Poem-Paintings, ink and gouache on paper, Oct/Nov. 1960. Collection of the Grey Art Gallery, New York University, reproduced in Frank O'Hara: Art Chronicles p. 94 and in Berkson, LeSueur: Homage to Frank O'Hara, p. 125.

34. Published in Semi-Colon Vol.2. No.1. 1956? In Smith, A Comprehensive Bibliography p. 119 the date is queried.

Koch and O'Hara wrote three other poems together. One of these "Poem", consists of twelve repetitions of Sky/woof woof/harp and was according to Koch composed on the street near the Museum of Modern Art. It was published in the same edition of Semi-Colon as "The Mirror Naturally Stripped." The other two poems are unpublished; they are "Nina Sestina"written for Nina Castelli's sixteenth birthday and "Bad Words". "Bad Words" has twenty-six lines each beginning with a different letter of the alphabet, demonstrating Koch's interest in using games and devices as a framework for collaboration. Copied of these poems were given to me by Kenneth Koch.

35. "St. Bridget's Hymn to Willem de Kooning" written in 1962 from Hymns of St. Bridget, 1960 and 1962. Published as O'Hara, Frank and Berkson, Bill, Hymns of St. Bridget, Adventures in Poetry New York, The Print Centre, 1974.

Chapter Five:"Why I am not a Painter": representation and abstraction: metaphor and metonymy

You are worried that you don't write?
Don't be. It's the tribute of the air that
your paintings don't just let go
of you. And what poet ever sat down
in front of a Titian, pulled out
his versifying tablet and began
to drone? Don't complain, my dear.
You do what I can only name.
To Larry Rivers (PR, 140)

"The City Summers of Hartigan and O'Hara" would be an ideal thesis for some graduate student at Millstone University, I should think. About 1980.-O'Hara, letter to Grace Hartigan[1]

In the previous chapter we saw how poetry and painting shared certain characteristics and how a painting analogy could be applied to the poem collaborations. In this chapter I want to show how the concept of the interdependence of representation and abstraction is much more relevant to O'Hara's single-author poems. I want to demonstrate how O'Hara's poems locate the point at which representation turns into abstraction and vice versa and then make a link between this and the previous analysis in terms of metaphor and metonymy in Chapter One. Before doing this, however, I want to review stances towards abstraction and representation in painting during the fifties and sixties among

the New York School, particularly in the work of those artists such as Grace Hartigan and Larry Rivers who were close to O´Hara and in O´Hara´s own artistic statements and art criticism.

Abstraction and representation in the New York School

The relationship between representation and abstraction was played out by artists in a number of different ways during the fifties and sixties. Of the first generation Abstract Expressionist painters de Kooning and Hofmann were probably most influential, in terms of the relationship between representation and abstraction, on painters of the second generation, such as Mike Goldberg, Joan Mitchell, Grace Hartigan and Larry Rivers. De Kooning was heavily influenced by cubism and used gesture painting as a central technique. However he also included representational elements, such as the human figure in the "Woman" series, which is recognisable as a figure at the centre of the paintings, but which is fragmented into areas which form part of, and merge into, an overall structural design. Sandler quotes de Kooning in a lecture at the Museum of Modern Art in 1950 (published the following year) when de Kooning "ridiculed aesthetician-artists who made an issue of abstraction-versus -representation and who wanted to "abstract" the art from art". De Kooning said that in the past art had:

...meant everything that was in it-not what you could take out of it...For the painter to come to the "abstract"...he

needed many things. These things were always things in life-a horse, a flower, a milkmaid, the light in a room through a window made of diamond shapes maybe, tables, chairs and so forth...But all of a sudden, in that famous turn of the century, a few people thought they could take the bull by the horns and invent an aesthetic beforehand... with the idea of freeing art, and ...demanding that you should obey them... The question, as they saw it, was not so much what you could paint but rather what you could not paint. You could not paint a house or a tree or a mountain. It was then that subject matter came into existence as something you ought not to have.[2]

Hofmann was interested in exploring the internal logic of shape and colour within a painting and his theory of push and pull where the structure was determined by strong colours competing with each other was very influential upon the second generation New York School. Working from his theoretical writings Cynthia Goodman explains Hofmann's theory of "push-pull" as follows:

Plasticity was created by the forces that Hofmann referred to as "push and pull" a phrase that he used so often that it became nearly synonymous with his style of painting. The analogy he used to explain "push-pull" was that of a balloon being pressed on one side and consequently expanding on the other. In a painting, the visual movement of one plane forward must be counteracted by the movement of another plane back into depth in order to restore the two-dimensional balance. Each time

the picture plane is stimulated, it 'reacts automatically in the opposite direction to the stimulus received'. According to the artist's most succinct explanation, "Push answers with Pull and Pull with Push."[3]

Hofmann's own paintings, which combine Cubism, Expressionism and Fauvism, and in which the eye is pulled from one block of colour to another exemplify his theories. His style ranges from "Pompeii", which is built up of small and large rectangles in mainly strident pinks, reds, turquoise, yellow and green to the freer, "Above Deep Waters" where a clearer top red and bottom black area is intersected by much more freely painted area of yellows, greens and blues. However as Sandler points out Hofmann was not averse to figuration and demanded that his students work with observable phenomena; the main activity in his classes was drawing from a model or still life. Hofmann's own earlier painting included figuration elements, for example, "Table with Teakettle, Green vase, Red Flowers" which uses still-life elements. [4]

Some painters of the second generation were attracted to one or other of the poles of representation and abstraction. Jane Freilicher, for example, in paintings such as "Farm Scene" and "The Mallow-Gathers" leaned heavily towards representation of landscape or in "Portrait of John Ashbery" to human representation.[5] Fairfield Porter (an older painter who is nevertheless collected by Sandler together with other members of the New York School) also leaned towards representation in such

paintings as "Red Wheel barrow" or "The Pear Tree" which are landscapes, or "Jimmy and John" which is a portrait.[6] On the other hand Joan Mitchell, Norman Bluhm, and Alfred Leslie's paintings, even if they took their inspiration from nature, were more abstractly orientated. Mitchell's "Ladybug", "Metro" and "Evenings on 73rd Street" though they may be drawn from land or cityscapes consist of thick highly coloured interweaving bold strokes which form a web of small overlapping blocks of paint.[7] Norman Bluhm's paintings "Bleeding Rain" and "Jaded Silence" though they consist of overlapping layers of paint, suggest in the horizontal division of the canvas the concept of the horizon, while "Sunstorms" jettisons the idea of the horizon for overlaying washes of orange and yellow dotted with small blue shapes which dissolve into drips and "Chicago 1920" consists of swirling gestures in red and blue.[8] Alfred Leslie in "Quartet # 1" and "None 1959" divides the painting into larger blocks which combine geometric abstraction with loose brushstrokes, drips and splashes, although in "Flag Day" there are some figurative elements such as stripes which could belong to a flag and some still-life images.[9]

At the same time Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were questioning the concept of representation. Rauschenberg's combines included found objects such as cast off pieces of fabric and plastic; "Canyon" incorporates a stuffed eagle, while works such as "Bed", which consists of a bed and pillow which could actually be slept in, confused the difference between presentation and representation.[10] Similarly Jasper Johns also worked with combinations of objects: his "According to What"

1964 includes a spoon and coat hanger projecting from the canvas and a chair projecting upside down, as well as a rectangle saying "According to What". Johns played off "real" against "art" objects: "Painted Bronze" is composed of two plastic cylinders cast into bronze, with painted Ballantine ale labels, but at the same time is a replica of the objects (ale cans), while the flag pictures look exactly the same as "real flags".[11] Both Rauschenberg and Johns, however, also employed non-figurative painted elements in their work. For example Johns "According to What" includes free painting over the objects or in the space between the objects. Pop Art in the work of Andy Warhol etc. took the idea of using everyday objects even further by including commercial images as subject matter.[12]

Larry Rivers and Grace Hartigan (and to a lesser extent Michael Goldberg) engaged the idea of the interdependence of the representational and abstract and made this interaction part of the subject of their painting in a way which is analogous to O'Hara's.[13] In "The Next to Last Confederate Soldier" O'Hara himself refers to "The Soldier's fluctuation between figurative absence and absent presence." (SS,p.96) Rivers work shows a large variety of different ways of confronting this problem; in a painting such as "Double Portrait of Berdie", which shows in unflinching detail his aging, naked, mother-in-law, his style is highly representational while in "Dead and Dying Veteran" the scene which is the subject of the painting is fragmented and dislocated into blocks (a person in bed, a coat and a flag) which are reassembled into a new structural

arrangement. In paintings such as "The Greatest Homosexual" or "Molly at Breakfast" superimpositions of a figure mean that the basic representation is multiplied and distorted. In other paintings we move in and out of the seeing the painting as about a subject and as a structural arrangement, for example, in "Me in a Rectangle" an outline which approximates to a figure consists of blocks of bright colour which also give an largely abstracted impression. Rivers also approached the idea of representation by using other representations as a basis for his own (e.g. Washington Crossing the Delaware (where he used Leutze's painting of Washington) or "The Greatest Homosexual" (where he used David's Napoleon) and by including commercial advertising (e.g. the Lucky Stripe advertisment) as part of his subject matter.[14]

Similarly Grace Hartigan also worked with a combination of representational and abstract elements. Hartigan said in the fifties "I want an art that is not abstract and not realistic, I cannot describe the look of that art, but I think I will know it when I see it."[15] Like Rivers Hartigan's career oscillated between abstract and representational styles though she came nearer to complete abstraction during some periods than Rivers, for example in her paintings, "New England" , "October" and "Montauk Highway" which mainly exploit the concept of interpenetrating blocks of colour which intersect the canvas with strong horizontal and vertical lines. However Hartigan's painting "Billboard" combined blocks of interpenetrating colour (mainly bright reds greens and blues) with semi-representational figures which suggest a doll-like head, a harlequin, vehicles

and lights. In "Chinatown", likewise she includes figurative elements such as a woman, bowls of fruit and flowers and Chinese signs which are partly abstracted and dispersed among interpenetrating blocks of bright colours such as oranges and greens. However her paintings tend more towards abstraction with with some representational elements than Rivers' paintings,which often involve superimpositions of objects or fragmentation and reassemblage of a particular scene.[16]

Mike Goldberg in paintings such as "Split Level" or "Summer House" was attracted more consistently towards abstraction in his painting than Rivers or Hartigan. However his painting "Sardines" which is the subject of "Why I am not a Painter" dislocates the image of a room (with possibly table and chairs and a figure like shape in it) and includes the words SARDINES and EXIT. Here the words both add to the representational element of the picture (they hint at what is represented in the painting) and at the same time because they are fractured and overlaid with paint participate in the painting as structural arrangement.[17]

O'Hara's statements and art criticism.

In O'Hara's art criticism and statements about his poetry he addresses some of the issues about the relationship of representation and abstraction.[18] In "Nature and New Painting", (SS,41-52) he supports the movement among some of the painters of the second generation to return to figurative elements and calls "potentially dangerous" the contemporary attitude which claims "that the return to figure and to nature in

American painters signifies a falling away from passion, from profundity." In "Nature and New Painting" O´Hara discusses the tension between representation and abstraction in the work of Rivers and Hartigan. In the case of Rivers, he says, increased painterliness (i.e. increased interest in the techniques of abstraction) coincided with increased seriousness of subject matter. "Mr.Rivers stroke became wider, the paint thicker and more Fauve, the images were flung even more joyously and carelessly, the surface had air and depth, vivacity and solidity. However "simultaneously ...his subject matter took on a new seriousness, notably in The Burial, a grand conception inspired by Courbet". At its best Rivers painting "satisfied the requirements of what he saw in nature and what he sought in painting". (SS,47).

Similarly he applauds in Hartigan´s current paintings the dislocation and structural rearrangement of figurative elements:

She put behind her the exclusively aesthetic concerns of her abstractions, her new canvases erupting with images and influences hitherto repressed: fantastic nudes and constumed figures, loaded still lifes like rock quarries, overt references to the monumental bathers of Cezanne and Matisse as well as to the Demoiselles d´Avignon period of Picasso. She had found that the great, beautiful and solitary aim of abstract painting was not hers, she could not give enough to that art. Essentially a painter of heterogeneous pictures which bring together wildly discordant images through insight into their functional relationship (their ´being together in the world´) her method is

seen in bold relief next to an abstract painter like Philip Guston, for instance, whose varied periods and explanations culminate in the pure, unified and perfect silence of his present work...She retains the chaotic brushwork and whirling impasto of expressionism, but in turning to nature she has introduced a passion which was only implied in the early work ...(SS, 45)

An awareness of the interpenetration of the representational and abstract in his own poetry is also implicit in O'Hara's statements about his work. In "Statement for the New American Poetry" he says, "It may be that poetry make's life's nebulous events tangible to me and restores their detail; or conversely, that poetry brings forth the intangible quality of incidents which are all too concrete and circumstantial. Or each on specific occasions, or both all the time." (CP,500). Likewise in "Notes on Second Avenue" (CP,495) he says "As I look this over it seems quite a batty way to give information about the poem, but the verbal elements are not too interesting to discuss although they are intended consciously to keep the surface of the poem high and dry, not wet, reflective and self-conscious. Perhaps the obscurity comes in here , in the relationship between the surface and the meaning, but I like it that way since the one is the other (you have to use words) and I hope the poem to <u>be</u> the subject not just about it." Here he is using a painterly analogy to show how representation and abstraction interact in in the poem and how (as I argued in Chapter One) the poem both refers to and embodies its own meaning.

Why I am not a Painter

I want now to show how the relationship between poetry and painting and between abstraction and representation is enacted in O'Hara's own poetry. To do this I will use "Why I am not a Painter"(CP,261) (in which Mike Goldberg's Sardines actually appears) which takes the relationship of painting and poetry or the work of a painter and poet as its subject. I will then make a link with the analysis of O'Hara' poetry in Chapter One.

"Why I am not a Painter" is not about either the difference or similarity of poetry and painting but both, for in the poem similarity is constantly turning into difference and difference into similarity. As such the poem humorously enacts and engages us in the deconstruction of the poetry-painting comparison I have outlined in the previous chapter. On the one hand the poem is about the differences between poetry and painting: a painter is not a poet, the painter works with images and the poet with words. The painter begins with an object, sardines, while the poet begins with a concept, the colour orange. The painter can represent sardines while the poet can only begin by talking about orange. The painter feels that his canvas is overcrowded, "it was too much" and empties it out while the poet feels he has not put enough in to it:

> There should be
> so much more, not of orange, of
> words, of how terrible orange is
> and life.

and expands his poem into pages of prose. They both produce different objects, one a painting called Sardines associated with a canned food, the other a poem called Oranges associated with a natural food.

On the other hand the poem is about similarities between the poem and painting. Both seem to involve words and images; SARDINES for example could be word or image or both and the most satisfactory image turns out to come from "just letters". Both poet and painter, who seem to have the vaguest of artistic intentions, find what they want in the process of working. Both keep putting things in and taking things out and change the way they depict the object of their original attention; Sardines becomes "just letters", that is, become less of an image, while orange becomes Oranges, changing from the conceptual to the concrete, from colour to fruit. SARDINES and ORANGES are both foods but also commodities and both poem and painting have their respective titles within them. SARDINES and ORANGES could each either be abstraction or representation.

In fact both poet and painter are oscillating between the possibilities of their mediums. They want to create the impression of direct expression, of apparent 'naturalness' which, however, can only be achieved by artistic juggling, that is by manipulation of the sign-system. Poet and painter approach the medium in different ways but both must work with it to achieve the most direct and forceful effect. As we have already seen this can be achieved through "representational" or

"abstract" modes which, because they are interdependent, are indissolubly linked: in the poem representation and abstraction become interchangeable. When the painter is asked about his representation of SARDINES he responds in terms of formal arrangement, structure, "it needed something there," while the poet, however much he relies on the grammatical and syntactical structures of language, "It is even in prose", must concentrate on the formal arrangement of the words, not their meanings, to convey "how terrible orange is and life." Both poet and painter, therefore, move backwards and forwards between the depiction of an object and the structural arrangement of their material. In addition the poet oscillates between the temporal and spatial possibilities of his medium; his fluctuation between the poem as pages of words and the poem as lines, implies that simultaneity is as important to its conception as ordered succession. Both poet and painter are involved in the differences within poetry and painting which they share.

"Why I am not a Painter" is not merely about the difference and similarity of painting, it demonstrates it. It conveys a sense of its difference from painting through its use of the grammatical and syntactical structures of language to make certain distinctions, "I am not a painter,I am a poet",to convey the passage of time, "I go by and the days go by/and I drop in again" and to convey snippets of conversation. At the same time it demonstrates its similarity to painting by employing the poetic equivalent of representational and abstract modes which are shown to be interdependent, to turn over into each other. It uses real names, characters and events, (Michael Goldberg is a

painter, was a friend of O'Hara's and did paint a picture called Sardines) and represents the incident through social conversation and colloquialisms in such a way that, in some respects, language seems transparent, the processes of signification are concealed and we feel as if we are directly witnessing it. At the same time the poem fails to close off its meaning, which is constantly deferred. For example, the initial statement, "I am not a painter I am a poet", which seems to be quite definite, is immediately modified by a statement which neither completely follows on from the first nor completely negates it, "Why? I think I would rather be /a painter, but I am not." In an abstract painting objects and events and their perceived relationships are broken down and structural relationships between colours and shapes predominate. In "Why I am not a ?ainter" likewise, logical and narrative discontinuity encourage our active participation in the structural arrangement of the poem whose "push and pull" to use Hofmann's expression, moves us in and out of difference and similarity.

The poem also deconstructs its temporal dimension through simultaneity. Though it involves the passage of time its argument is circular rather than linear: its only conclusion is to send us back to the beginning again. The second and third stanza could in fact be laid out opposite each other on the page since the effect of the poem will be to move us backwards and forwards between them, to make us view them simultaneously, rather than to progress through them.

Representation and Abstraction:Metaphor and Metonymy.

This analysis of the poem is in fact congruent with that of O'Hara's poems in Chapter One. If we return to the premises of Chapter One we can see how the poem, "Why I am not a Painter" again locates the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy. The metaphorical unity of the poem breaks down into parts which are metonymically connected and which therefore pull against any clear-cut metaphor about the differences between poetry and painting. Sardines and oranges are both members of the same class of fruit, while the other sense of orange, as a colour, relates back to painting. Letters are parts of words, words are part of the general class of language while lines and pages are parts of a book and prose and poetry are forms of writing. These three categories, language, books and writing all overlap (words make up the lines and pages of writing) forming an interconnected metonymical network.

The overall metaphor about the difference between poetry and painting in "Why I am not a Painter" therefore breaks down into metonymical connections between poetry and painting and realigns as a metaphor about the similarity of poetry and painting. Again metaphor and metonymy are shown to be interdependent in how the poem works. However this interdependence of metaphor and metonymy can be seen to be responsible for the interdependence of representation and abstraction in the poem. The metaphorical aspect of the poem which tends towards depiction of an incident and which is therefore "representational" collapses into the metonymical aspect of the poem which makes us participate in its structural arrangement and which therefore tends toward

"abstraction". And as we have already seen both metaphor and metonymy and representation and abstraction are interdependent. The metaphor splits between showing differences and similarities and spreads out in suggestiveness: if "Why I am a Painter" is a metaphor about anything it is a metaphor about the interdependence of difference and similarity , which it both refers to and embodies.

A Comparison between O´Hara and the painters.

Having discussed "Why I am a Painter" I want to return to the painters of the second generation New York School who seem closest to O´Hara in terms of exploration of the interaction of representation and abstraction in their painting (Rivers,Hartigan and Goldberg). I want to compare the way these painters, all close friends of O´Hara´s, exploit this interaction in their work with the way O´Hara exploits it in his.

In the most general terms, O´Hara´s poems do share common ground with the paintings of Rivers, Hartigan and Goldberg since the elements of a chosen subject are dislocated and rearranged in a new way which emphasises the relationship between the elements as well as their relationship to the subject on which they are based. The subject matter is also similar in some respects: Rivers incorporation of his friends in his paintings, his use of everday objects in American life objects such as the Lucky Strike packet and his satiric ´camp´ sense of humour displayed in paintings like "The Greatest Homosexual"; Hartigan´s use of city images in "Billboard" and Goldberg´s incorporation of

a tinned food, Sardines, bear a relationship to O´Hara´s own subjects. In addition the use of bright colours, particularly in Hartigan´s work seems to be paralleled in the striking and vivid conjunctions of words in O´Hara´s poetry and in his many references to bright colours such as orange and blue throughout his poems.

However there are certain important differences between O´Hara and the painters. The most important difference is that it would not be possible to analyse these pictures so clearly into parts and wholes. This is mainly because of the differences between the two systems (poetry and painting) for as we have already seen painting is not divisible into discrete units in the way that language used in poetry is. This means that an abstract area in one of Hartigan´s paintings is not so obviously part of a whole area, and even where parts of objects are used they are not necessarily complete parts (in the way that the word leg signifies the whole of a part of the body). For the images used in the paintings, such as the flag in Rivers "Dying and Dead Veteran" picture are often partly abstracted and each part is a part torn from a whole rather than potentially a whole in its own right. Nevertheless, loosely speaking, the rearrangement of elements in Rivers work, particularly in a painting such as "Dying and Dead Veteran", where the juxtaposed elements still bear a resemblance to the original scene but reassemble as a structural arrangement with new relationships between the parts, is, given the difference between the two mediums, strikingly similar to O´Hara´s reassemblage of parts in poems such as "Chez Jane". [19] Hartigan´s work, which does not exploit so

forcefully the tension between seeing the picture as representation and structural arrangement, makes I think a less fitting analogy with O´Hara´s work.

Secondly there is a greater sense in O´Hara´s poems of the activity of the reader than there is of the activity of the viewer in the paintings. For instance in Michael Goldberg´s "Sardines" the elements of the picture are flattened out and there is a much stronger sensation of seeing them all at once than in one of O´Hara´s poems where the reader finds and loses the meanings as she/he reads through. The difference between the media is again a major factor: "push and pull" in O´Hara´s poetry mainly takes place through time while push and pull in a painting involves the sensation or illusion of movement on a still and flattened plane and the pushed and pulled movements of the viewer´s eyes. Here again the closest analogy with O´Hara poetry is in Rivers work for "Me in rectangle" or "Horses" do engage the reader in a continuous movement in and out of their optical possibilities.

As we have seen, "Why I am not a Painter" embodies the interplay of differences and similarities which I have shown to be so central to Frank O´Hara´s work. But "Why I am not a Painter" also creatively enacts the other predominant themes and areas of discussion in this thesis. It makes a link with the discussion of working methods in Chapter Three, because it shows how both poet and painter arrive at the poem and painting through the process: they both work with the vaguest of

intentions hoping to find an artistic solution as they work. Hence the painter keeps experimenting by taking things out and putting them back into the painting while the poet feels if the words are controlling him rather than that he is controlling the words:

> there should be
> so much more, not of orange,of
> words, of how terrible orange is
> and life.

The poem also implies collaboration and therefore links with Chapter Four, for although this painter and poet are not working together the poem suggests that they are stimulated by interest in each other's work and the idea of working in parallel. "Why I am not a Painter" also uses the informal talking style, hesitant and self-correcting discussed in Chapter Three and demonstrated in the opening:

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

The poem makes a link with Chapter Two by showing the importance of friendship and social interaction in art and written in 1956 during the Cold War, when Abstract Expressionist painting in America was being promoted as the supreme expression

of human values, the poem humorously demonstrates that poetry can do anything painting can do.

The poem alludes to and pokes fun at Pop Art, (characterised by representation of consumer goods such as sardines and oranges) and Abstract Expressionism (characterised by gestural images and structural relationships); it suggests also that art, whether verbal or visual, should not be separated into movements. Apparently opposed artistic tendencies can be combined, as they sometimes were in the works of the The New York School of painters such as Michael Goldberg and in O'Hara's own work.

Finally humour makes a link between these different points in the poem. The poem is amusing because the two men behave like a couple of good-humoured buffoons who do not know what they are doing,; because it confuses difference and similarity; because it refuses to be explicit and give itself up while pretending initially to be very direct; because it uses consumer goods; because of its pun on the word oranges; because it overturns representation into abstraction and abstraction into representation, poetry into painting, poetry into prose. In so doing it shows that humour and seriousness are not opposed and that poet and painter can be involved in the most serious endeavours without taking themselves too seriously.

Notes

1. O'Hara, letter to Grace Hartigan, New York May 21st 1951. George Arents Research Library; University of Syracuse.

2. Sandler, Irving, The New York School, New York, Harper and Row, 1978.p.3.

3. Goodman, Cynthia, Hans Hofmann, Abberville Press, New York, p 41.

4. Hofmann, Hans, "Pompeii", 1959, oil on canvas, the Tate Gallery, reproduced in Goodman, Hans Hofmann p. 71; "Above Deep Waters" 1959, oil on canvas, University Art Museum, reproduced in Goodman, Hans Hofmann, p.82 and "Table with Teakettle, Green Vase, Red Flowers", 1936, oil on plywood, University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley reproduced in Goodman, Hans Hofmann, p. 39.

5. Freilicher, Jane, "Farm Scene", 1963, oil on canvas in the collection of the Grey Gallery, New York University; "Driveway" 1964, oil on canvas, , Collection of the Grey Gallery, New York University. "The Mallow Gatherers", 1958, Collection the Artist, reproduced Sandler, The New York School, p.92 and "Portrait of John Ashbery", 1954, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in Sandler, The New York School p. 92.

6. Porter, Fairfield, "Jimmy and John" 1957-58, oil on canvas,

Hirschl and Adler Galleries, Inc, New York reproduced in Sandler, The New York School p. 127.

7. Mitchell, Joan, "Ladybug"; 1967, oil on canvas, Museum of Modern Art; "Metro", 1958, oil on canvas, Cleveland Museum of Art and "Evenings on 73rd Street", 1957, oil on canvas, Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Hedreen, Seattle, Washington. "Metro" and "Evenings on 73rd Street" reproduced in Schimmel, Paul, Freidman, B.H.,Myers, John Bernard, Rosenblum, Robert, contributors, Action Precision:The New Direction in New York 1955-60, Newport Harbour Art Museum, 1984, catalogue for an exhibition of the same name, on p.122 and 120 respectively.

8. Bluhm, Norman, "Bleeding Rain" 1956, oil on canvas, The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; "Jaded Silence", 1957, oil on canvas, Collection of the Artist; "Sunstorms", 1957, oil on canvas, The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia and "Chicago 1920", 1959, oil on canvas, David Anderson Gallery, New York, reproduced in Schimmel, Action Precision: p. 54, 56 and 58 respectively.

9. Leslie, Alfred, "Quartet # 1", oil on canvas, 1958, Allan Stone Gallery, New York; "None", oil on canvas, 1959, David Anderson Gallery, New York; "Flag Day", 1956, oil on canvas, Bill Bass, Chicago, Illinois. All three paintings reproduced in Schimmel, Action Precision, p. 108, 110 and 102 respectively.

10. Rauschenberg, Robert, "Canyon" 1959, combine painting, reproduced in Robert Rauschenberg, London, Tate Gallery Publication. (No date given). "Bed", combine painting, oil, pencil, pillow and quilt on wooden support, in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Castelli, reproduced in Robert Rauschenberg, London Tate Gallery publication.

11. Johns, Jasper, "According to What", oil on canvas with objects, Collection Edwin Janss, reproduced in Crichton, Michael, Jasper Johns Thames and Hudson, 1977. Painted Bronze, 1960. Kunstmuseum Basel, collection Ludwig, reproduced in Sandler, The New York School p. 189.

12. Lippard, Lucy, Pop Art, London, Thames and Hudson, 1985.

13. Rivers has said "Even though you recognise people, things in my work, that isn't my supreme concern...But I jump back and forth. At one moment I may stand up to someone and say, 'Well what the fuck is wrong with subject matter? Maybe that's all that's interesting about it. What do you think art is about? I don't know and you don't know.' And at other times I will think, well, there is some kind of truth to the fact that a picture is composed of certain kinds of plastic, abstract things that have to be dealt with..." in Rivers, Larry, with Brightman C, Drawings and Digressions, New York, Clarkson N.Potter Inc., New York, 1979.

14. Rivers, Larry, "Double Portrait of Berdie", 1955, oil on

canvas, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York,; "Dying and Dead Veteran", 1961, oil on canvas, Collection Mr. and Mrs. Max Wasserman, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts ; "The Greatest Homosexual", 1964, oil and collage on canvas; "Molly and Breakfast", 1956, Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation. Reproduced in Hunter, Sam, Larry Rivers, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. (no date given) "Double portrait of Berdie" plate 51, "Dying and Dead veteran", plate 112, "The Greatest Homosexual" plate 18, "Molly and Breakfast", plate 59. "Me in a rectangle", 1959, oil on canvas, Neuberger Museum, State University of New York. and "Lucky Strike", 1961, oil on canvas, reproduced in Harrison, Helen, A. Larry Rivers pages 63 and 67 respectively.

15. Hartigan, Grace, Artists statement in 12 Americans, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1956, p. 53 quoted in Schimmel, Action-Precision.

16. Hartigan, Grace, "New England, October", 1957, oil on canvas, Albright- Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; "Montauk Highway", 1957, oil on canvas, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston, Texas, "Billboard", 1957, oil on canvas, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Julia Bigelow Fund, Minneapolis, Minnesota reproduced in Schimmel,Action: Precision p.82, 84 and 80 respectively.

17. Goldberg, Michael, "Split Level", 1958, oil on canvas, The

James and Mari Michener Collection, Archer M. Huntingdon Art Gallery, the University of Texas at Austin; "Summer House", 1958, oil on canvas, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, and "Sardines" 1955, oil on canvas, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. reproduced in Action Precision p.72, 74 and 66 respectively.

Postscript

I'd like the end of this thesis to indicate that it is still a continuing project and therefore I want to summarise various suggestions for further research which I think arise out of the thesis and for which I think it might be regarded as a preparation. Some of these are ideas are projects I have already embarked upon while others are as yet only ideas which could be followed up by myself or others in the same or related areas.

There are a number of further areas of research concerning O'Hara's poetry which I think the thesis suggests. Firstly, my work on metaphor and metonymy in Chapter One suggested to me that a computer analysis of some of the poems would enable a more detailed and exhaustive analysis of the relationships between the words. Secondly, the implications of Chapter Three could be taken further, for example by comparing O'Hara's improvisations in more detail with those of David Antin or comparing O'Hara's improvisations with those of individual jazz musicians. Thirdly when the O'Hara manuscripts become publicly available there would be the possibility of a much more rigorous inspection of the working methods which I have begun to analyse in Chapter Three. Fourthly Chapter Two suggests the possibilty for a much more extensive analysis of the gay content and language in O'Hara's poetry in the context of other gay literature and sociological analysis of the period. Fifthly there are are a number of the collaborations, for example the film "The Last Clean Shirt" (as yet unavailable in this country) which would repay close attention.

More generally, on a theoretical level, the thesis throws up the application of the inter-artistic comparison and this could be developed with regard to the relationship between poetry and music in much contemporary poetry such as text-sound:in my essay "Text, image and performance: inter-artistic relationships in contemporary poetry" I have already embarked on this.[1] Moreover the framework I have set up for analysis of collaboration could be applied and extended to work involving not only poets and painters but also musicians and film-makers. The subject of improvisation as a basis for writing could be explored further: for example the psychological mechanisms involved could be studied (so far these have only been tentatively explored in music) and compared with other working methods such as slow transformation of material through rewriting.[2] And as far as the general implications of the thesis for critical analysis of other types of writing are concerned the metaphor-metonymy analysis could be extended usefully to other contemporary poets such as the American language poets whose poetry tends towards the non-referential and abstract and therefore problematises the whole concept of meaning.

Notes.

1. Smith, Hazel, Text, image and performance: inter-artistic relationships in Contemporary Poetry, in Murray, David, ed. Poetry and Critical Theory, London, Batsford, 1989 in Press

2. Sloboda, John A., ed. Generative Processes in Music: The Psychology of Performance, Improvisation and Composition, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988.

Appendix A

Questions for interviews

The following list of questions was presented to the interviewees and used throughout the interviews mentioned in the thesis:

Do you feel you had a special relationship with O´Hara, what was the nature of that relationship and do you think it affected your work? Do you feel you influenced his work?

What do you know about his early life and reading?

What relationship do you see between the life and the poems? (given that that relationship is always problematic?) What kind of an audience do you think he envisaged for the poems? Are there secret codes in the poems which can only be decoded by friends? Do you think his poems were affected by the social milieu in which he lived and if so how? A lot has been said about Frank O´Hara´s openness: do you think there are some things he tried to shut out of his life? Do you think his sexuality affected his work? What were his political views?

What do you think were O´Hara´s predominant interests apart from literature, and how do you think they affected his work? Why do you think he chose literature as the medium in which to work?

What relationship do you see between developments in the other arts at the time and O'Hara's work? Do you think there were similarities in the way people from all spheres of the arts approached their work during the period? How strong do you feel the influence of Dada and Surrealism were? What do you see as the role of popular culture in his work? O'Hara's writing is often compared to action-painting: do you see any reason to draw this kind of analogy? Do you think analogies with contemporaneous developments in film, music or dance are relevant?

What part do you feel music played in his life and writing. Was he interested in jazz? Do you see a relationship between his work and the music of the period? Do you see his writing technique as musical in any way? Do you know anything about his early musical compositions and their whereabouts?

Do you think Frank O'Hara used improvisatory techniques to write, and how far do you think his poems are improvisations? Do you think he is a performance poet in any sense? What do you know of his writing techniques and procedures.

What aspects of collaboration do you think interested O'Hara? What qualities do you think collaboration brought out in his work? Did he ever suggest collaboration with you? Do you think collaboration was an important feature of the artistic spirit of the time and if so why?

How do you read O´Hara´s poems? Which do you feel are the best? What do you feel are their most important features? What part of his output do you think he viewed as most important?

A central feature of O´Hara´s writing seems to me to be opposition, contradiction and ambivalence: meaning in an O´Hara poem always works several ways. This also seems to be true of the form of the poems, where one mode of writing often works against its opposite. Do you think such contradictions are important in his work, and if so why?

Do you feel there are important apects of Frank O´Hara´s work which have been neglected or misrepresented in critical writing about him?

Do you know of any unpublished work by him?

Who else do you think I should contact who might be able to help me?

Appendix B.

Interview with Kenneth Koch Bridgehampton, July 30th 1986.

My interview with Kenneth Koch has been referred to throughout the thesis. The following is another extract from the interview. The sign...marks omissions. The collaborations "The Mirror Naturally Stripped" and "Poem" (Sky/woof woof/harp) and the answering poems "Collected Poems" and "Collected Prose" were all published in Semi-Colon. During the interview Koch is responding to the list of written questions which were sent to him a few days before the interview (see Appendix A).

KK: What we would do in our collaboration is we would make rules and probably I was the evil genius behind the rules. And in collaborating with Frank I think I would make certain special rules - the first collaboration I did was probably with Frank, we did a Sestina, it's never been published ... It was for the 16th birthday of Nina Castelli, it was written in a little house in East Hampton and it's a sestina. I'd tried to write sestinas before that and never could but as I mentioned in that article I wrote about Frank, he helped me to become less literary and academic. I realised as I say in that article that the silliest idea in your own head is better than the most important idea in somebody else's head. Anyway we wrote this sestina and the envoys were Larry and Jane. I think Frank began "it makes us very happy to be older than Nina"...Then I did a number of collaborations with John Ashbery. John and I used to do it with

rules in every line, we would have the name of a city and a soft drink in every line or we would have a description of a statue and something contrary to that. When I came back to collaborating with Frank I liked doing it with rules and we would always collaborate doing alternate lines, except in the Nina Sestina where Frank became so inspired that he went on once for two or three lines which wasn't so good. But it was very exhilarating to collaborate with him, it really was. He was inspired.

HS: I just want to ask about this particular one, the one where you have the headings: this one, "Collected Proses".

KK: That's not a collaboration at all. I wrote the poem "Collected Poems" in Rome in 1956, I guess, and I sent it to Frank in the mail and he wrote me back being very polite and friendly and inspired - he wrote "Collected Proses", he used the same title.

HS: I see, but in the other one (The Mirror Naturally Stripped), you wrote alternate lines ?

KK: Yes.

HS: Who did the first line then, can you tell me?

KK: Frank almost certainly wrote the line, "like a needle in the

nose" because I wouldn´t have have written that and I almost certainly wrote the line "and the empire of phosporus cheesecake also" and I almost certainly wrote "the steep side of California- happy gypsy dominoes" ´because that´s the style of my poem "When the Sun Tries to go on". Do you know that poem? Frank had a lot to do with the composition of it and encouraging me to do it and we used to read to each other. When he was writing "Second Avenue" and I was writing "When the Sun Tries to Go on" we used to read them on the telephone to each other all the time, probably we influenced each other. He also made a faux pas about it, at one of Auden´s birthday parties he told Auden that I had written the best poem of this century which was not only not true but I don´t think Auden wanted to hear it.

HS: And you actually sat side by side while you were writing this - was it quite fast ?

KK: Oh yes very fast. Let me tell you how we wrote the other one, "Sky/ woof woof/harp". Well, Frank and I had lunch together-when he worked at the Museum of Modern Art we often had lunch and we decided to write. We were both feeling very inspired, I know I was, it was a beautiful day and we were both on the street. I don´t know which of us proposed that we write the poem together. Maybe, we were talking out loud on the street and I think we must have stopped and - I don´t know whether Frank said sky or I said sky, maybe Frank said woof woof, I don´t know, maybe we each composed one line but once we had the three lines we had to decide how many times we would do it. I think we decided on

twelve. Yes I remember us standing there, Frank and I, deciding how many times we would do it and I said is this enough times, sky /woof woof/ harp/ sky/ woof woof/ harp and Frank said no. I agreed we ought to do it more. We did that one on the street.

HS: What do you feel about this now (referring to "The Mirror Naturally Stripped") - it´s interesting reading it - do you feel its a unique thing that came out of collaborating, unlike your normal work, unlike Frank´s normal work and therefore unique.

KK: Picasso said you shouldn´t be your own connoisseur. I think he said it because you don´t sell your paintings to yourself.

HS: Well let me put it another way then - amongst your work I haven´t come across anything quite like that, do you think there are poems of yours which are very similar?

KK: Yes, and they are probably more successful. Well obviously the experience was in talking back and forth to someone in this way: I was influenced by the lines that Frank was giving me and he was probably influenced by the ones I was doing. It´s like having the muse in the room with you, its very interesting so you move closer together...Anyway when I collaborated with Frank, sometimes I´d make a rule that none of our friends´ names could be mentioned, nothing about politics and nothing about sex. Because I felt that since we knew all the same people it would rather quickly deteriorate into something so personal and so

specific. I mean these are the three temptations, these are the three easy ways out of an artistic situation. Frank could do it all and not get in trouble but I couldn´t - do you want to go back to the general questions.

HS: Yes.

KK: "Do you feel you had a special relationship with O´Hara". I certainly do. He was one of my best friends for ever. Yes he influenced my work. I don´t know whether I influenced his or not: he says I did, in one of his poems when he talks about "you were wearing..." and says he can´t get this line out of his head. But I know he influenced me, he influenced me in the direction of being more conversational and less pompous and literary.

"What do you know about his early life and reading?" Now there what you should get a hold of are his Harvard notes... He was very excited by Rene Poggioli´s course. He read a tremendous amount.

HS: One thing I did want to ask you about:in your article about him in Homage to Frank O´Hara, you say something about his having read philosophy. I´ve asked one or two people about that, whether he read philosophy and what he read besides literature. Nobody´s come up with anything much, can you remember anything specifically?

KK: Let´s see, what was I thinking of - it doesn´t immediately leap to mind. I have a feeling he read it because-

HS: Presumably he did, because you put that in.

KK: At the moment I don't remember.

HS: Would you have called him an intellectual in the sense of having an intellectual framework and reading a large variety of different things ?

KK: Intellectual's a very slippery word it means different things in different places... intellectual in New York means somebody who writes for the New York Review of Books and Partisan Review and doesn't write poetry. I think Frank was a genius and I don't think he was an unlettered genius.

HS: What I meant was - was he an intellectual in the sense of having a consistent intellectual outlook? He seems to have had a slightly different outlook in that he's always prepared to go along with a lot of contradictions, even when you look at the art criticism it doesn't all work in one direction, it turns back on itself.

KK: I would say his thinking was not systematic. There really does seem to be a difference to me between the kind of artistic kind of personality that Frank had and the kind of intellectual or academic personality. Often in the intellectual academic personality more prestige is given to things in the past, things

that are not immediate. Therefore academic people are often rather boring to talk to because - although if you get them on them on the right subject they may know a lot and can be fascinating - it´s not all being applied to how they´re feeling at dinner or how their love life´s going. With Frank all this stuff was being constantly fed into what was happening that second so if you said that Frank O´Hara was an intellectual nobody would recognise it as a description. He was certainly cultured intellectually, he knew a lot.

"What relationship do you see between his life and his poems". Give me a break! One important thing about the relationship between the life and the poems: - whatever happened moved him. He was extraordinarily sensitive to what was going on around him. It seems as if almost everything Frank saw or did or felt was significant to him, that he saw the significance of it, that was part of his particular genius. I sense something like that in the historical works of Bourdelle, it a strange comparison to draw, but Frank looks at a poor old woman on the street and Frank doesn´t pass by the poor old woman, the poor old woman interests him - he´s sympathetic to her, he´s interested in her, he´s attracted to her, he compares his own life to her, it all happens in a second. He gets into a taxi, he may be attracted to a taxi driver but he´s thinking - what´s his life like, what´s my life like, what´s this got to do with that - it´s all there at the same time, it´s very refreshing. What his life has to do with his work is that it´s all the material for his work, I don´t see how his life can have been very much different in a sense. At Frank´s funeral there must have been thirty

heartbroken people all of whom considered themselves his best friend. The energy he had for friendship and caring about things was extraordinary and this was all - except when he was drunk - without sentimentality and he was just really fascinated by these things.

HS: One thing that really interests me about the letters - I found the letters very extraordinary in some ways - they don't seem to be very introspective. Sometimes he'll just say he's depressed and then he'll go on to something else whereas if I was writing a letter to somebody I'd say I was depressed and then I'd go into all the reasons why I was depressed.

KK: Frank had marvellously good manners. It's not very polite to tell people about your troubles.

HS: It's not just that - he didn't seem to be very introspective - he didn't go into anything about how he was feeling about things.

KK: I would guess that Frank would think that he'd better jolly well take care of himself and -

HS: Well I don't know - I'm just saying they are not those type of letters. He talks very much about who's coming to dinner and that type of thing, but the letters don't say a lot about his feelings or if they do, they talk about them in a very effusive

way but not in a detailed way. I feel that the poems do; I was just intrigued by that.

KK: I think that's a very interesting observation; there's not much confessional about Frank in the sense of the confessional poets; one feels a little imposed on sometimes by those poets. They seem to try to make you feel that what has happened to them that is sad and is very important. More important than what has happened to you perhaps. Frank would never want to make you feel that way...

"His political views"... I'll tell you something which may say something about Frank's politics. I forget the year but it was the year Boris Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize. Frank and I were in the Cedar Bar as usual and Frank said Kenneth isn't it awful about Pasternak, I mean that they won't let him collect the prize, and I said yes its really awful - I felt pretty powerless - I mean Pasternak always meant a different world to me but to Frank everything was connected. He said, listen, I think he could use some support and I think we should send him a cablegram. This was the hey day of the Cold War and I thought they are not going to let him get a cablegram from American poets, they just stopped him getting the Nobel prize. And I may have secretly thought that we might get in trouble sending a cable to Russia and I said no, no. Frank was very brave, very courageous I always admired him for that, he said, listen Kenny what we have to say is that we love him and we think he's marvellous and we like his early prose and poetry as well as Dr Zhivago. It was about three in the morning and he had gone home

to compose this thing and he called me up and we agreed on this cablegram and sent it to Pasternak -we never heard from him . But the only political aspect was, "those subjects were making Boris Pasternak feel bad and he´s a great man" and what the artist had a right to feel was very important to Frank...

KK: You know politics didn´t really become fashionable, if I may use such a ridiculous word, among American poets until the Vietnam war. There were always a few poets, like Allen Ginsberg who were interested long before. We tended to think, or I tended to think, that he was a little silly to care about such things. We all got to care afterwards because we all got involved, but in general the poets and painters I knew weren´t talking much about politics, not in the fifties.

HS: When I was speaking to David Shapiro the other day he said he thought you could see a lot in the poems which was pro the poor and anti the rich.

KK: Well Frank was for justice of all kinds - he didn´t like pompousness or pretentiousness and he didn´t like nice people being hurt-his impulses were fantastically good - as for specific political programme - anything which encouraged freedom and kindness, he was a really nice man.

KK: "His predominant interests"- he was certainly very interested in painting and ballet and in opera. Terribly interested in

people. I never noticed a great interest in sports. He didn´t really develop much of an interest in travel until quite late in his life.

HS: That´s very interesting to me - for example, that he never went to England.

KK: He wasn´t making an awful lot of money then. You might consult that poem - it´s about how poems aren´t made by people going to strange places, it´s where he´s complaining he doesn´t want to be on the Riviera. But when he travelled for the Museum on art trips he really liked it. Frank was always keeping himself so busy and trying so much to relax and not be nervous. My wife Janice said that she thought maybe the only time Frank could think was when he was writing poems, he was so busy all the time that the only time he could think was when he was writing and that´s why there is this intensity - I´m interpreting what she said which is very witty - there is this excitement about being able to think in his poems being able to talk about things, just being himself.

I can also think of a few other things he wasn´t very interested in: psychoanalysis, drugs.

HS: He took drugs once or twice didn´t he?

KK: I don´t know that he did - he was very sceptical - I know once he said to Larry, "what was it you imagined happened to you last night"? But there again he died before drugs became very

popular and drugs were mainly taken by poor blacks and jazz musicians up to the time of Frank´s death. Also he died before it was easy to be open about one´s homosexuality.

HS Yes we actually rather skated over that (referring to an earlier part of the conversation). What I really meant when I said "did his sexuality affect his work" - Bruce Boone has written about O´Hara saying there are a lot of gay codes in the poems and gay language -He picks out certain poems such as "Lana Turner has collapsed " and "At the Old Place".

KK: I was going to mention "At The Old Place"- that uses homosexual lingo just as he uses all sorts of other lingo in his poems.

HS: How much of that kind of lingo do you think he uses in the poems?

KK: Very little.

HS: A lot of people have also talked about camp in connection with him and brought up Susan Sontag´s article on Camp in connection with him - I don´t find her article very satisfactory-

KK: Susan´s article as far as I remember is pretty exclusively a homosexual thing and of course I knew a lot of homosexual writers and other people and camping it up was really acting dandy. No, I

don´t think Frank´s poems - the homosexual language is in Frank´s poems like any sort of language, Frank wrote a whole poem in French too, any kind of language which is around is in his poems. If he was associating with drug addicts drug language would be in his poems. Everything got into the poems everything connected with his life and his work goes in it... I don´t think its important to his work at all. How can you read "Sleeping on the Wing " or "Hate" or any of those things and think that there is a special language. I can hear Frank O´Hara´s voice like in "an arrow that really feels something" I can hear that nasal slightly homosexual intonation "an arrow which really <u>feels</u> something" but that´s not camp, it´s his voice.

HS: Sontag talks a lot about turning the serious into the humorous and being ironic. Let´s say camp isn´t a good way of describing it but do you feel there was a certain way of looking at things at that time that was ironic?

KK:I would say in the New York School in general yes.

HS: Do you think camp is a ridiculous way of describing that ?

KK: I would be careful about using the word ... I think you have to do the same thing when you talk about surrealism - people always say about Frank´s work and mine that its´s surreal - the answer to that, as I said in a review of Frank, is in "Sleeping on the Wing": the surrealist wants to stay asleep but Frank wants to wake up, to help return. A lot of good things about surrealism

have just become a part of good poetry - the freedom to go from conscious to unconscious..

"Why do you think he chose literature as the medium in which he wanted to work"- you must be kidding - I mean he had a genius for writing, was he going to be a soap designer!

HS: The reason I asked was because he was very interested in a lot of different art forms and he was very interested in music.

KK: He used to think music was wonderful but there are such a limited combination of things you can do in music. You can express a great deal but not what you can express with the English language.

HS: I think I would dispute that. You have the advantage in music that its not referential in the same way - you could say that was a great advantage.

KK: Or a disadvantage when you look at Frank O´Hara´s poetry. I think you can read Strindberg/Swedenberg and say I wish this didn´t refer to anything, but you can´t read Frank and say that.

HS: Yes, I think that´s one of the great interests of his work, the tug between its being referential and non-referential but that´s the way he uses the medium its not a criticism of music as a medium .

KK: No but it strikes me you can´t have your say about everything in music.

HS: You can have your say about a lot of things which can´t be expressed in words.

KK: OK, well Frank O´Hara was a great poet and he wrote so many poems. Why did he chose to be a poet? Who knows? It´s like why did Cervantes write Don Quixote: once it exists its a necessary part of life.

KK: "What connections do you see between developments in the other arts and Frank O´Hara´s work?" He was very excited by modern painting as you can see in his poem "Memorial Day" and very excited by Bill Kooning and by Pollock and Franz Kline and the younger abstract expressionists and the more figurative painters like Larry Rivers. He was crazy about painting, who knows how it affected his work. He spent a long time in painters´ studios, we all did, but Frank more than anybody, and our social life was largely composed of painters. There is in a painter´s studio a marvellous feeling of spontaneity and things happening right there. So Larry would be painting a picture like a this and like this and he´d smear something, then he´d say, what do you think and we´d say maybe a little green down there, he´d put a little green there and that was sort of the way we wrote poetry, at least they way Frank did and I did. There is a very good description of the excitement of being in an artist´s studio in "Chez Jane", the slight smell of paint and turpentine.

He is the best pastor of the paradise of the artist´s studio... I would guess that the painters were more inspired by Frank than he was by the painters. The usual story is that we poets were very inspired by the painters, that´s just because the painters got famous first and made lots of money in the way painters do. Poor poets there´s no way to buy a poem, you can´t get dressed up and go to a poem, its even worse than being a musician there is nothing to do. Frank´s technique was very advanced.

HS: But presumably you don´t think that you or O´Hara or any of you influenced Jackson Pollock, for instance.

KK: No (laughing) I don´t think I influenced anyone. I think it was very encouraging for me to look at de Kooning - I don´t know what it did for my work, I guess it gave us all courage to be bold and free and crazy. People always say that the painters gave so much to Frank, he gave so much to them, but he wouldn´t like me to say that he gave them more than they did to him because he was so polite. There was a lot going on that was the same, everybody being excited about the same thing at the same time. But the thing was that we could see what the painters were doing, it was harder for them to see what we were doing though we did show them our poems.

HS: The other thing is film. I really liked that film he made with Alfred Leslie "The Last Clean Shirt", it seemed as if what Alfred Leslie and he were trying to do was so similar.

KK: I don´t know if I´ve ever seen that film.

HS: He seemed to be very keen on movies but he mainly seemed to watch Hollywood movies. Do you know whether he took an interest in experimental film ?

KK: I think so, I don´t remember. Music, I don´t know except that I know he listened to music when he wrote.

HS: Do you know anything about his jazz interests?

KK: We used to go to the Five Spot a lot and listen to jazz. I think Frank may have actually read his poems to jazz once, I did it more than he did.

HS: There was that series that you and Larry Rivers arranged, at the Five Spot.

KK: I didn´t really arrange it, I was just in it and Larry directed it. I don´t know that Frank was terribly interested in jazz... "What aspects of collaboration"... it´s really exciting to collaborate and he liked the artist´s work, he liked my work he liked Jimmy´s work, we wrote a play together you may not yet have found.

HS: I know there´s that one the three of you wrote together.

KK :"Was collaboration part of the artistic spirit of the time." We were inspired by the surrealists and dadaists and I at least wanted to do what they had done.

"How do you read O´Hara´s poems"... I read them in a rather odd way as a fellow poet, which is a bit the way boys look at girls which is not the way doctors look at girls or girls look at girls. You want to know what´s there for you in it. It´s not exactly like a sexual interest but it´s -sometimes its hard for me to go very far into a poet I like without rushing to the typewriter either in a state of inspiration or feverish competition, sometimes just one line of Frank´s excites me so much that - I read his poems in a very special way and since I read so many of his poems when he wrote them they have all sorts of associations for me - I´m a rather odd reader of his work.

If I were to make an anthology of Frank´s poems I think it would be very hard because I think he´s one of those rare poets like William Carlos Williams, the more poems you read the better it gets. You can pick out certain poems as the best, which for somebody who hadn´t read the rest of his work would give the best idea of it, but that isn´t the same thing. I don´t know that I believe in the great poem.

HS: Another thing, when I was reading "Easter" I thought it was a typically surrealist poem but the more I read it the more it seemed to be about something it seemed to be an inversion of the traditional idea of "Easter" - in your article you say something about inspired irrelevance which turns out to be relevant in

"Easter". So I wondered if you were driving at the same thing...

KK. Oh, I don´t know, I don´t drive at anything, I say things as best I can.

HS: I never really understood what you meant and then I kept on and on reading "Easter" and I thought this really is about something, it seems to have a theme.

KK: Does that please you then , that it has a theme?

HS: No, it doesn´t please me at all, but it seems very clever it can be two things at once.

KK: One thing that Frank O´Hara did was change somewhat the concept of what the subject of a poem could be. That´s one of the most interesting things about his work, the whole idea of what a proper subject for a poem is. Take Shelley´s "Ode to the West Wind": Shelley is comparing himself as a poet to the west wind and there is a really recognisable theme and there aren´t any irrelevant thoughts that come into Shelley´s head. But in Apollinaire´s "Zone" the theme is whatever come´s into Apollinaire´s head as he is taking a walk and so it is also in certain poems by William Carlos Williams. So the subject comes close to what is in Frank´s poems which is, whatever is in a person´s mind or whatever happens to come in front of a person in a certain span of time becomes the subject of the poem. It´s very interesting in Frank´s work he takes it quite far. What I get

from "Easter" - although sometimes I've suspected there is a unified theme but I've rather shied away from it because it might spoil my pleasure in the poem - what I love is all these sensations like "sisters in a hanky of shade " and "the glassy towns are fucked by yaks". I don't want them to mean more than that - they mean a lot to me - language raised up out of its boringness and meaningfulness to really mean something...

HS: Another thing that interests me ... do you think there were certain poems he wrote that he was particularly keen about ? I got an impression from a letter that he wrote that he particularly liked "Second Avenue".

KK: I don't know, he certainly liked his poems more than anything else he wrote. When he wrote the letter he was probably in a good mood and wanting "Second Avenue" to be published.

Ah, now we have an academic question, Meaning contradiction, what do you mean by that?

HS: In the poems he often seems to be able to combine modes which seem to cancel each other out and in all his poem meanings points both ways. I always come back to the fact that things never move in a single direction, the opposite is always coming back at you. I talked to Alexander Smith about it he called it ambivalence, he thought of it as a psychological thing. I wonder if this keeps hitting you.

KK: Yes:I think I share it to some degree. As soon as you talk

about it I think of an early poem, where he says "And here I am, the/ centre of all beauty!/" like he´s really feeling wonderful but at the same time making fun of feeling wonderful.

In a way just as Frank brings in everything he sees and hears around him so he brings in all the feelings you can have about something, he isn´t parochial about a feeling, he doesn´t just put in the feeling of reverence, but also the way the chair feels. There are a lot of things going on at the same time that he is aware of, he never seems to get rid of his awareness.

HS: He seems so aware of the opposite of what he is feeling, if he was like that all the time it must have made life very complicated !

KK: Maybe only when he writes - I don´t think one is like that - when one is biting into a peach one is hardly aware of anything else, unless one is in great pain, except the taste of the peach, although one may remember other peaches, be reminded of someone one knew, even think of someone one knew called Peachy, even think of other things that sound like peach. But when you say, "I bite into a peach" this is a verbal experience, then the fact that someone once said "You´re peachy aren´t you" is just as important - so I don´t think his life was the torment you imagine, I don´t think his feelings always worked two ways. When you write it is a sort of paradise, you can be in all kinds of different times and places and have all sorts of different feelings at once.

Appendix C.

Interview with Bill Berkson, San Francisco, 17th September, 1986.

The following consists of extracts other than those used in the main body of the thesis. The sign *** marks large breaks in the interview, while... marks smaller omissions. In addition to some of the questions from Appendix A Berkson also responds to some more detailed questions about O'Hara's methods of writing.

BB: ...It's as if every one of those poems in Lunch Poems could be taken as an answer - so many of his poems or anybody's poems could be taken as an answer - to a perfectly ordinary question: what have you been doing, how are you feeling, how do you say hello to Khruschev, and the process, the way you find out what it is that is appropriate, that is a style and that has to do with the content and the feeling and the sensibility towards decorum and that's Frank's politics - if it's true that the only truth is face to face and Frank's politics is face to face then the question is how do you act within that.

HS: What do you mean by "the only truth is face to face".

BB: In the "Ode Salute to the French Negro Poets" which is probably his singular outright political poem towards the end he says the only truth is face to face /the poem whose words become your mouth/and dying in black and white we fight for what we are love, not are. It would be wonderful thing to construct Frank O'Hara's utopia... if you ask anybody about their politics, their

politics are usually to do with how they think the world ought to be and with him it´s not problematic and it´s got a lot of terrific contradictions like the love of grandeur and of the kind of recognisable grandueur that can only come from the existence of an empire. That´s there and his belief in the star system and his belief in the Museum of Modern Art, which it´s true is a Rockefeller foundling and deep in patronage, so there you have that aura of people who have a lot of money and good contacts and then you have his revolutionary sympathies with republican Spain and with Mayakovsky and the Russian revolution.

HS: ...One thing I think I´ve really learnt is that when you are talking about Frank O´Hara never just say one thing because there is always the other side.

BB: Yes, because it´s real open. A wonderful guide to that is Allen´s "City Midnight Junk Strains" because its so singular in it´s view of O´Hara as Allen´s view and its spells Allen´s own sense of the world so clearly and what he couldn´t go for, "you mixed with money... I tried your boys ...they all have large sofa apartments" and Allen´s very ironic about this because it´s not his world and he couldn´t make that bridge the way Frank could. Frank could walk right into fancy restaurants and the living rooms of Park and Fifth Avenue and know how to act and be himself too - he didn´t have to take his clothes off or something like that. Allen would feel it incumbent on him to take his

clothes off.

HS: Something I wanted to say to you was that I read the letters, that was a weird and wonderful experience for me to read those, but they just raised more questions than they answered for me.

BB: Yes, well you see you get the same thing in Williams and the same thing in Kerouac, maybe you do in Whitman ,you certainly do in Shakespeare. If you just stick to the writings, the writings present "grace/to be born and live as variously as possible", the writings in a way state the possibility of being a complete human being in writing, with all of the ironies, with all of the passions, with all of the contradictions, like Whitman´s contained multitudes, he says, "I contradict myself", and O´Hara says that´s my great predecessor, and there is a line there. But you could also say, to hell with the literary model, this seems like a pretty common-sense thing, that if you have the energy and stamina and the scope, then why write an oeuvre with a tiny set of emotions and opinions like most people do. It´s like Williams against Eliot in a certain way, the tremendous strength of Eliot´s integrity as to what he is, against Williams´ wry reversibility, so you never know what he´s going to say next. And this is how it is with O´Hara, you simply never know what he´s going to say next, he says in that poem, "My Heart", "And if/ some aficiando of my mess says "That´s/ not like Frank!", all to the good!". You know we could have this conversation in which my part of the conversation would be only lines from Frank O´Hara, "you don´t always know what I´m feeling", he says in the

Hartigan poem. So the important thing is to realise that it is lifelike.

HS: So you see a continuity between his approach to life and the poems?

BB: Oh yes - but there again there are certain things that only happen in writing. Did he do them in life, can you know, will you ever know, I´m not telling you, I don´t know. And vice versa there are things that didn´t get into the poems. It is peculiar with writers like that, like Williams, O´Hara, and Kerouac, they tell you a tremendous amount about themselves in their writing yet you always want to know more, there is always something left unanswered about them, you want to read all the correspondence, you want to see the notebooks, you want to get into it all. The reason is there´s always something left unanswered - you are given all this information and you always want to know more. And there are the writers who tell you next to nothing about themselves or their lives, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot and you don´t miss it.

HS: Yes that´s very true, but so much of what it tells you is on the surface in a way and I felt like that about the letters, there was a tremendous amount about events, and I kept thinking all the time, what is he really thinking about this. He would say I´m very depressed and then there would be nothing about it...

BB: Well maybe that´s enough, and you know in conversation he would conceivably tell you a lot more, but : a few years ago I hit on this sort of rule about the New York School. There was this insistence on energetic surface and it´s hard to talk about surface but the rule I ended up with was, surface is the great revealer, surface is where you really find anything, and anybody who is trying to tell you "here I am and deep inside me is all this other stuff", really the sensible thing to say is forget it.

HS: Yes it really depends what we are talking about, I agree with you about the poems but I think when it comes to a person´s letters I think there there could conceivably be a case for that person to make an attempt to talk about what he is actually thinking about something -

BB: You know various people said about him that surface was a necessity for him and it has to do with that face to face politics too - you know they say he had grace or that he was very polite - and including the incredible tirades that he could level at his best friends, lovers and so forth- but he was very polite so probably the letters had that degree of politeness?

***

BB:... That style which in the fifties was called camp was part of what he was doing and nobody else got that into writing the way he did. But if you walked into a gay bar in the 1950 and

1960's there were a lot of people who acted that way.

HS: That's something I'm interested in getting into but its extremely difficult. Have you got any way to suggest for me to get into that?

BB: Run back the tapes of 20 years ago? No, its not available... its just background which either does or doesn't help you understand. But he wasn't in his immediate circle an isolated case - John Myers if you met him he had a lot of the same effusive sweeping style and so did many other people at that time.

HS: Do you think there are certain poems which are particularly influenced by that way of talking or do you think that's just something which is intermittently present?

BB: Well, some of the poems in love poems have a rushing quality - "Having a Coke with You " does to a certain extent have that patter, "Biotherm" sure does. And probably because that was the way we talked a lot - even though I wasn't gay I picked up on that style from him and other people so much because it was so freeing. And I guess I had been brought up so much in this upper-middle class set up, the idea that you could just make these great sweeps of rhetoric and enthusiasm and anger too - I found it incredibly appealing and I learnt it very fast and I could do it like crazy for about ten years and then it fell away from me.

You could tell it in the poetry of the early sixties or in the St.Bridget poems. The first St.Bridget poem I wrote by myself and it is a straight out imitation of Frank and it gets pretty close to his tone. It´s a Frank O´Hara imitation so its written by him too. I had a girl friend in the early sixties who sometime after we knew each other met Frank and she said "oh now I know where you get that way of talking."

HS: So are you then talking about picking up a Frank O´Hara way of talking or a gay way of talking?

BB well it was Frank´s way and he had a very unique way; did you see the films...

***

(We are talking about the Fidelio and Angelicus Fobb letters).

HS: And what was the idea of those ones ?

BB: We pretended to be brothers.

HS: Were those meant for publication ?

BB: Well, that´s a central issue with all these collaborations, with the artists with everybody. The audience was so small the question wasn´t pertinent but I remember soon after we wrote a few of those St Bridget poems, Frank said, "why don´t we get

some of these to Barney Rosset at the Evergreen Review", so that was pretty soon after in 1961 or 2.

HS: I saw the letter that he sent about the St Briget poems with the photographs in Syracuse Library. It's in the uncatalogued Evergreen Review material... How did the Angelicus and Fidelio Fobb letters evolve, did you start talking like that for fun? Do you remember ?

BB: No I don't really remember how it happened. I have the sneaking suspicion that Frank initiated it but how it happened I don't know. Is there anything about that in the archives? I think it started around 1963. One of the reasons why Frank's correspondence is not more voluminous than it is, is because most of his friends were in New York - and we were in New York- so actually some of that correspondence, the Anglicus and Fidelio correspondence was not even mailed,it was handed. He would bring a letter and I would bring a letter and I would bring a letter but then he got into the business of sending postcards, I don't even have all the copies of my side of that.

HS: Some of it is missing then? Some of it seems very obscure but I didn't know whether that was the way it was supposed to be!

BB: No, some of it is missing, I don't know if Frank's side is all there.

HS: Did you often do that together, make up a scenario together?

B: No, we wrote some plays. We wrote that play called "Flight 115" and we wrote another play together called "The Marvel" which is lost.

HS: Is that the one you wrote together with Patsy Southgate?

BB: No, that´s something else entirely. That´s a novel with all of us filling in sections with blank areas left for people to fill in. But the play "The Marvel" was longish, it had up to forty pages, it was to have a cast of thousands and historical and other figures.

HS: What do you think of those letters now?

BB: Well I haven´t looked at them for a while, but when I did look at some of them to arrange publishing some of them, it struck me that Frank was very witty and I wasn´t. But it might have struck him the reverse way, that is to say you see something like that twenty years later and it´s entirely possible that you are embarrassed.

HS: And the monk scenario ?

BB: That just happened, that was me, I suddenly got myself into a monastery.

HS: You are the one writing from the cell?

BB: I think I was the one, I sent him a list of things I wanted sending at one point.

HS: I think those were the ones I thought were witty! I don't remember...

***

BB: The audience up to the time that Frank died was so tiny. You say what was his sense of audience, well, you see in those poems there is the immediate audience of friends and other poets who you respect and who you know are going to read your work and be aware of its formal implications and who know what is going on generally in poetry. And then you have your extended audience, which is whoever turns up for poetry readings, and who buys his books and the Evergreen Review, and then you have posterity and the sense of John Donne looking over your shoulder. So I think he had all that but the immediate audience was very, very small, the little magazines had just got going around the time that he died and anyway Ferlinghetti was far in advance of the magazine revolution of the mid-sixties. Then Ted Berrigan started Scene magazine and Ed Sanders started Fuck You magazine so there started to be more of these at the end of the sixties. But those are small magazines and that's a small audience. Frank did publish poetry in Evergreen Review and in Partisan Review but the

years when he published in the Evergreen Review were the years before the Evergreen Review became a kind of mass market magazine. He did publish in little magazines and give poetry readings, there were just fewer of them. He never read at St.Mark's - St. Mark's didn't start until the year after he died.

HS: There don't seem to be many tapes of him reading.

BB: There is the Buffalo tape which is one of the great readings. There was the summer series 1962: Frank read on June 22nd in that series, it included Frank, Robert Lowell and others, all of these readings were filmed or taped by national educational television in New York. They were all aired except for Frank's because they thought his voice was too fruity for the TV audience and years later in 1965 I went to work on that station I found out why it wasn't used and that they had erased the tape. That was one of the major readings like the Buffalo reading and included him reading "In Memory of My Feelings." As far as the Buffalo reading is concerned there are various copies of that and there are cuts that are on the John Giorno records but the whole reading is on tape at Buffalo...

Then there is a series of readings he made for Jerry Newman and Eugene Brooks, who is Allen Ginsberg's brother, in the studio and that is a great set, some of those are on the Giorno records. When Giorno started Dial-a-phone we went about finding all the recordings we could of O'Hara and so we got those and Giorno dubbed them and has I think his own copies. Then when Evergreen Review started they conceived of an Evergreen Review of the air

and there was a recording which Giorno has put on record of O´Hara and Jane Freilicher reading "To the Film Industry in Crisis" while another part of that same programme was O´Hara reading, "At night Chinamen jump /on Asia with a thump" with a piano background by John Gruen which Gruen had and Giorno and I borrowed.

The Buffalo tape is interesting because he makes various interesting remarks and that was a very interesting occasion. He was invited on behalf of an Audit magazine and he was reading for Charles Olson. He was introduced by someone called David Posner who also read and he was reading to a specifically Olson-structured audience and they clearly went for it. And it was very interesting that Olson made that extension and they spent a night going round the Buffalo bars together and O´Hara spoke of Olson reminding him of David Smith. I think they had not met otherwise.

***

BB: "did he write several poems concurrently". OK, the long poems tended to be written with the page in the typewriter and left in the typewriter but maybe he´d bring it along to work. He would work sometimes on both typewriters, it could be that if he had a page still in the typewriter he might write another poem at the museum. And then there was the carrying the poem in the inside pocket of his jacket, often as you can see in those manuscripts words, lines and sometimes whole poems get written in ink on the

sheet. By and large I'd say his principle was that he finished what, he started and then went on to the next thing.

HS: Do you have any idea how long it took him his long poems?

BB: Many of them are dated, they date the start and finish, and there might also be hiatuses.

HS: And you think he wrote a chunk and then wrote another chunk the next day without revising very much?

BB: Yes he would work straight through and those corrections done mainly in ink would be later.

"Preconceived framework"-when he wrote sonnets he wrote sonnets. He may not have started out to write a sonnet he may turned it into a sonnet. Do you know that letter about music and poetry - that idea of being against the planned image whatever that was - I don't remember. But there was that sense of not planning and so by the time the lunch poems got going as such I don't think there is much of a formal or pre-conceived framework in advance, it's virtually head on.

HS: What interested me was whether he ever made up a completely fresh kind of framework and worked on top of that. Obviously there is a hint of that sort of thing in putting the names Elaine de Kooning or Vincent Warren down the side of the page,

BB: An acrostic sure. Also the Edwin Denby poem , Edwin's Hand.

HS: I think I missed that.

HS: Do you know the notes for the Eighth Street talk form and design where he-talks about how to use system. That´s design.

HS: Yes, I should have another look at that.I suppose there may be other things like the acrostic which are not so obvious.

BB: One of the extraordinary things is - did he plan this or not (we look at Berkson´s analysis of "Sleeping on the Wing"). The last fourteen lines are a sonnet. They are separate and they develop with all the qualifications of the sonnet and makes a continuity to the rest of the poem...

"In Memory of My Feelings" has such a organisation, is such a totally organised poem that you wonder how much of this did he sketch in, know what he was doing, ...but what he had in him was "let fly impromptu" and the thing comes together and the control was derived from his training: he had trained himself as a writer and previously as an artist and musician.

***

HS: I´m interested in the way other artists approached their work at the time and an incredible stress has been put on this abstract expressionist link.

bB: Yes,what Rosenberg says about action painting, even the

artist´s statements, they don´t check out against the work. Franz Kline is not someone who loads the brush with black paint and goes charging up to the canvas and five minutes later he´s got a painting, though it looks like that. The fact is that if you look closely you see that there are three different layers of different blacks. Kline made a stroke and then walked back and sat for half an hour and considered that stroke - so that whole romance about what the procedure has been mythologised.

HS: Also I don´t see how you can talk about O´Hara without bringing in a whole range of painters, not just abstract expressionists - for instance Rauschenberg, Johns.

BB: Yes Rauschenberg, Fairfield Porter, Jane Freilicher. Frank really worked on the New York School principle that you can´t maintain a friendship with someone whose work you don´t admire. That´s one of the interesting things about the New York School you don´t just like someone because they are a friend of yours, those friendships broke up on aesthetic grounds ... Another thing about the New York School which it is inportant to know but which the critics tried to obscure, was that the abstract painters and the figurative painters and the still-life painters lived amicably, side by side and sometimes in the same metaphysical room or aesthetic room. They try to make out that Pollock negates Andy Warhol. Some people have the sense to read both Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns as logical responses to what Pollock did. So that whole business of how O´Hara relates to the movements, he was right there in the thick of it and he had his

preferences and he did not believe in systematising it. And there is another statement for the Paterson society which talks about the bad thing about system and then you see some contemporary writers going into system. In that respect he really was participating in his time, that´s a forties, fifties existentialist attitude.

HS: I don´t know what you know about his tastes in contemporary music ...there is very little about that in the letters

BB: There´s a lot of it that I don´t know... I think he probably thought that John Cage was a great man and I think he was as ambivalent about the music as anybody in their right mind should be...he had a belief in Ned Rorem´s music that I never shared.

HS: I don´t like that collaboration they did together

BB: It´s romantic music and its movie music in a certain way. Ben Weber is romantic so is Mortie - I once ran into Earle Brown and he told me how complimentary Frank had been about his music and I always liked his music. I arrived too late on the scene for a lot of that ....he loved 19th century music too, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Schoenberg and Ives.

HS: I´ve often wondered if he liked Ives.

BB: The great years of the Ives presentations weren´t until the later sixties when the music was recorded and issued. There was the Ralph Kirkpatrick version of the Concord Sonata and that was about it...

***

BB:... As a child he was fascinated by maps and geography...and then you realise that that is all over the poems and that in poems like "The Day Lady Died" and "A Step Away From Them " you can chart-it´s like a ship´s line - the movements block by block. And that is very interesting to do, even though many of the places in New York are gone you could take that walk that he took in "The Day Lady Died". So it is a poem of a map - its interesting to think of those things in terms of earlier poetry, like the Cantos of Pound suggested a voyage. These are voyages except they are walks. Pound´s rule in the Cantos was empirical, which is knowing the landscape by being in the landscape, knowing the sea by being in it, a map-maker´s version of it. So there you have Frank in those walk poems and that´s an interesting kind of connection... And the geography is there, that love of funny place names and romantic place names - China, Russia - Japan gets into it because he was there.

HS: When you talk about him you tend to refer a lot to the literary heritage; is that to you a more interesting way to view him than looking at developments in the other arts.

BB: No, but I think its important to realise thst he was not

someone who came out of the blue, that he was not informal or against the tradition or unaware of the quality of the tradition. He was a super-educated artist, and part of the movement of the poetry and the decisiveness of the poetry was to do with how much he knew about poetry and what its possibilities were.

HS: Do you see that as a greater force than other things that were going on in the arts at the time?

BB: No, because what was going on in the other arts at the time was the same kind of thing. The real theory of action painting in Harold Rosenberg´s formulation is of the painter operating in the history of art, as a performer within the history of art, and he´s operating with full consciousness, a total memory of everything that has gone on in painting. It´s really a memory-theatre, he had that too, that´s why the notebooks are interesting, because they show that self-education plus whatever he was getting from Harvard. He was following something like the Ezra Pound principle that at a certain age he was going to know everything about poetry, just as Pound set himself that task.

HS: It´s just interesting to consider what context is the most interesting to discuss him in...

BB: It´s the everything concept, the inclusivity. You don´t necessarily have to project yourself into his mind, you can just

read the poems the way you read them, but if you want to get into how he wrote them then that is projecting yourself into his mind - his idea of a line might extent from Dryden from Rimbaud, from Pound from Williams from Stevens from Breton from Mallarme and it might also extend from Earle Brown to some Rogers and Hart song, some steps he saw a dancer take, it might not come from art at all, it might come from something someone had said he day before in a non-art context.

HS: Yes, that´s the way I feel about him but it makes writing about him very difficult because it means you have to draw on absolutely everything.

BB: Or you don´t, you can read the poems as what they say to you given everything that you know.

HS: This analysis of "Sleeping on the Wing" looks very interesting - I´ve often thought it would be interesting to do an analysis of his poetry where you categorise every word.

BB: One thing Ted Berrigan said in about 1969 was Frank O´Hara really did it to us, knowing his poems the way we do it´s impossible to write our own poems without knowing that every word counts, and he´s not the only poet you can find that in but there aren´t that many poets where that is true, and the peculiarity in this poem is that every one of those words counts and has levels.

HS: Did you think of bringing it together into some kind of big analysis at the end?

BB: It was a kind of analysis that I worked out at the time. Primarily it seems to me such a hinge poem. The poem is about making a choice, you can see the decision various ways, whether to live in the world or not, whether to live or not and how, dreaming versus staying awake, reverie versus absolute commitment to the world.

... "Stock devices? " I don't think he used them. Evolution of style, I would say it's multiplicity of style, effulgence, rather than evolution.

APPENDIX D

THE MIRROR NATURALLY STRIPPED

They are debating over the daffodil seeds
in history. Quaff these jeweled belches
for isn't there whichness in the thinking apparatus
that glides towards cruelty as commonly as a bench?
Yes I am inverting my bricks.
Santa Claus, please bring me a barefoot match
that never finds itself
like a needle in the nose. Bad and nasty
are the crisscrosses whose films naughty daisy unheeds
as if there were tulips singing "Rattan, grow down"
and the empire of phosporus cheesecake also.

Oh let me. Yet I think of myself as being impossibly
happy
like a licensee who has been appointed to health-juices
it's so moving to be moving, O Everest your nose grows
down
the steep side of California-happy gypsy dominoes. Pets!
You do intend to love us like a helicopter landing
on the frozen faces of these hen-indented planets, O
basement
always yiping until one feels like a nagged bore
whose films are growing like a daisy method in you,
basement,
basement, always twitching like a Bostonian, get out,
like!
O marinated herring of these twelve blue eyes!

Are you gasping with astonishment at the hideboundness?
Aren't there packs of your best Chinese star?
I'm not going to persuade you to cuckold the Ringling
Brothers-Barnum and Bailey world
of chin-faced sadness, O Labrador of teasing neck-sacks,
and all of it of such an ofness
beyond the caress of displaced piano
tra-la. Let's tra-la it. Aren't you William Tell?
Will you em tell? Oh it wool int. baby ex fair ill nnnn
tell
and it is true or my name isn't ick. Well, ick then. Ick.
Nice coolness oh erp, axe, fair, fare, pink, trees! pangs!
oh its jamas

dun carp orange trees escaping the cylinder, isn't
every car a field of ringing hash, O motors of velvet?
Carolina moon, keep it up as long as you can, and you
can
be a bee, or, if you like, a giant pea, a big kimono factory
shuffling its enormous hams up and down the street.
A boat must quietly sing, "My cheers of tall roses
which are as Russian as an English novel" in C,
and the baseball said, "My head was filled; the Redsox
are reading *Hudibras* on the tenement roof this July."
And I looked—O poor crybaby, it is the Mediterranean—
our hugs sent back!

Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch

ST. BRIDGET'S HYMN TO WILLEM DE KOONING

1

Rain down the field in the Russian mush
that is no field that is the asphalt threshhold
of St. Bridget a black and white striped umbrella
and a white umbrella with red roses all
over it Once, long ago, you wanted to escape
to Irkutsk Now you are an old old man with an old
old piano Still if you were on the railroad tracks
and I were on the railroad tracks and the snow
were echoing the general alarm I would recognize you
the snow like a phone on your ear and me
like an ear in your phone what a generation
"Ying is Yang" I can't really tell whether the sun
has come out or you have come in yang
apparently is ying and through the cement
your visage your vice-age your V (for Victory) sage
you are not unlike a blue and pink and bong
de Kooning St. Bridget up there all abstracted
loving with no holds-barred spitting out
the salt from the rain I am no longer alarmed
Salt in my mouth salt in my wounds
All over the tundra the sweet seals
are licking each other all battles ended
the malaise begun Here a hunter there
his dog "His warp is in his woof" Will
the giant tortoise reach the sea Will
the climber see the hill or the hill the city
"She bends forward in self-conscious ecstasy,
slightly bewildered. It is red and white." You
ying your yang in various skies You are beginning
to know what pleasure really is, but you will
never atone for that pain Ping Pang Pangs
of German feeling -- Fidelio -- being beauteous
sublime rapturous verlorenen lovely lichte geschlecte
If Leonora becomes Angelicus then we are all Fidelio
oh god I didn't know my voice could go way up
there above the steeples and swoop around and then
come down down down in the sunlight like a dumb
embattled-bosomed swarthy contralto or a walrus
who had just finished off his imitation of a bird
clang clang the uproar tremendous the bladder
filling with smoke like a big blowsy bird of steel
covered with whaleskin your "spindrift" stare
your silver eyelash the ampleness of your cobalt
circle and the fillingness of your presence

I said we should fall apart like a Tinguely and
you said we should reinforce like a Dekooning
so the steeples stayed standing and the wind blew
and we smiled because our lips were forced apart
there are no raisins and no bread on the sidewalk :

2

The sidewalk rapturous the Bavarian State Opera
Not because of your divine genius nor because
of my premonitions of it engendered in gossip but
because of your bloomin' brow smack dab on the back
of "America's liveliest magazine" do I know you
to be my own true knight sceptre realm "mirroring shield"
"It is engendered in the eyes" Velleities tin
cups It is a boat It is a woman It is reclining
It is a face a meadow armature obelisk hog hobgoblin
brouhaha "true love demands an answer" Mary Haworth
I think you are the nuts I mean I think you are nuts
I sometimes even think you are autochthonous
where does that leave us St. Bridget with all your
spirituality your mediums your beads and the clatter
and the breviary I know for instance that your feet
are longer and narrower than mine but that you love me
anyway like a sidewalk ouch
the presentation of wit
as a religious exercise is something that only happens
in bars in this neighborhood ouch a nail in
my "broad" "flat" foot but that's not religious
it was a tack actually I dislike nail polish
I just realized it I just got it I know it
There we were in Zoute splashing around in the spa
Another one of our slurred days Who would ever expect it
to be warm and healthy in Holland Just then
we stopped for the Angelus they didn't kept on
splashing ruining driving tacking the merry work
of politically religious Spain not at all like Millet
If our spirituality is defunct our spleen shore ain't
Histoire du Soldat Now lemons have replaced salt

3

You open and close the icebox I am reminded
of Willem De Kooning's black and whites
early and now How peculiar -- the three of us
are truly monoliths but the icebox has a horn

(from the side) which is really like a harp in Cocteau
Stravinsky Ravel They are reviving La Valse We are
reviving our feelings admirations gods velleities
One tan the other black Selves The rain at the door
I suspect you of going into the other room to cry:
It is logical but what you do (flush!) is just as logical
Vale to Kenneth Cooper bravo bravo bravo bravo as usual
because I was not logical I was crying and I flushed
the tears down the drain back to the salt like on
the wharf the pier the pier-ess Two becomes one often
enought to keep the floodgates closed against art
or any abstraction which might make us one .
instead of two singular steeples necessarily
together
ah yes the two natures of my personality
even as a saint, cher maitre, you understand, don't
one has two eyes, don't one, and is not self-sufficient
and if one eye should stray slightly in emphasis
it is thrilling should stray back is even more so
I am the cushion of your soul your ambition your beauty
and I am glad and that is my hymnal next to the Bowery
that is my bower next to your beautiful Self that's IT

Bibliography.

Published material by Frank O'Hara.

O'Hara, Frank, Collected Poems, ed. Allen,Donald, New York, Knopf, 1979.

O'Hara, Frank, Selected Poems, ed. Allen, Donald, New York, Vintage Books, 1974.

O'Hara, Frank, Poems Retrieved, ed. Allen, Donald, Bolinas, California, Grey Fox Press, 1977.

O'Hara, Frank, Early Writing, ed. Allen, Donald, Bolinas, Grey Fox Press, 1977

O'Hara, Frank, Standing Still and Walking in New York, San Francisco, Grey Fox Press, 1983.

O'Hara, Frank, Art Chronicles, New York, Braziller, 1975.

Collaborations and Answering Letters

O'Hara with Rivers, Larry. Stones, 13 lithographs printed in black from stone, 1957-1959. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, Art New York, New York. Reproduced in Perloff, Marjorie, Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters, Austin, University of Texas, 1979, plate 3 and Rivers, Larry: Life Among the Stones, Location,

O'Hara with Bluhm, Norman, Poem-Paintings, ink and gouache on paper, Oct/Nov. 1960. In the Collection of the Grey Gallery, New York University. Reproduced in O'Hara, Frank, Art Chronicles, New York, Braziller, 1975 p. 94 and Berkson, Bill and LeSueur, Joe, ed. Homage to Frank O'Hara, Berkeley, Creative Arts Book Company, 1980, p. 125.

O'Hara with Koch, Kenneth, "The Mirror Naturally Stripped" and "Poem" (sky/woof woof/harp) in Semi-Colon Vol. 11. No. 1, 1956. (date in question).

O'Hara, Frank and Berkson, Bill, Hymns of St. Bridget, Adventures in Poetry, New York, The Print Centre, 1974.

O'Hara with Berkson, Bill, The Angelicus and Fidelio Fobb letters, published in ZZZZ Z Press, Calais, Vermont, 1975.

Koch, Kenneth, "Collected Proses" and O'Hara "Collected Poems" in Semi-Colon, Vol 11, No.1, 1956. (date in question).

Unpublished Material by Frank O'Hara

The collected unpublished letters of Frank O'Hara ed. Allen, Donald, in the Special Collections department, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut.

A letter among the papers of Burton Aldrich Robie in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

Unpublished letters to Henry Rago and manuscripts in the Special

Collections Department, The University of Chicago.

Manuscripts of poems and unpublished letters among the papers of Bill Berkson and Donald Allen, Special Collections, University of Connecticut.

Photocopies of manuscripts included in Art with the touch of a Poet. An exhibition at the William Benton Museum of Art, The University of Connecticut,Storrs, Connecticut. January 24th to March 13th 1983.

Letters from O'Hara among the papers of Grace Hartigan and the uncatalogued papers of the Evergreen Review, George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University.

"Nina Sestina" and "Bad Words", unpublished collaborations by Koch and O'Hara, copies given to the author by Kenneth Koch.

Papers relating to O'Hara's work as an employee, in the Frank O'Hara Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Papers relating to Frank O'Hara in the archives of the Ford Foundation.

Films and Recordings by Frank O'Hara

The Continuity of Vision Interview with Barnett Newman, in the series, Art: New York produced by Colin Clark for Channel

13/WNDT-TV, Newark, N.J. (assoc. producer, Bill Berkson), directed by Bruce Minnix (assoc. director, Ina Korek). First televised on 8th December, 1964.

David Smith: Sculpting Master of Bolton Landing. A filmed interview with David Smith, in the series Art: New York produced by Colin Clark for Channel 13/WNDT-TV (assoc. producer, Bill Berkson), directed by Bruce Minnix(assoc. director, Ina Korek),animation sequence by Jerry Sukenick. Filmed in New York and Bolton landing, November 1964. First televised 11th November. 1964. A typescript for this programme is among Berkson's papers at the University of Connecticut.

U.S.A. Poetry: Frank O'Hara and Ed. Saunders. No. 11 in a series of filme interviews and readings, produced and directed by Richard Moore for KQED-TV, San Francisco, 1966.

Dial-A-Poem Poets, New York, Giorno Poetry Systems, GPS001, originally recorded in New York 1963.

Frank O'Hara and Ed Saunders: poetry associated with both fim and rock music, 10161, Hollywood, California, The Center for Cassette Studies, 1966.

The Last Clean Shirt, film produced, directed,photographed, and edited by Alfred Leslie. Subtitles by Frank O'Hara. 1963-4.

Everyman a masque. A play by John Ashbery. Incidental music composed by Frank O'Hara for the world premiere performance by the Poet's Theatre, at Christ Church Parish House, Cambridge, Mass.,26 February 1951.

Musical Collaboration

O'Hara and Rorem, Ned, Four Dialogues for Two Voices and Two Pianos, Boosey and Hawkes, New York, 1979. Recorded on CMS Records Inc. Stereo DC7101 in 1970.

Other Sources.

Allen, Donald, ed. The New American Poetry, New York, Grove Press, 1960.

Allen, Donald and Tallman, Warren, ed. The Poetics of The New American Poetry, New York, Grove Press, 1973.

Altieri, Charles, Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry during the 1960's, London, Associated University Presses, 1979

Antin, David, talking at the boundaries, New York, New Directions, 1976.

Ashbery, John, Selected Poems, London, Paladin, 1987.

Auster, Paul ed. The Random House Book of Twentieth Century

French Poetry with translations by American and British poets, New York, Vintage Books, 1984.

Bailey, Derek, Improvisation: its nature and practice in music, Ashbourne, Moorland Publishing, 1980.

Berkson, Bill and LeSueur,Joe, ed. Homage to Frank O'Hara, Berkeley, Creative Arts Book Company, 1980.

Berkson, Bill. Talk, Hills 6/7 Spring, 1980. pp.7-24.

Breton, Andre. What is Surrealism? in ed. Rosemont, Franklin, What is Surrealism? London, Pluto Press, 1978. pp. 112-141.

Boone, Bruce, Gay language as political praxis: the poetry of Frank O'Hara, Social Text, Winter, 1979, pp. 59-92.

Boone, Bruce, Frank O'Hara's Poems, Ph.D. thesis, Berkeley, University of California, 1976.

Cage, John, Silence, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 1961.

Cage, John, An interview with Roger Reynolds in Schwartz Elliot, Childs, Barney, ed. Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music, New York, Da Capo Music, 1967.

Culler, Jonathan, Structuralist Poetics: structuralism linguistics and the study of literature, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

Culler, Jonathan, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature and Deconstruction, New York, Cornell University Press, 1981.

de Man, Paul, Blindness and Insight, London, Methuen and Co, 1983.

de Man, Paul, Allegories of Reading, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.

Dean, Roger, Creative Improvisation:Jazz, Contemporary Music and Beyond, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, in Press 1989.

Derrida, Jacques. Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences in Macksey, Richard and Donato, ed. The Structuralist Controversy, Eugenio, London, John Hopkins University Press, 1972. p.247-296.

Derrida, Jacques, trans, Bass, Alan, Writing and Difference, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Introduction, page xvi.

Feldman, Alan, Frank O'Hara, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1979.

Frascina, Francis, ed. Pollock and After: The Critical Debate, London, Harper and Row, 1985.

Germain, Edward B., English and American Surrealist Poetry, London, Penguin 1978.

Ginsberg, Allen, Collected Poems, London, Penguin, 1987.

Goodman, Cynthia, Hans Hofmann, New York, Abberville Press, 1986.

Gruen, John, The Party's Over Now, New York, Viking Press, 1972.

Harrison, Helen, Larry Rivers, New York, Harper and Row, 1977.

Harrison, Helen, "A Conversation with Kenneth Koch" interview in Larry Rivers: Performing for the Family: An exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture, Drawings, Mixed-Media Works, Film and Video, 1951-1981, Guild Hall of East Hampton, 1983 pp. 9-12.

Hodgson, Godfrey, America in Our Time, New York, Vintage Books, 1978.

Hunter, Sam, Larry Rivers, New York, Harry.N. Abrams,Inc.(no date given).

Johnson, Barbara, The Critical Difference, Baltimore, John Hopkins, 1980.

Jones, LeRoi, Autobiography, New York, Freundlich Books, 1984.

Jost, Ekkehard, Free Jazz, Graz, Universal Edition, 1974.

Lippard, Lucy, Pop Art, London, Thames and Hudson, 1985.

Mac Low, Jackson, Representative Works: 1938-85, New York, Roof Books, 1986.

Mac Low, Jackson, The Special Jackson Mac Low issue in ed. Ott, Gill, Paper Air, 1980 Vol 2, No.3.

McCabe, Cynthia Jaffee, Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century, Washington,Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984. Catalogue for an exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington.

Mitchell, W.I.T., Iconology: Image, Text and Ideology, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Molesworth, Charles, The Fierce Embrace, London, University of Missouri Press, 1979.

Mottram, Eric, John Ashbery: All,in the refined, assimilable state, Poetry Information, 1979, Vol.21 pp.31-52.

Mottram, Eric, Open Field Poetry, Poetry Information, Summer 1977. Vol. 17. pp. 3-21.

Nyman, Michael, Experimental Music:Cage and Beyond, New York, Schirmer Books, 1974.

Parker, Alice, Art and Homosexuality in Frank O'Hara's Poetry, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Rhode Island, 1983.

Perloff, Marjorie, Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters, Austin, University of Texas, 1979.

Rivers, Larry, Life Among the Stones, Location, Spring 1983, Vol.1 No 1.

Rivers, Larry, Drawings and Digressions, New York, Clarkson N. Potter Inc. New York, 1979.

Sandler, Irving, The New York School, New York, Harper and Row, 1978.

Sandler, Irving, The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism, London, Harper and Row, 1970.

Schimmel, Paul, Freidman B.H.Myers, John Bernard, Rosenbluhm, Robert, Action: Precision: The New Direction in New York 1955-1960, Catalogue for an exhibition at New Harbour Art Museum, Newport Harbour 1984.

Schuller, Gunter. Sonny Rollins and Thematic Improvising, in Williams, Martin, ed. Jazz Panorama, New York, 1964 pp.239-252.

Smith, Alexander Jnr., Frank O´Hara:A Comprehensive Bibliography, New York, Garland, 1979.

Sontag, Susan, Notes on Camp, in A Susan Sontag Reader, London, Penguin, 1982 105-109.

Steiner, Wendy, The Colours of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting, Chicago, Chicago Press, 1982.

Stevens, Wallace, Collected Poems, London, Faber and Faber, 1984.

Tuchmann, Maurice, ed. The New York School:Abstract Expressionism in the 40´s and 50´s, Thames and Hudson, London, (No date given).

Tytell, John, Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation, New York, Grove Press, 1986.

Williams, Raymond, Marxism and Literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977,

Williams, William Carlos, Selected Poems, London, Penguin, 1976.