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Frank O'Hara & the City:
Situationist Psychogeography, Postwar Poetics, & Capitalist Culture

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Résume

Cette thèse expose une nouvelle perspective interdisciplinaire quant à la lecture des poèmes d'après-guerre de le poète de New York School Frank O'Hara. Au travers de la philosophie de Situationiste Internationale, plus précisément des écrits de Guy Debord, cette étude explore les connections entre la poésie de Frank O'Hara et des propres représentation urbains et culturelles. Grace au notions de psychogeographie et ses « anti-technique » de détournement et dérive, cette recherche se concentre sur l'art d'appropriation qu'utilise O'Hara dans ses assemblages poétiques.

L'emphase mise sur les poèmes d'après-guerre tirés de *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* illustre la vision de l'environnement moderniste de O'Hara. Les aspects urbains, expérimentaux, et érotiques inspirés de la poésie française sout mis en valeur par les poèmes choisir d'O'Hara. Les deux premier chapitres proposent une approche psychogeographique pour décomposer les images des poèmes de O'Hara tandis que le troisième chapitre examine l'utilization du « camp » en rapport avec la politique Situationiste qui souligne non seulement la capitalisme et la culture, mais aussi l'érotique et l'homosexualité.

Mots-clés : Poésie Americain d'après-guerre; New York School poets; Situationisme; Guy Debord; capitalisme; aliénation; « camp »; culture urbaine; psychogeographie; la marche; culture de surface; ambiance; dériveur; flâneur; dandy; « cognitive mapping »; expérimentaux; poésie gay.

Abstract

This dissertation adopts a fresh interdisciplinary perspective on reading the postwar urban poems of New York School poet Frank O'Hara. Through French Situationist philosophy, and particularly the writings of Guy Debord, the study explores the spatial and textual relations of O'Hara's urban and cultural representations in postwar poetry. With the help of psychogeography and its "anti-techniques" of *détournement* and *dérive*, the research focuses on O'Hara's uses of appropriation in constructing his urban assemblages.

The dissertation considers postwar poems from *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* and offers Situationist readings and understandings of O'Hara's modernist (urban and cultural) space. The choice of specific poems highlights O'Hara's unequivocal inspiration by French poetry and focuses on their urbane, experimental and erotic aspects. The first two chapters propose ways in decoding psychogeographical approaches in poetic (de)composition for reading O'Hara's poems, while the third delves into O'Hara's uses of camp in dialogue with Situationist politics that highlight not only the capitalist and the cultural, but also the erotic and the queer.

Keywords: American postwar poetics; New York School poets; Situationism; Guy Debord; capitalism; alienation; camp; urbanism; walking; psychogeography; surface culture; ambience; dériveur; flâneur; dandy; cognitive mapping; experimental; queer poetics.

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Introduction

Situationist Appropriation[1] of O'Hara's Urban Poetry

This dissertation attempts to discuss and examine the postwar poetry of Frank O'Hara through the interdisciplinary lens of Situationism.[2] The Situationist International, a mid-twentieth century French movement that was inspired to work and develop political and cultural theory of late capitalist history and experiences, is deployed in the study of O'Hara's urban poems that were published in Donald Allen's *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*.[3] Winner of the National Book Award for Poetry and still in print to this day, the collection provides published and unpublished works (1950-1965) that chronicle O'Hara's life (Allen v). By opening debates with critical texts by the Situationists, the following dissertation focuses on the nature and utility of social and cultural representations in O'Hara's postwar urban poetry by exploring political notions (most importantly from Guy Debord's *spectacle*[4] and *psychogeography*) that revolve around understanding the capitalist city and urban culture.

Taking Frank O'Hara's postwar poems as the sources of this Situationist investigation, the dissertation aims to explore and map the relations of urban verse to Guy Debord's political and philosophical notions in the construction of social ambience and cultural history. While most O'Hara critics have considered his poetry as "part of a modern tradition" (Ashbery vii), a few have pointed specifically to the "Frenchness" of it and to its relationship with Situationist

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[1] Used throughout the dissertation as a "detouring or redirecting strategy" that stems from "working with- and heightening awareness of- an existing situation rather than from creating original works" (Smith 1).

[2] Despite its close relevance to a theory in psychology which indicates that changes in human behavior are due to factors in a situation rather than the innate traits that influence personality (https://www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition.php?term=Situationism), it is used in this study to refer to the theories constructed by the Situationist International. Founded in 1957 by members that included writers, painters, philosophers, architects, and journalists, the Situationists drew on previous artistic and political avant-gardes. They saw art as a "political intervention capable of providing both an analysis of society's ills and the means to remedy them" (Wolfreys 339). Situationism was officially dissolved in 1972 and its unacknowledged impact on intellectual and cultural life still resonates to this day.

[3] Cited as CP in the dissertation.

[4] Throughout the dissertation, **S**pectacle refers to Debord's text, while **s**pectacle refers to the notion or concept.

philosophy. John Ashbery, a friend and fellow New York School poet, believes that O'Hara's influences range from French Dadaists and surrealists to poets such as Rimbaud and Mallarmé. (Ashbery vii) When it comes specifically to his poetic features, Peter Stoneley in "Frank O'Hara and 'French in the pejorative Sense'" sums up the "Frenchness" of O'Hara's work as the merger of "the urbane, playful, experimental, and erotic aspects" (126). He also points to the poet's influence in French poetry and specifically in its surrealistic style of writing as O'Hara notes in a letter addressed to his friend Kenneth Koch that "[he]'d rather be dead than not have France around [his] neck like a rhinestone dog-collar" (Stoneley 126). As for reading O'Hara in Situationist terms, N.R. Lawrence in "Frank O'Hara in New York: Space Relations, Poetic Situations, Postcolonial Space" situates O'Hara's poetic constructions as "spatializing" activities in exploring relations with the urban environment in order to "disrupt conventions of perception" (95) and "suspend the social order" (87) in subjects of race and desire. In using *détournement* and *dérive* to read O'Hara, Lawrence attempts to highlight the performance of the "racial-colonial content of his poetry" (94).

My goal is not to examine O'Hara's urban poetry as a racial-colonial space, but as a gathering space of the "urbane", "playful", and "erotic" characteristics of French poetry as noted by critic Peter Stoneley. In applying the two most prominent Situationist techniques of appropriation, *détournement* and *dérive*, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore how O'Hara's postwar poems represent "the city and its hidden claims or content of urban structure" (Clover 1). By utilizing a vernacular that can portray the "creatively messy New York environment", Ashbery suggests that O'Hara's "conversational tone" merges "surreal imagery" with "temptations of everyday" to create a "new style" that would embody "the contradictory components of modern life" (Ashbery x). This style immerses readers in New York-as-poetic

space, a "kaleidoscopic lumber-room where laws of time and space are altered" and where "nightmares, delights, and paradoxes of life in his city" coexist with his impressions of "passionate friendships" and whimsical relationships (Ashbery x). Through psychogeographical examination, the urban style of O'Hara's poetry poses, like a modern city, a space[5] without a "fixed form" and where "interferences of situations" and "meshing influences" shape its temporary construction (Sadler 79). In examining O'Hara's postwar assemblages through Situationist psychogeography, this dissertation makes fresh connections between O'Hara's structural compositions, his relationship with capitalist culture, his "Frenchness", and his campy urban style.

Situationist approaches were developed to stand against the power of the *spectacle* and its assumed domination of economy over social life in urban space. Guy Debord's key text, *The Society of the Spectacle*, offers political notions that are transposed in this dissertation into an aesthetic examination of postwar urban poetry. Consisting of 221 propositions for re-examining consumer capitalism, *The Society of the Spectacle* addresses how the urban transient experience has been transformed into media images ready to be consumed by the capitalist market. In the age of late capitalism, images have become an essential cultural commodity in the creation of social relations. Without them, social relations might seem impossible. When Debord and the Situationists imagined the world of the *spectacle*, they anticipated the spread and control of

[5] In *American Cultural Studies*, Campbell and Kean suggest that to read the city as text depends "on where you read it from: high and low, inner city or suburb, skyscraper or street level, uptown or the ghetto, feminine or masculine, rich or poor, and so on. These differing points of view explain the endless possibility of the city for artists and the fascination for historians and sociologists studying its meaning" (188). Thinking of text in this light, the writers suggest that text is a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings… blend and clash" (189). The reader can only offer a "temporary unity to that text" where meaning is "deferred because people will bring various perspectives" into their interpretations (189). Through Situationist theories, O'Hara's poetry explores the multifaceted nature of the city by constructing diverse representations and evasive subjectivities that clash in his text-as-city space. In doing so, the idea of poetic discourse suggests "the manner through which the city is represented…in language and related frames of reference and definition" (Campbell & Kean 189).

"social relations mediated by images" (par.4) in capitalist culture and society. For Debord, the *spectacle* is a "tool of pacification and depoliticization" (Best & Kellner 3) because it is said to distract the urban dweller from the most urgent tasks of daily life. In one sense, the concept of the *spectacle* refers to the society that consumes images and commodities, while in another sense, it is a dangerous capitalist power that manipulates its urbanites in order to conceal its domination over their social and cultural life. Debord argues that the purpose of the *spectacle* is to cause a "separation of worker and product" (par.26) and to create "isolation…to engender lonely crowds" (par.28). In O'Hara's works, alienation is depicted as a form of resistance of the social standards that were set in place by postwar capitalism. In a journal entry dated October 10th, 1948 and reproduced in *Early Writing*, O'Hara expresses society's alienation in relation to ephemeral time and its effect on his "creative impulse":

> One must live in a way; we must channel, there is no time nor space, one must hurry, one must avoid the impediments, snares, detours; one must not be stifled in a closed social or artistic railway station waiting for the train; I've a long long way to go, and I'm late already. What is known as the normal day-to-day existence is successful in only two ways: it passes the time, it stifles the creative impulse (101).

The significance of this entry comes from a desire to not be "stifled" in a closed system of social space that creates obstacles and "detours". O'Hara's proposed resolution in facing such social and artistic hurdles comes by perceiving time in his poetry as transient and fleeting. Furthermore, this implies that O'Hara is quite spontaneous when it comes to the nature and role of his creativity and to the manner he wishes to "channel" his own creative impulse. Accordingly, O'Hara's poetic subjectivity cannot be easily determined, yet it clearly seeks to evade society's

alienation by constantly fleeing or giving the impression of a person "on the run"[6]. This leads us to the most important ingredient of his poetic constructions: mobility[7].

In order to capture a sense of O'Hara's poetic mobility, this dissertation draws connections with Situationism, especially to those that illuminate psychogeographical readings of his urban poetry, as well as his campy constructions of imagery that portray his queer discourse. To carefully study and examine O'Hara's campy and urban poems, one has to look closely at the methodology behind the theory of Construction of Situations. In the "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action", Debord argues that change can be brought about by "revolutionary action within culture" which attempts to "enlarge life and not merely express", "abolish exploitation", "define new desires of present possibilities", and "construct new conditions of behavior" (Debord par.37). A common basis for the art of appropriation (that is found in both *détournement* and *dérive*) is that the theory of Construction of Situations attempts to trace the inner workings of language and discourse for the purpose of locating social relations in desire and behavior in aesthetic composition or poetic form. The operation consists of investigating the use of "existing material" at the moment of construction in order to "study organization of place and event" (Debord par.52). Although such operations appear to be quite transitory, these "ephemeral passageways" (Debord par.52) facilitate the study of modernity and ambience[8] in O'Hara's urban writing.

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[6] The critic Rudy Kikel suggests that O'Hara's daily life has affected the nature of his work "which seems to be written on the run, between appointments, or during his lunch break" because of his "supercharged" charisma that has been noticed and pointed out by his friends and lovers (337).

[7] An essential element for Debord and the Situationists in their urban politics and psychogeographical endeavors.

[8] It is defined in psychogeography as a crucial emotional effect of the environment on the city observer. In this dissertation, it adheres to the psychogeographical formulation, but it also takes into consideration the influence of affect and personal desire in the workings and production of art.

Situationism is a movement "attuned to the problems of modernity" (Wolfreys 341), a term that in *Five Faces of Modernity*, Calinescu defines it as a "dialectical opposition to tradition, to the modernity of bourgeois civilization (with its ideals of rationality, utility and progress) and to itself, insofar as it perceives itself as a new tradition or form of authority" (10). By thinking of O'Hara's urban poetry in light of these conditions, this dissertation explores the dialectical[9] relationships constructed by O'Hara to achieve his unique achievement of lyric subjectivity through the use of intertextual modes and devices that come to reflect the political ambience of urban capitalist postwar space. For the Situationists, "experimentation by means of concrete interventions in urbanism" is to be developed through "active observation" of the structure and space of the city ("Report" par. 49); reading O'Hara's urban assemblages through the Situationist-modernist tradition is to map his poetic appropriations as cultural reflections of his temporal and spatial setting through a distinctive gay voice in poetic discourse in postwar New York.

To summarize: in this dissertation, the theory of Construction of Situations and the notion of psychogeography are brought together in an effort to examine literary form through relations - whether urban, structural, and/or social, - in postwar poetic discourse. By mapping traces of the psychogeographical in poetry, the dissertation proposes connections that tie the Situationists' *détournement* and *dérive* to the process of O'Hara's witty and playful poetry. In the essay "Captive Words: Preface to a Situationist Dictionary", Mustapha Khayati suggests that to oppose society and its culture is to oppose its language. In accordance with the Situationists, the *spectacle*'s language is a language of separation and so one must "constantly reformulate [it against its] fixed historical power" (Khayati 1) in order to seek out the genuine components. The

[9] Relating to Debord's interpretation of dialectical i.e. a "critique of itself by its relations" (par. 206) (see page 21 in introduction for further discussion).

schism that is created by the *spectacle*'s "language of contradiction" (Debord par.211) serves in this dissertation as a viable motive for examining O'Hara's "reappropriated" discourse as a passageway into genuinely-expressed social elements that are possibly hidden in capitalist language. In addition to these psychogeographical connections, the dissertation offers a number of Situationist associations with O'Hara's use of camp and its emphasis on the oppositional politics of gay language as found in his open-ended and startlingly immediate style.

O'Hara's Poetic Reappropriation: Debord's *Spectacle* & Capitalist Discourse

With early influences in Dadaism[10], surrealism, and Lettrism[11], it is nevertheless important to note that Debord and the Situationists' aim was to update Marxist theory in an attempt to merge art and politics. Beginning with a major shift from a society of production to one of consumption, Debord and his colleagues sought to respond to these "new historical conditions" that carried new "aesthetic and theoretical impulses" (Best & Kellner 1). To start with, the Situationists tried to highlight the new modes of consumption and the inclusion of media into their Marxist reformulation. Next, their focus was on city and everyday life instead of Marx's focus on the factory and the labor force. By emphasizing the "cultural revolution and transformation of everyday life" over "class struggle", the Situationists attempted to contribute to a distinct perspective in Marxist postwar thought. Finally, an essential difference the Situationists wanted to achieve was to focus on "production of space and the constitution of society [rather

[10] French Dadaism borrowed elements from various pre-war modernist schools (futurism, cubism, expressionism, etc.), but it exploited its predecessors' techniques to "diametrically opposite purposes through a subtle process of denaturation". Dadaism stands for "an intransigent and inconsequential mockery of the vain conceit that cultural monuments stood for something immortal, something ever-lasting. Self-immolation was written into Dada's very DNA, its main aesthetic tenant its brevity and self-destructiveness" (https://www.dadart.com/dadaism/dada/020-history-dada-movement.html).

[11] Lettrism was a radical postwar avant-garde movement that extended the experimentation of dadaism and surrealism. Through decomposition, lettrists attempted to search for new forms of communication by extending "art to the totality of life" (Kaufmann 85). The lettrists considered that poetry "takes the shape of the city" for it offers "new forms of behavior" that appear by the merger of the "provisional and the lived" (Kaufmann 92).

than] on time and history" (Best & Kellner 2). All these changes were offered by Situationists as postwar projects that could collapse "the boundaries between high and low art, and art and the everyday life" (Best & Kellner 2). By approaching O'Hara's poetry through Situationist theory, his work can be located within a postwar consumer space where it simultaneously captures quotidian urban life and American culture.

Written in 1967, one year after O'Hara's unfortunate demise on Fire Island (New York, July 24th, 1966), *The Society of the Spectacle* was central to the Situationist's philosophy concerning economics, politics, and everyday life. Given the proliferation of media and communications technology in contemporary culture, the Situationist practices still influence social critique and cultural activism. Today, the concept of the spectacle remains "as part and parcel of both theoretical and popular media discourse" (Best & Kellner 1). Defined in chapter one of *The Society of the Spectacle* as a "social relation between people that is mediated by images" (par.4), the *spectacle* is presented as unifying fragmented or "separate" visions for the purpose of "delusion and false consciousness" (par.3). From Debord's perspective, it creates a "split between reality and image" (par.7). This notion of the effect of city as a spectacle is iterated by Graham Clarke in *The American City*, where he suggests that New York City is a city of image fragments, fragments that sway between the "natural and the manufactured" (Clarke 42, 51). Clark echoes Debord's vision of such a type of city, but unto an American landscape where fragments come to portray different "states of desire"[12] (Clarke 53) that would condition "ethereal and substantial" qualities of city life. This paradoxical reality of the modern city and its

[12] What Clarke calls "states of desire", Debord calls "states-of-mind quarters" in his psychogeographical examinations of ambience which are said to "provoke sentiments appropriate to spatial development" ("Report" par.48).

alienating effect on its inhabitants is a key component in examining the city (and its construction in postwar poetry) as a site for "possibility and entrapment" (Clarke 54).

More recently, Claire Bishop has discussed the definition and function of *spectacle* in a lecture entitled "Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?" Bishop's central definition is substantially influenced by Debord's formulation of a society whose social relations are exclusively communicated through image. She argues, though, that the image that is communicated by this social experience is not only fragmentary, but also "diffused and concentrated" (1). She associates the nature of this image with the role and power of "participatory art" over the "passivity of the mass" (2) at a time when, she suggests, culture is a "spectacle without spectator" (2). By this, Bishop claims to support Debord's use of "strategy" in active participation, or his "anti-aesthetic devices" like *détournement* and *dérive* in order to "negate the political", "critique consumer capitalism", and come to "analyze how they [can] contribute to the social and artistic experience [that they generate]" (3-4). Debord believes that the advantages of participation are to introduce relations that the alienated dweller cannot perceive in capitalist society; similarly, Bishop presents the idea of "tension" as a relation that occurs between two disparate discourses (the social and artistic) as they come together in a single space. Consequently, this tension produces multiple forms of critique. With participation, Bishop argues, "tension" is not considered as an opposition to the *spectacle*, but merges with "mass empowerment" within the *spectacle* since "everyone can air their views to everyone" (6). This results in a form of *spectacle* which creates "participatory art" that has the "capacity to communicate paradoxes of discourse and experience in order to reimagine the world and its relations" (11). With this in mind, the spectator is no longer perceived as passive and distant. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière emphasizes the role of the spectator as one who

does not experience a "struggle" or a "structural opposition" to consumerist desires ("individual and collective, image and reality, activity and passivity" (13)); rather, he suggests that all these consumerist desires are organically interrelated. As a result, the spectator experiences "unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations" (17). So, too, do O'Hara's subjects exhibit and experience an interplay of ambient behavior, and a multiple layering of associations and impressions, in his urban and campy assemblages.

As for the language used by the *spectacle*, it consists of "signs of the dominant system of production" that presents "unconnected phenomena" taken from the "social order of appearances" (Debord par.10). This is embodied in the forms of commodities and in their abundant spread[13] in capitalist space. Debord believes that commodity abundance hinders social needs and falsifies social life (Debord par.68). When commodity abundance is examined in O'Hara's poetry, and especially when focusing on the nature of naming and building commodity representations in verse form, the purpose is not simply to express their excess in poetic space, but to show how banalization is part of the process of critiquing capitalist culture. O'Hara's essay "Personism" reveals yet another aspect of how commodities function through poetic imagery by implying that the existence of commodities is what rests "squarely between the poet and the person…the poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages" (CP 499). Just like the workings of a *spectacle*, the poem creates and embodies a commodified space between disparate images of social interaction in close proximity. With this in mind, this dissertation regards O'Hara's assemblages as not merely portraits of commodities reflecting capitalist

[13] In poetic space, not all of O'Hara's urban poems portray this kind of commodity dominance, or are even constructed for the reason mentioned by Debord. This dissertation presents some poems by O'Hara that could be read as quite complacent to the functioning of an imagined hegemonic society (by way the commodities make up the building blocks and the essential elements of the poem) and other poems which appropriate commodified space in order to critique the historical, urban, and personal milieu.

culture; instead, they are treated as spaces that contain social and emotional traces that can be detected and critiqued with the help of psychogeographical tools like *détournement* and *dérive*. Thus, the aim of the first two chapters is to read O'Hara's selected pieces as potential spaces for transformative emotional experiences that are born out of commodity and discourse (re)appropriation.

Debord considers that in the *spectacle,* discourse and language bear aspects of the "never-ending monologue of self-praise" that completely dominates "all aspects of life" (Debord par.24). Debord argues that the effect of the invading discourse resembles the workings of mass media, which are "inseparable from the modern state" (Debord par.26) of affairs that divide social classes. Putting politics and economics aside for the moment, it is the inclusion of the multivalent and evasive addressees that O'Hara constructs in his poetry assemblages - what Hazel Smith in *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara* calls "self-talk" (145) - that is particularly relevant to this dissertation. O'Hara, just like Whitman, wanted to attempt to synthesize all of American experience into his poems (Vendler 1). Apart from the constructions of assemblages (made up from variations, observations, memories, allusions, impressions) in most of his poems, O'Hara often builds poetic forms that initiate self-reflection or suggest ironic remarks about their own making and construction. Based on Debord's idea of the *spectacle* being a force that feeds on the breakdown of real communication or "disinformation"[14], I argue that O'Hara uses "self-dialogue" as an attempt to achieve a "liberation" from the clutches of such forces, and thus, to offer the possibility of experiencing real communication through poetry. In chapter eight of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord argues that to understand capitalist culture,

[14] The concept of disinformation is said to be employed by those who hold fragments of econo-political authority in the *spectacle*. Its aim is "deliberate manipulation" and falsification of information to serve exclusively the capitalist state and to reinforce itself by "eliminating any reference to the original" ("Comments" par. XVI-XVII).

one has to accept that the destruction of language is a positive development. Debord suggests that the decomposition of the *spectacle*'s language is a "pseudoinnovation [that could] restructure society" (Debord par.192). Therefore, to appropriate language or to construct a self-dialogue is a creative act that contributes to the development of a form of real communication (away from forces like the *spectacle*'s manipulation of information). In my dissertation, O'Hara's "self-talk" is regarded as an innovation to restructure and reinvent poetic language and form at such a moment in American history.

These attempts at appropriating language and discourse are illuminated by Debord's "Dialectical Theory" which primarily offers a "critique of itself by its relations" (Debord par.206). Debord argues that this theory can enable a reversal of already-established meaning (by reversing the language of contradiction) and a reappropriation of past critical efforts. Debord believes that as a result, one can "reradicalize truth" (or reexamine the narrative issued by the *spectacle*) and "maintain distance" from whatever has caused such transformations to be perceived as truth in the first place (Debord par.206). This is why *détournement* is a necessary process in the decomposition of language and discourse (as discussed in chapter one).

O'Hara's poetic constructions can be viewed as elements in a search that appropriates discourse for the sake of opposing a society (like the *spectacle* and its ideals) by opposing its means of expression. Since the *spectacle*'s "language of contradiction" is media-related, changes in the discourse ultimately involve a critique of "bureaucratic language" (Debord par.211) which consists of demotic enunciations through colloquialisms and speech patterns. This bureaucratic language is said to assume an "order" or command form that conveys the "militarization of the whole society" (Khayati par.8). Accordingly, this type of language represses "real" communication and hides the truth of social behavior and mannerisms. This dissertation explores

how O'Hara's playful constructions and campy assemblages critique these presumed bureaucratic intentions of communication.

In *How to Read a Poem*, Terry Eagleton suggests that to explore poetry as experience in capitalist times is to perceive it as a "fading experience" (17) in a consumable and transient world. This "depthless" experience is turned into a "commodified experience" where the use of language becomes "unpredictable" (17-18). While Eagleton argues that this form of poetry is a postmodern one, he also refers to Benjamin's "dialectical viewpoint of modernity" (20) in which the death of some forms is necessary so that other forms can be (re)born. Thus, commodified experiences are not simply a reflection of the dominance of mass culture, as with Debord's thoughts on the development of discourse, it is also imperative for language to experience "ideological decomposition" if it is to critique all "outmoded systems" (Debord par.24).

In *The Matter of Capital,* Christopher Nealon believes that American postwar poetry aims to create a "textual imaginary for itself" in order to "stage confrontations between poetry and capital" (Nealon 3). According to him, capitalism has colonized everyday life by colonizing "extra-mechanical skills" to meet the "demands of the market" (4). This, he suggests, produces an American identity that sways between a "disintegrative" and a "reintegrative" position in history (5). Nealon argues that once the modernist lyric can accommodate "the question of the exploitation of labor" and capture "the negativity expressed in chance and play", then the verbal form will achieve a "cross-disciplinary notion of textuality"[15] (Nealon 12). This process "turn(s) all negativity into knowledge and meaning" (Nealon 13) and becomes a key component of American postwar philosophy and art. This view of American philosophy in postwar capitalism suggests a notion of politics that is reflected in images of ironic decadence in O'Hara's lyric

[15] Nealon defines this notion as a place to "imagine relations between poetry and politics" (Nealon 11).

poems. T.S. Eliot defines the lyric as "a record of the voice or the mind speaking to itself" (Eliot 1376), a definition that seems viable when it comes to the workings of O'Hara, where the poet's evasive subject ("I") is in constant conversation with an absent addressee(s). Through this "verbally self-conscious" (Eagleton 41) form, O'Hara turns his lyrical poetry into a space for critiquing itself and society.

***Psychogeography*: Mapping Affect & Desire in Poetry Composition**

In the "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography", Debord proposes psychogeography primarily as a means for taking "chance and predictability of the streets" (Debord par.1) into account. If social geography presents the study of natural forces and climactic conditions with regard to "the economic structure of a society" and the "corresponding conception that such a society can have of the world", psychogeography is a study that focuses on "geographical" and environmental conditioning, "consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Debord par.2).

Psychogeography is an essential element in Situationist philosophy. It permits self-analysis through the study of "change of ambience" (par.11) and its effects on the individual's perceptions and emotional gestures. Noting that "zones of distinct psychic atmospheres" exist in urban space, Debord suggests that these ambiences give "rise to feelings as differentiated and complex" as any other form of feelings when conjured by a spectacle (par.11). Thus, to understand the emotions provoked by an urban setting, one has to "constantly critique" (par.12) the arrangement and effects of those elements on the emotions of the urban dweller, and not merely consider the urban décor through its "historical period" or "architectural style" (par.11).

In general, Debord claims that ambience is the impression a place leaves on the individual. It is too often a "neglected phenomenon" (Debord par.12) when examining the

emotions of the urban dweller, whose ever-changing mobility is crucial in evaluating and investigating the complex psychogeographical feelings that ambience creates. However, what Debord does not discuss is the relationship ambience can have with the observed affect(s) and with the artist's personal desire to appropriate these affects into the construction of the urban subject.

Before studying psychogeographical ambience, it is important to distinguish affect from emotion. Beginning with a difference between a feeling and an emotion, Eric Shouse in "Feeling, Emotion, Affect" defines "feeling" as a "sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labeled" (1). Feeling, then, is personal and biographical, whereas emotion is not necessarily unique to the individual's social experiences. "Emotion" is defined as the "projection/display of a feeling" that is considered in most cases a social expression (Shouse 1). When it comes to affect, though, it is the most abstract sentiment of the three. In the words of Brian Massumi, who relays Deleuze's and Guattari's definition of "affect" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is "a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (xvi). Therefore, affect is considered a mode which has no representation outside itself, yet whose 'intensity of passage' is shaped by an external impact that reveals internal characteristics of the body under study. What gives affect its form lies in the interaction[16] between the "sensation in the image received" and in "the artist's response" to the received image (Uhlmann

[16] In Robert Seyfert's "Beyond Personal Feelings and Collective Emotions: Toward a Theory of Social Affect", he replaces the act of interaction with "transmission that emerges in moments of interaction" (37). This statement comes to focus on exclusively the "effect that emerges in the encounter of social bodies" (37). What the latter proposes in regards to ambience is the fact that affect influences the psychology of a social body as it engages with another. However, what it does not state is whether the architectural body incorporating city space is capable of producing affect. Seyfert adds that "the entirety of all heterogeneous bodies" (31) are involved in the production of affect, without clarifying if those bodies could be other than social.

16). Through a psychogeographical lens, such interactions become signposts for detecting and realizing the effects of ambience.

Once ambience is perceived as a necessary component in the process of constructing urban discourse, it becomes feasible to explore and critique individual emotions and behavior, particularly when it comes to studying the spatial relations between the object and its observer. When Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory* claims that art is "the possible as promised by its impossibility…the ever broken promise of happiness" (135-136), he touches on ideological decomposition (to use Debord's phrasing here) as a starting point to compose possible worlds or realities. In psychogeography, the observer is offered tools (or devices like *détournement* and *dérive*) to investigate and map this "impossibility" in order to seek new ways of emotional and cultural expression that are produced by experimenting with (decomposing) discourse.

In this dissertation, the psychogeographical approach aims at highlighting O'Hara's constructs as spaces embodying witty and gaudy representations that have been appropriated from the poet's urban and social milieu. While *détournement* represents a recycling of texts and images in "new ensemble" (Debord par.1), *dérive* is a type of drifting through urban landscapes in order to become attuned to the atmosphere or "auras of locales and neighborhoods" (Wolfreys 343). The first technique appears to be more of a literary form of appropriation or transformation than the second one, but it is important to note that the significance of the *dérive* lies in its "playful-constructive behavior and awareness" of the "attractions of the terrain" and the encounters experienced by traversing through them (Debord 1). The Situationists believed that experimenting with these "new states" were the kind of "situationist tasks"[17] necessary to the study of both urbanism and daily life. This dissertation seeks to perform such situationist tasks

[17] Defined in "One More Try If You Want to Be Situationists" as a task to create "new cultural theatre of operations" (par.1) at the final stage of decomposition.

when considering the critique of "existing spheres" (such as language, urbanism, and sexuality) in O'Hara's experimental assemblages as innovative postwar reappropriations of urban, cultural and poetic space.

Abstract Expressionism & the Semiotic Poet

The New York School of poets, as John Bernard Myers came to call them (Allen x), included Barbara Guest, James Schuyler, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and last but not least Frank O'Hara. They are known for their collaborations with the New York School Painters and Abstract Expressionists living in New York in the postwar period, and their initial publications were considered accompaniments to the artworks of New York School Painters like Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell, as well as the "second-generation" of painters like Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher, and Grace Hartigan. This entourage of poets and painters remains to this day crucial to the ways O'Hara is read. In particular, O'Hara's work shares certain characteristics with his fellow New York School poets. The first is to chronicle the history of the making of the poem; the second is to present the poem as an activity in itself (and one separate from its creator); the third is to consider poetry as play in its own medium of expression (i.e. language). Through these characteristics, postwar poets came to consider themselves as "ironists" (Lehman 3).

In *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*, Lytle Shaw suggests that to be a coterie poet is not simply about collaborating with other artists, but also about the relationship among friends and "their ways of speaking together"[18]. This is something often O'Hara calls "the appropriate sense of space – the fluctuating space that two people invent between themselves" (Shaw 76).

[18] Shaw in "Gesture in 1960: Toward Literal Situations" relates O'Hara's "ways of speaking together" to the development of a critical language from "Hollywood lexicons of masculinity and violence to international Cold War debates about freedom." Shaw argues that this type of expression opens up "experimentally to culture in ways no other critics pursued" instead of having mere "reductive iconographic readings" (31).

The notion of space or "set of interpersonal reference points" (Shaw 77) that is created by the coterie poet is said to combine "biography" and "judgment" in order to carry out notions of "particularity" as well as "universality" that are "historically constructed in flux" (Shaw 5). In this dissertation, the experiences of the coterie poet are reimagined from the standpoint of the walker-poet who traverses the streets and alleys of the city in order to observe and construct his subjects' multivalent desires and experiences from the existing ambiences of the surrounding urban space.

Based on notions of composition relayed by abstract expressionist painters, O'Hara's poetry adheres to what he calls an "Esthetic of Culmination". In his essay "David Smith: The Color of Steel" which appeared in the journal *Art News* in 1961, O'Hara explains his theory by suggesting that the observer should not detach himself from the work observed. Influenced by Harold Rosenberg's definition of Action painting, which states that surface is the "arena" in which the painter's "actions" are to be expressed (Rosenberg 8), O'Hara's poetry constructs strong spatial relations in both form and content. Like Marjorie Perloff, who remarks that the "surface" of a poem "must be regarded as a field upon which the physical energies of the artist can operate, without meditation of metaphor or symbol" (Perloff 23), O'Hara affirms the importance of surface over metaphor in his essay "Notes on Second Avenue," where he wishes to keep "the surface of the poem high and dry, not wet, reflective, and self- conscious" (O'Hara 497). However, in another instance found in *The Great American Artist Series: Jackson Pollock*, O'Hara situates Pollock's Action painting in the context of history and specifically of cold war tensions when he states that "it is not surprising that faced with universal destruction, as we are told, our art should at last speak with unimpeded force and unveiled honesty to a future which may well be non-existent, in a last effort of recognition which is the justification of being" (22).

O'Hara's sense of heightened urgency is neglected by most critics who examine O'Hara's poetic subjectivity within a historical context.

Graham Clarke in *The American City* associates Pollock's representations of abstract subjectivity with those of the city which, he claims, bring an "endless game [of] energies" (55). These energies are said to create a necessary tension between the artist and his constructed space. In O'Hara, it may be that the suggested "game of energies" is one that deals with more than one form of tension. It can also be a play between presence and absence which O'Hara states is a "last effort of recognition". This process, which clearly comes from abstract expressionism, situates O'Hara on the forefront of such a "game". In the same text, O'Hara describes Pollock's paintings as "painfully beautiful celebrations of what will disappear, or has disappeared already, from this world, or what may be destroyed at any moment" (21). This statement is a key to understanding how O'Hara's own poetic constructions highlight tension between presence and absence while conveying his spontaneous production of metonymic and syntactical explorations in poetic discourse. Psychogeographically, this dissertation attempts at reading such tensions as passageways into O'Hara's shifting worlds of postwar New York culture.

Not only does O'Hara employ the painterly methods of the abstract expressionists in composing poetry; in Situationist terms, O'Hara's poetry is discussed as a chronicle of its own making, a reflection of urban, postwar capitalist American ambience, and ironic in its campy constructions. O'Hara is a witty gay poet who perceives language as a game that brings together distinct structures and modes of expression, most importantly for the purpose of producing a text's self-critical and dialectical form. Based on Situationism and psychogeography, I suggest that the surface culture (an essential element in O'Hara's relationship to abstract expressionism) is designed to reveal the effects of ambience as perceived consciously or unconsciously in the

spectrum of the subject's observations, while it creates unfamiliar spatial relationships (or tensions) that are constructed in the process of composition, i.e. between the artist, his produced work, and his cultural environment.

Camp, Homosexuality, and the Modern City

All the members of the New York School of poets are said to question notions of masculinity and interrogate capitalist heteronormative society through images of an "indistinguishable consumerist reality" (Lehman 15), thus presenting and promoting an understanding of aesthetics, culture, and society that explores possible relations between sexuality and postwar poetic diction. Accordingly, camp is re-examined in this dissertation not only as a site for inventing and reinventing masculine subjectivity, but also as a site for linguistic and poetic experimentation that resignifies the cultural and social elements of the postwar capitalist narrative by queering them. This narrative is certainly aligned with what the critic Rudy Kikel calls the "bastard-angel syndrome" of the pre-Stonewall period where "accepting one's gayness in a homophobic society [was] often to entertain society's worst fears about itself for oneself- if there [was] no movement to ward off the oppressive stereotyping- the haunting projection of the 'other', in all its dreadful and exhilarating ramifications" (340). Reading O'Hara's camp through Situationism suggests social and aesthetic (poetic) appropriations that capture this pre-Stonewall history and culture of New York. With similar objectives, O'Hara's playful use of irony and parody expose oppressive stereotyping in order to undermine and hopefully transform prevailing social and cultural attitudes toward American homosexuality.

Camp and Situationism also converge in O'Hara's relationship with history and the past. Susan Sontag in her "Notes on Camp" argues that camp presents a sentimental reaction to the past and a love of the old, even though it does not hold any moral relevance since it focuses on

style. Thus, the past can become a source for play in the present (Sontag par.31, 33, 36). Play, in Situationist terms, is a "rational escape from confined time and space", and contrary to Sontag, Situationists do not regard it as "at all separate from ethics" (Keehan par.4). In Situationist techniques of appropriation, play has to "provoke conditions favorable to direct living" in order to fight "for a life in step with desire" (Keehan par.4). To read camp through a Situationist lens is to perceive it as a playful "attitude of indifference" that rejects an "elitist past" in favor of rediscovering "history's waste [in order] to liberate objects and discourses of the past from neglect and disdain" (Ross 150-151). Moreover, O'Hara's camp resists cultural alienation as his pieces drift between what Debord calls "commodified time"[19] and "human time"[20]. Interestingly, these two types of measured time present two distinct perspectives in O'Hara's work; commodified time is suggestive of the *spectacle*'s total control over man's desire, while his campy representations of a personally lived gay history foreground a human time that is open to textual and cultural transformation.

To understand camp and the situation of gay culture in postwar New York, one has to look back at the models of sexuality that prevailed in American twentieth century culture. In *Foundlings*, Christopher Nealon argues that the first half of the century subscribed to the "inversion model" of homosexuality. However, in the second half of the century, the inversion model is overcome by the "ethnic model". Historically speaking, the adoption of the ethnic model both follows, and contributes to, the construction and development of a gay community as more and more people migrate to the city in search for work (Nealon 2-6). A transitional period between the two models creates what Nealon calls a "foundling," which he defines as a "tension

[19] Such time is said to be bought and sold in capitalism to portray "socially controlled uses of time" (Debord par.151).
[20] In brief, human time is time explored as a concrete passage in spatial and social ways (Debord par.163).

manifested to feel historical" (8). Nealon explains that this tension occurs between the inversion model, experienced by the "solitary exile", and the narrative of a collective and communitarian experience (8). Keeping this in mind, we may say that the New York School members tried to rewrite the historical narration[21] of homosexuality by "reworking the tropes of the inversion model" in an attempt to show the "struggle between powers of isolation and those of collectivity" (Nealon 16). This delicate process of rewriting at the "foundling" moment can be fairly regarded as one way of appreciating O'Hara's campy composites. Yet, overlapping with the "foundling" perspective on O'Hara's poetry is the obvious influence of the particular modernist notion of constructing obscure and multiple subjectivities. Both notions can be taken into account when examining the *doubleness* that becomes a substantial marker of O'Hara's urban postwar poetics.

Joseph Boone's *Libidinal Currents & the Shaping of Modernism* explores such connections between sexuality and modernity. The indeterminate subjectivity that, as Boone sees it, is such an integral element in both modernity and in the postwar critique of the heteronormative (Boone 2), and is also quite central to O'Hara's poetic space, as revealed in his "self-talk" and his modernist bricolage of unusual allusions (to be discussed in the psychogeographical readings of the selected poems). Indeterminate subjectivity becomes for O'Hara an effort to "free gay desire from its dependence on heterosexuality as the dominant sexual code" (Boone 207). Indeterminate subjectivity is highly compatible too with the culture of surface that O'Hara is known for. Here, language and discourse are constructed from the 'grey

[21] The narrative that follows the ethnic model represents a vernacular of the colloquial first before being customized to a gay entourage of urban space.

area'[22] of the urban experience, where anonymity and autonomy melt away, or from the coexistence of this duality, as produced by what Georg Simmel calls "shifting stimuli" (Simmel 15).

As already mentioned, the creation of a gay community cannot be separated from the modern urban experience in the immediate postwar period because of the shift from the inversion model of homosexuality to a collective "ethnic" model. This shift is a normal occurrence in the development of the metropolis. In "Metropolis & Mental Life", Georg Simmel puts forward the idea that there is a psychological conditioning that takes place in the space of the metropolis (Simmel 11). On the one hand, there is a constant shift of stimuli (internal and external) that the city produces on the consciousness of the individual. On the other hand, the reaction produced in the individual is one of desensitization. The reason for this, he adds, is the "inability to be stimulated in a milieu that keeps shifting" (Simmel 12, 14). Simmel is a precursor of Debord when it comes to the idea of modern society (with its "money economy") causing the individual to feel isolated and "blasé". Furthermore, Simmel adds that "aversion", "strangeness", "repulsion", and "deflection" are responses essential to urban life and are actually seen as signs of personal freedom (Simmel 15). The subject in the modern metropolis sways between anonymity and autonomy in response to society's "shifting stimuli" (15). This is a major cause of alienation in the modern city, one that Debord captures some three score years later in his notion of *spectacle*. The ever-changing process of the modern city brings to the surface a play of diversity, anonymity, and possibility in the creation of the modern/urban subject.

[22] In opposing the postwar status quo, O'Hara's camp may be viewed as an attempt to build "an alternative world under a diverse space of marginalized people [in order to] celebrate their difference by crossing sexual and social categories of oppression" (Boone 210).

According to Simmel, the modern city is initially structured around the freedom of movement of individuals and dwellers. He suggests that individuality in the city is always perceived with regard to the group or crowd dynamic. This means that the individual in a group holds what Simmel calls a "perceivable intellectual distance" (Simmel 16), and this is what gives the individual a kind of independence from the mass. The spatial relationship that the city dweller experiences encourages cultural differences as the city's grid is constructed in such a way as to permit the conceiving of spaces or "pockets" that maintain a "physical insularity" and "a symbolic resonance" of individuality (Boone 212-213). Therefore, the modern city in Simmel's definition is designed to abet the other, no matter how different the other may be. Having said this, O'Hara's sense of individuality could be viewed as quintessential to his psychogeographical openness to places, people, and poetry construction, even if such a constructed alternative world has its roots in resisting[23] an alienating urban space that Simmel had already presented decades earlier, but that was still reflective of postwar capitalist societies.

Michel de Certeau reminds us in "Walking in the City" that the function of the "concept-city [is a] machine of modernity [which presents a] space for appropriations [as the subject is] constantly enriched by new attributes [and] various interferences" as he traverses the urban grid (De Certeau 1). Thus, the concept-city makes it possible to engage with a "collection of singularities" of enunciation that permit a "pedestrian rhetoric" (Boone 214) similar to the experience of walking: "a fragmentary… yet multilayered" (Boone 219) operation that includes intersecting thoughts and totalizing attributes. Walking, then, is not only an operation of interaction, but also an activity that spreads knowledge, experience, and culture. These urban

[23] Based on Simmel's duality notion of subjectivity of the urban experience, Boone argues that this frees the subject from a straightforward commitment as the attention in urban space keeps shifting. Thus, such experience is to be portrayed through a play in language vernaculars and in encoding discourse in order to produce queer desire that fluctuates between high and low, private and public, heterosexual and homosexual culture/knowledge (219).

concepts are certainly acknowledged in Situationist notions of *unitary urbanism* and psychogeography. Their experimental techniques are geared toward the existence of the numerous ambiences that will be experienced by walking the city grid. This totalizing operation of walking is to be seen as a backdrop for O'Hara's method of constructing assemblages that appear, (to use Boone's words,) to be fragmentary yet also multilayered. The "fragmentary" comes from the constantly-shifting attributes of the urban experience and the "multilayered" from the coexistence of the "actual and the imaginary" (Boone 215). For O'Hara, this makes walking a physical and creative operation in which observations of distinct (sexual) experiences are transposed to other communities in urban (and/or textual) space.

In Debord's psychogeography, the passage through urban space exceeds the boundaries of nation because it engages with conscious or unconscious stimuli brought about by the urban ambience. Similarly, when exposed to the urban lexicon, poetic language can operate within a textual space (like a passage through the urban grid) and come to create new and appropriated metonymies (Boone 216). When this occurs, the urban narrative or discourse is put to the test every single time it goes through the experimentation and composition process. This is central to O'Hara, whose constructed transient figurations and subjectivities offer constantly new translations and readings of the modern city and urban life in textual (poetic) space.

O'Hara's Semiotics: Situationist Reading, Modernist Appropriation

O'Hara's charismatic and highly sociable personality often led to his being placed at the center of the New York School of poets, where he creatively fused abstract expressionist artistic process with modernist composition. Situationism helps us understand O'Hara's urban discourse as a marker for explicating and developing spatial relations in his poetry. In this dissertation, psychogeographical techniques are deployed as methods for understanding postwar (gay) culture

through the effects of ambience and spatial relations in O'Hara's poetic constructions "generated linguistically via innovative techniques in composition" (Lehman 34).

Since Situationism (itself influenced by Dada, Surrealism and Lettrism) is derived from modernism, my examination also involves a Marxist reading that retains its pertinence so long as capitalism continues to exist. In "Postmodernity, Not Yet", Nathan Brown discusses this continuing periodization with regard to Frederick Jameson's account of the modern/postmodern. With Marx's identification of modernity with capitalism as the basis of his argument, Brown explains that Jameson uses the prefix *post* to suggest a recommencing of modernity. In this case, *post* presents a continuity and not a rupture (Brown 12). By contrasting Ernest Mandel's and Robert Brenner's periodization with Jameson's work, Brown concludes that modernity is "structured as the history of the contradictions of capitalist accumulation, and as long as those contradictions persist across and through discrepant phases, so, too, does the history of modernity continue to unfold as the history of capital" (Brown 19). On another note, Brown takes up Jameson's argument that modernist styles have become "postmodernist codes" in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and adds that "they too serve as a system of referents for discrepant transformations" (Brown 20). The reason for this, Brown explains, is because "within a late phase of modernism itself, a phase in which the new continues to have become old, the abolition of the economic and cultural imperative of novelty has not yet been traversed" (21). Similarly, by re-examining O'Hara's urban poems through Situationism, this dissertation claims them for late modernism, and not postmodernism, as some critics would claim.

In *Modern and Modernism*, Frederick Karl defines modernity as a particular perception of time that involves "suggesting the present, as against some historical past" (Karl 3). Such a

perception "assumes the world has progressed" and that "a progressive world needs a new mode of expression" (Karl 7). In "The Painter of Modern Life", however, Baudelaire claims that *modernité* is a quality of "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable" (7). Baudelaire argues that it is the responsibility of the modern artist to neutralize the past and history itself by safekeeping the "transitory fleeting elements"[24] that construct "portraits in the spirit of their day" (7). Hence, the responsibility of the modern poet is to present the shifting attributes of discourse as elements that are crucial for social transformation, as well as necessary for cultural development. O'Hara's urban and campy poems can be considered just such portraits that preserve transient "situations" in their spatial and temporal observations of postwar capitalist culture.

Peter Nicholls suggests in *Modernisms* that "old forms of communication have to be destroyed [in order to] transform the relations between art and society" (Nicholls 25), a position that both modernists and Situationists agree on. While the modernists have acquired from Baudelaire the importance of a process like *synaethesia*, the Situationists explore a similar interlinking process through psychogeography, which involves constructing discourse from the diverse effects of ambience on the emotions and behavior of individuals. Both movements argue that "atmospheric suggestiveness" (Nicholls 26) in the construction of artistic and poetic language is much more important than its semantic counterpart.

Under capitalism, and particularly in the age of *spectacle*, Debord argues that modern society is constructed as a space[25] for uniting "contradictions and divisions" (Debord par.54) of the "socio-economic system" (par.55). Furthermore, Debord suggests that what is required for

[24] This is a key point that refers to O'Hara's use of transitory elements in his urban poems (mostly relayed through his sense of immediacy and urgency) to present a fleeting perception of time along with its effect on poetic composition that delves into urban and cultural investigation.
[25] This kind of space, in Debordian terms, implies a troublesome totality as it unites fragments from separate entities.

communication in such a system is a "praxis for direct activity with its own appropriate language" (par.187). I argue that O'Hara's assemblages create a dialectical space by contesting a linguistic system that ideologically dissolves "contradictions and divisions" of capitalist society. Thus, his assemblages provide a necessary artistic space for reinventing *langue* in poetry and for developing non-alienating relations[26] in such a space. In other words, to view O'Hara's poetic discourse in Debordian terms is to view his artistic space as a space that serves to produce "a unifying critique" of "social totality" in order to produce a contestatory "unified social practice" (Debord par.211).

To reinvent *langue* in poetic experimentation is to build by means of verbal destruction. The modernist process is similar to Debord's call for *ideological decomposition*. Debord believes that the breakdown of language through "practical critique" is a positive development in society's ability to achieve real communication (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.203). As in Mallarmé, where language is an "experience of negation in aesthetics against the materiality of the world" (Nicholls 34), language in O'Hara is a "register of substitution" to create a "reality of transgression over rules and limits" (Nicholls 34) beyond itself. By using "decodings", the experimenter of verse is believed to "free language from its referential bondage" (Nicholls 36). To the degree that modernists are less interested in describing the object than its effects, they create a "syntactic opacity" (Nicholls 38) that seeks meaning by "difference between words" and not by "authorial intention" (Nicholls 38) like speech acts. Such a modernist approach in O'Hara's assemblages creates an interaction between meaning as produced by syntactical arrangement and effects that derive from spatial ambience.

[26] In his notion of *personism*, O'Hara explains that "partly" it is about "its minimal aspects to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feelings towards the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about the person" (CP 499).

In the postwar period, there have been two contradictory approaches to modernist art. The first is a tension between the objective correlative and individuality, and the second is a tension between sensory experience and the mind or self as the "maker of meaning" (Hartman 154). I argue that psychogeography offers a space in which to observe how these contradictory modernist tensions exist and shape O'Hara's urban poems. On the one hand, the spatial relationships shed light on the uses and composition of subjectivity in O'Hara's work, while on the other hand, they foreground the materiality of experience in O'Hara's urban and campy assemblages.

Two unique subjects or personality archetypes from the nineteenth century- the flâneur and the dandy- make their way into O'Hara's postwar poetics. Both figures pose a critique of an emergent modernity (including urbanism) by reflecting upon "the body" and its relationship with urban space and mass culture of capitalism. To locate these figures in O'Hara's poetics is to reconsider them as viable to a society "moving away from traditional hierarchies and identities" (O'Connell 220). As these figures make their way into late capitalism, they become freighted with new tendencies that allow for a critique of postwar urban culture.

Through Situationist urbanism and philosophy, my intention is to take a closer look at the workings of these figures of modernity and the way they have been reappropriated in O'Hara's poetry. Suffice it to say that their essences have not been tarnished. The archetype of the flâneur still remains that of an observer and a stroller of urban space. Nonetheless, based on psychogeography, my purpose is to present the walker as a medium for cultural change and political transformation, and not simply an aimless stroller who observes and records his impressions of the urban milieu. Furthermore, the act of walking in itself is seen as an act of thinking and of mapping mental connections. With the help of the *dérive*, walking becomes a

tool for understanding modern culture by traversing distinct ambiences and by constructing situations and events in poetic space worthy of social and cultural critique. As for the dandy, he remains a figure of fashion and taste. His quest for self-display constantly projects an ethos of "risk-taking, sartorial meticulousness, and intolerance of ordinariness" (O'Connell 233). These qualities are challenged in O'Hara's rhetoric when he produces campy representations that surround his obscure subjectivity. With representations that focus on surface and style, O'Hara's dandy is an observer who has a particular manner[27] of seeing things and is essentially a consumer of urban and sensual ambience. Although the mission of the dandy aesthetic is a "rejection of mass industrialization, vulgarity, and bourgeois conformity" (O'Connell 234), this dissertation negotiates these conditions in relation to Situationist urbanism. O'Hara's dandy interweaves an abundance of flamboyant mannerisms with style and taste in order to present a certain situational complacency of culture and social class. His camp constructions are attempts to blend cultural and sexual resonances in action-packed, metonymical urban assemblages.

Situationist Time

The importance of examining the act of walking in composing and reading poetry has a lot to do with finding mobility to be an asset in presenting a continuously shifting culture and for capturing the sense of flux that characterizes urban space. Based on the sense of flux in modernity, the "moment" is viewed as the only possible unit of reflection of the present since the sense of time under capitalism has frozen the movement of history (Nicholls 5). In his review of Pollock, O'Hara remarks that abstract art functions analogously by capturing "celebrations" of fading and terminated moments. O'Hara uses words instead of color to capture moments, but his poems similarly amplify the experience of time by merging a sum of unfinished actions and

[27] Peter Nicholls defines style as a "manner of seeing things" which brings "a scientific detachment over mimesis" (19).

discontinuous impressions into a single moment of observation that normally appears in the form of an enjambed or paratactic assemblage. O'Hara's assemblages are paused moments of multi-layered urban observations that convey the psychogeographical ambience of his campy poetry.

Psychogeographists have formulated a notion of time that resembles O'Hara's. For example, antiquarianism is a concept they use to perceive the present as flux existing in an "eternal stasis" (Coverley 57). Psychogeographists suggest that the environment is a "self-regulated" system and man is but a passive observer of this system (Coverley 57). However, they argue that antiquarianism could help create a subjective sense of time and space where "local history"[28] (Coverley 9) is highlighted over other geographical investigation. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord argues that society, which is "a product of its history", perceives time as a "returning" phenomenon and not a "passing" one (par.126). For Debord, this "cyclical time", regarded as one that is formed by personal and spatial conditions, adheres to nomadic culture. A return to the same space is a return to that same time that has occupied such space. History then is no longer an "alienating tool" (par.127-128) with a fixed order of narration or of events. O'Hara's postwar moments, meticulously constructed in his assemblages, are appropriated and personalized forms of local space and time that "resist" an alienating capitalist history. Debord suggests yet another notion of time which he refers to as "irreversible time" or "commodified time". In this form of time, history is represented as a "countdown of its end" (par.137) in a world of expanding commerce and bustling urban life. For Debord, history is a "chronology of events" and a "movement with a base in political economy (a hidden consciousness)" (par.141) of a society. To consider time as movement, he argues, is to consider it a "movement of things" and not a movement of individuals or groups. Debord adds that ours is a time where human

[28] New York and its urban ambience are captured abundantly in O'Hara's postwar oeuvre. This can portray the importance of local time and space over any other artistic and political exploration.

development is devalued in the face of commodity consumption and where man is left with no room for decision making (par.147, 150). To read O'Hara through "commodified time" is to study the captured interactions[29] of commodities and subjectivities as movements through a history that is ending. The major difference between the two notions of time is that whereas "cyclical time" is considered as "lived time of unchanging illusions", "commodified time" is an "illusory lived time of a constantly changing reality" (par.155). In configuring the nature of the "moment" with respect to these notions of time, I suggest that O'Hara compromises between the former, which is entirely customized to his own appropriations of space and spatial relations, and the latter, which highlights the effects of urgency and transience on the construction of urban and campy poetry.

By exploring O'Hara's urban postwar poetry in relation to Situationist notions of time, the reader can observe the workings of urban life that separate the subject "from his activity…and from his time" (Debord par.163). This becomes significant for psychogeographical relations that fluctuate between a false consciousness of time and the transient experience of urban life in a capitalist society. Insofar as it gives prominence to acts of transformation that the ambivalent subject experiences, commodified time in O'Hara's work privileges those ephemeral moments that may contain resonant social and cultural critique.

Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter, "Situationist Appropriation: *Détournement* with O'Hara", is concerned with how Situationist theory sheds light on the poetics of O'Hara's urban poems. Beginning with the theory of the Construction of Situations, the chapter introduces key terminology and concepts

[29] While interactions refer in this instant to psychogeographical examination of linguistic and social ambience in poetry construction, it is also important to analogize such interactions to the spatial process of action painting and to the nature of spatial composition that O'Hara had been familiar with because of his coteries with Abstract Expressionists.

from Situationist philosophy. Whether in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* or in a number of central essays written by other members of the Situationist International, the objective is to find ways to build an innovative art form from existing materials by using entirely different forms of representation or signification. The chapter traces essential principles that allow for the exploration of O'Hara's poetry in a Situationist light. Concepts like mobility, interaction, play, and unitary urbanism are examined in relation to spatial investigation and the process of composition in O'Hara's postwar assemblages, especially their verbal (re)appropriations and metonymical representations.

The chapter considers poetic discourse as an effect of ambience in O'Hara's elusive subjects. With emphasis on linguistic construction as a passageway into cultural knowledge, the poems are considered social commentaries and emotional embodiments of O'Hara's urban ambience. In exploring a number of studies that focus on appropriated dialogue and self-talk; on banalization as a process of surface representation; on deconstruction of subjectivity; on fragmented and synecdochal discontinuities; and on Dada and surrealist appropriation (also an important component of chapter two), the poems, as read through psychogeography and *détournement*, are treated as texts that have tremendous potential for social and cultural transformation.

Chapter two, entitled "Debord's *Dérive*: Revisiting O'Hara", analyzes selected poems in reference to Situationist politics and its studies of urban behavior. Considered the counterpart of *détournement*, *dérive* is a technique of drifting through urban space so as to become aware or receptive of the effects of the surrounding ambience on behavior and emotion. The path taken by the *dériveur* is contrasted with the *flâneur*'s passage through the city grid since it is not as random and spontaneous as some critics have asserted. By engaging with Benjamin's critique of

the *flâneur* and notions of *cognitive mapping*, the chapter explores the relationship of the act of walking to *flâneurie*, the *dérive*, and to textual composition and production. While psychogeography allows for the study of spatial relationships as they occur during the urbanite's walk, it is also insightful when it comes to mapping and linking distinct urban observations and cultural experiences.

The purpose of this chapter is to present O'Hara's urban pieces or "walk-poems" as works that map variations and multi-layering of experiences, thoughts, commentaries, observations, impressions in a single poem as a way to resist capitalist social alienation. Like the *détournement*, the technique of the *dérive* aids in the discovery of resilience by allowing the reader to study O'Hara's assemblages of fragments and discontinuities as a vortex[30] of moving objects in appropriated urban and textual space. Furthermore, the poems convey a sense of change and transformation of subjectivity that is also crucial to the Situationist portrayal of experience and its present-day critique of society and art.

While the first two chapters revolve around Situationist appropriation and the application of psychogeographical technique in O'Hara's urban poems, chapter three examines the Situationist politics of art in O'Hara's campy representations and subjectivity. "O'Hara's Camp & Situationism" correlates a number of Situationist issues of poetic discourse appropriation with the role and function of camp in the postwar context. Most O'Hara and New York School critics claim that camp is a recurrent style in O'Hara's poetic constructions. Whether it be a subtle resistance against boredom (Lehman 287), or a "manifestation of the impulse" (Lehman 354) to embody and project desire without any direct contempt or antagonism, critics have often regarded camp as an "inversion of accepted values of the white heterosexual and literary canon"

[30] In modernist terms, the vortex is considered the "proper form to restore chaotic modernity" for it represents a "fixed place for rushing ideas" (Nicholls 170).

(Smith 17). This chapter explores the literary "wiring" of the camp sensibility in an attempt to find correlations with Situationist and modernist notions of linguistic and modal experimentations in verbal art.

Chapter three is divided in such a way as to specifically map the Situationist's notion of play through an analysis of key components in O'Hara's campy poetry. By examining the proceedings of appropriated modes of trivialization, irony, and parody, the chapter highlights the workings of O'Hara's postwar campy subjectivity. With references to objectivism, affect, and the role of artifice in his work, the chapter presents camp not only as a style, but as a space where linguistic experimentation meets notions of queer sexuality and discourse. Because the Situationist "mission" is to study social behavior in order to critique unnoticed facets of culture, the chapter ends with a return to the modernist concept of the dandy archetype as a political and cultural persona for O'Hara's postwar gay subjectivity.

From psychogeographical techniques to Situationist philosophical readings, O'Hara's selected poems are examined in this dissertation as possible spaces for political observation of capitalist art and queer life in postwar New York. The three chapters are designed to offer a critical discussion of Situationist theories in relation to Frank O'Hara's process of composing urban and campy postwar assemblages.

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Chapter One

Situationist Appropriation: *Détournement*[31] with O'Hara

> *What is happening to me allowing for lies and exaggerations which I try to avoid goes into my poems. I don't think my experiences are clarified or made beautiful for myself or anyone else. They are just there in whatever form I can find them... It may be that poetry makes life's nebulous events tangible to me and restores their details; 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)[32].
>
> *The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot arise from a comparison but rather from the coming together of two realities more or less distanced from each other. The more distant and precise the relations between these two juxtaposed realities, the greater the strength of the image-the greater its emotional force and poetic actuality* (Caws xx)[33].

Construction of Situations in the Age of Capitalism

In the age of hegemonic capitalism and blind consumerism, production has become the "superior" organizer of life, replacing culture, which is defined as a set of "aesthetics, customs, sentiments that prefigure possibilities of organizing life"[34] (Debord par.3). Debord and the Situationists believe that the rise of capitalism has created a new form of conflict wherein the state, consumerism, and fascism have exploited class struggle. The Situationists are convinced that ruling class ideology creates historical falsifications and uncertainties with the goal of

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[31] Debord in "A User's Guide to Détournement" suggests that the best English translation of this term would be "diversion" (par.6), but this word is confusing because of its more common meaning in "idle entertainment". Thus, Debord chooses to anglicize the French word so as to secure its implication in French, the best being turning something aside from its normal course or purpose (par.5).

[32] From "Statement for The New American Poetry" by Frank O'Hara.

[33] From Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism*, adopting Pierre Reverdy's definition of image.

[34] From Guy Debord's earliest published Situationist article "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action", 1957.

manipulating society into retrograde thinking where individuals merely follow "personal inclinations" ("Report" par.23). Subsequently, this Situationist attitude is believed to have led some avant-garde movements to "settle into mental ruin" [and/or] "return to the distant past" ("Report" par.16). For the Situationists, this seems like a non-viable approach to cultural rejuvenation because it is difficult to build the new on ruins, or to simply return to the past by critiquing only the "fragments of outmoded systems" ("Report" par.23). This process, which Debord calls "ideological decomposition"[35] ("Report" par.24), is therefore quite limiting for the Situationists and does not offer any new values in counter position to the age of capitalist production. In his search for fresh values, Debord suggests that the best revolutionary action lies in the "transformation of all cultural superstructures" ("Report" par.40) so as to deter capitalism from spreading historical uncertainties and falsified forms of knowledge, and controlling the collective imagination, all of which delude the working class. Debord and the Situationists offer the theory of the Construction of Situations as a feasible approach for overcoming "new forms of struggle" (par.51) and enabling the proletariat to take matters into its own hands when it comes to understanding its history and their culture. Moreover, the Construction of Situations, specifically with regards to culture, entails "abolishing exploitation, defining new desires of present possibilities, and constructing new conditions of behavior in the presence of new ambiences" (par.38). As this theory is transposed to postwar poetry and particularly to the urban poems of Frank O'Hara, the role of the reader is one that investigates the ambiences that underline the "confusionist culture of disinformation" (Debord, *Comments* par. XVI) by paying

[35] Ideological decomposition for Debord is the inability for modern culture to build the new on ruins and outmoded systems. He suggests that modern culture can only create "pseudosubjects" (par. 24) of "confusionist" (par. 24) ideology. Likewise, the history of modern culture is a "history of theoretical and practical defeat of the movement of renewal" (par.29).

close attention to everyday situations that are created to reflect possible historical and cultural "transformation" (par.40) in their linguistic and poetic arrangements.

"A Proud Poem"[36] is an O'Hara piece that, in poetic form, calls for the construction of individual desires and possibilities no matter how "conceited" they might appear to be. The speaker affirms in stanza two that "no god turns [him]" or has any effect on shaping his "identity". In the third and fourth stanzas, the speaker's "insufferable/ genius" is depicted as a result of his own choice of ambiences and appropriated inspiration:

> I am hopelessly happily conceited
> in all inventions and
> divertissements. I hardly even notice
> hurricanes any more
>
> for the glamour of suspension bridges
> alleys and pianolas-
> I claim them all for my insufferable
> genius my demon my dish (CP 52)

In the third stanza, the opening line portrays a speaker who is "happily conceited" to "all inventions and divertissements" that come his/her way. The speaker expresses an affirmation to being open to "all" diversions and so "hurricanes" can hardly be noticed. The speaker constructs a situation out of his/her encounters with urban architecture and the "glamour" of places like "suspension bridges" and "alleys". As these attributes from city space are observed, other "inventions" intersect with the speaker's experiences like "pianolas". This creates an

[36] Dated February 1951 (CP 522).

anachronistic play between the indifference of the speaker to weather conditions on the one hand, and to his/her psychogeographical observations of urban constructs and musical instruments on the other.

The speaker's constructed situation then is one that embodies different and random representations. It is a space where hurricanes, back alleys and self-playing instruments co-exist. By the end of the fourth stanza, the speaker "claims" that all these documented elements assist in forming his "insufferable genius", his "demon", and his "dish". The speaker presents an assemblage of distinct observations as ingredients of the process of a poet composing a dish. These ingredients can potentially imply a make or break type of poem as the speaker suggests that it could be the result of a "genius" at work or a "demon". In the last stanza, the poem ends with a return to being "happily conceited" with the speaker saying in the final line that he/she will "go down/grinning into clever flames" once he/she is "cornered". This can imply that the poet has the power to choose what to include in his appropriations and in his constructed poetic situations and that not even divine providence ("no god" in line 6) can change his mind or affect his compositional decisions. O'Hara comes up with a title that certainly reflects the speaker's admiration of his ability to depict poetic situations out of his own personal appropriations. In this challenge to the poetic composition of constructing situations, city space elements create "new realms of being" (Gray 16), or in the words of Helen Vendler, any "aesthetic that permits the co-existence [of variations] has a good chance of being a new source of truth"[37] (Vendler 236).

Debord and the Situationists believed that the process of constructing situations would include significant markers to critique present conditions of capitalist society through the

[37] From Vendler's essay "The Virtues of the Alterable" (1972).

"*interaction* between the material environment of life and the behaviors which it gives rise to and which radically transforms it" (Debord, "Report" par.46, emphasis added). The Situationists believe that interaction does not exist in capitalism, where it has no place in its system of production, for the information relayed is only "the pursuit of fragmentary works combined with simple-minded proclamations of an alleged new stage" (Debord, "One More Try" par.1). From the same essay, whose full title is "One More Try if You Want to Be Situationists", Debord correlates this lack of interaction in capitalism to a power that militates against the "necessary development of productive forces, in the sphere of culture" (par.6). Therefore, "interaction" becomes a significant condition of critiquing modern culture, primarily because it opposes the hegemonic complacency of capitalism while offering a way to examine the ambient behaviors of urbanites in times of constant social and cultural change. In the oeuvre of Frank O'Hara, textual and syntactical interaction aid in exploring social relations and behavior as transformative components of both culture and poetics, while also bringing forth a psychogeographical reading of O'Hara's urban assemblages.

For the Situationists, to be self-aware in capitalist space would be to challenge the "passive" (Debord, "One More Try" par.7) and hidden cultural conditions projected by the capitalist system. In *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, Vincent Kaufmann locates the source behind their idea of Construction of Situations to early notions of interaction presented in Antonin Artaud's "Living Theatre". It is essentially a type of theatre which requires the active participation of its spectators. When their participation fails to keep the play from moving forward, the Situationists would perceive this occurrence as a product of "experimental art" which for them is the root of all art. However, without participation, the play is reduced to pure chance (Kaufmann 157).

Here, it is important to note that by examining ambience[38], Debord's notion of psychogeography is introduced into the analysis. The significance of the theory of Construction of Situations lies in its praxis of interacting or engaging with "momentary ambiences" ("Report" par.46) in the surrounding environment. The participant's interaction is a central condition to Situationist analysis of culture and history. The participant takes the role of catalyst in following social and aesthetic techniques like *détournement* and *dérive*[39], where s/he attempts to explore the spatial relations in a given urban environment. These techniques are initially considered practices for the "study of organization of place and event" which extend to "all known forms of human relations" in order to determine the "quality of a moment" by its construction of "situations, collective ambiences, and ensembles of impression"[40]. This preliminary description is not only crucial to the conditioning of participation in constructing situations, but also in attempting to utilize the practices of psychogeographical analysis to examine social relations and to explore literary/ textual relations that might come to reflect cultural critique.

For Debord and the Situationists, it is crucial to get physically involved within the urban network of ambiences in order to make possible the critique of capitalism, or of the *spectacle* in particular, with its false representations of social and sociological relations. Only then can these

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[38] For the Situationists, ambience is the atmosphere that a place leaves on the individual's emotions. Ambience is necessary for psychogeography because the purpose of psychogeography is the study of the effects of ambience on the emotions of an urban dweller ("Report" par.46). What Debord and the Situationists do not discuss in detail is the fact that ambience is not only affect and the effect of geography on the feelings of a person, but also the collective space which includes pockets of in-betweenness (a space where affect and subjective desire come together). However, in analyzing O'Hara's poems, the term ambience suggests the effects of the surrounding space (urban/ rural, heteronormative/ queer, high culture/ low culture, etc.) and the effects of the constructed situation that the language performs in the poetic space, structure, and form.

[39] The Situationists consider that both psychogeographical devices, *détournement* and the *dérive*, can play a significant role in opening a "diachronic narrative" (McDonough 64) in the experience of a constructed situation. D*étournement* achieves this by way of "defamiliarizing" (Lawrence 98) past images and allowing for new meaning, while *dérive* derives its significance from the "spatializing action" (McDonough 64) of practical drifting through an urban context. Consequently, both practices aim to achieve possibilities of change and critique by their intervention within the capitalist homogenizing narrative of fragmented and falsified ideologies.

[40]"Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action" (par.53).

transitory moments create passageways into a proper study of social history and of a unified form of urbanism. This physical intervention with the urban environment is said to involve a type of play or playful movement where the player or participant engages directly in the given space. This mode of play is not about competition or even taking a break from daily life; instead, it is but a "rational escape from confined time and space"[41] as allotted by the bourgeoisie through urbanism. Similarly, Debord's psychogeography is also a means of provoking, by technique and experimentation, the conditions "favorable to direct living"[42]. Even though the aforementioned Debordian terms and Situationist theories overlap, their purpose is the same: to form a unified field of experimental urban devices that work their way through a constructed situation into a broader socio-political and theoretical critique of modern society. Similarly, the role of such techniques can be extended to a wider sphere of study to include the textual and poetic examination of social and spatial relations that directly or indirectly portray cultural and political constructs in postwar poetry.

***Unitary Urbanism* & *Détournement* in O'Hara's Poetic Assemblages**

The process of constructing situations falls under what Debord and the Situationists call Unitary Urbanism. It is a unique form of urbanism in which "all arts and technique" are to be considered as means to "contribute to the composition of a unified milieu"[43]. Just as the function of Debord's *spectacle* is to unify "contradictions and divisions" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.54) in urban space, the purpose of *Unitary Urbanism* is to create an urbanism "freed from the multiplicity of separation" (Kaufmann 129). Its function is to "reorganize space" while taking

[41] The Situationists considered play a revolutionary process to subvert the imposed notions of the capitalist state over the person's individuality and desire ("Contribution to a Situationist Definition of Play" par.3).
[42] "Contribution to a Situationist Definition of Play" (par.4).
[43] The importance of this unified milieu is to reflect the interdisciplinarity of combining social and psychogeographical techniques that would aid aesthetic or poetic examination ("Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action" par.47).

theories from architecture and human desire into account (Kaufmann 130). Hence, the Construction of Situations under *Unitary Urbanism* becomes the first step in observing urban social and cultural forms of behavior while simultaneously developing new art devices to critique the existing urban capitalist society.

In as much as *Unitary Urbanism* seeks to create new techniques and experimental forms of study of the urban environment through the Construction of Situations, it also depends on appropriating[44] previous forms in "architecture, urbanism, *poetry* and cinema" ("Report" par.47, *my emphasis*). Debord believes that urbanism provides the space "for the deployment of the forces of capitalism" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.171), an "isolating operation" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.172) that separates the working class from its own space and environment. Therefore, his notion of *Unitary Urbanism* is to seek some sort of harmony in the totality of the various ambiences projected by the architectural elements found all over the city, and eventually, to find new or hidden forms of social relations in capitalist societies through the art forms discovered in the construction of momentary situations. With the help of *détournement* and the *dérive,* the construction of situations delivers a practical critique of urban space and social life. Both Debordian techniques are deployed to study momentary situations in poetry, and thus to reflect upon and critique O'Hara's campy ambience in the context of urban and poetic space.

The Construction of Situations is ultimately essential to the notion of psychogeography. With its initial definition as an "active observation of present day urban agglomerations,"[45]

[44] The Situationists oppose the simple return to the past; the conditions of the past no longer affect the present conditions. *Détournement* seems like the best critique since it appropriates past useful (relative & effective) narrative into existing conditions of the present society.
[45] "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action" (par.49)

psychogeography is also a notion for practicing interaction in urban space. It is pertinent here to associate Debord's theory of constructing situations with Delueze's description of constructed assemblages. In examining the material of language in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze suggests the necessity of collective assemblages for enunciation:

> There is no individual enunciation. There is not even a subject of enunciation. Yet relatively few linguists have analyzed the necessarily social character of enunciation. The problem is that it is not enough to establish that enunciation has this social character, since it could be extrinsic; therefore too much or too little is said about it. The social character of enunciation is intrinsically founded only if one succeeds in demonstrating how enunciation in itself implies *collective assemblages.* It then becomes clear that the statement is individuated, and enunciation subjectified, only to the extent that an impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so. (79-80)

An assemblage manifests itself in language in the form of "order-words" that are defined as "the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions . . . to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the statement" (79). Similar to Debord's critique of language of the *spectacle*, this description of language is directly related to a "socio-institutionalized environment in which statements assume force and meaning" (Porter 12). Deleuze suggests that these order-words or statements "seem to be defined as the set of all incorporeal transformations current in a given society and attributed to the bodies of that society" (Deleuze & Guattari 80). This implies that society's demotic language is based on "bodies" that assume a given meaning without challenging its content. Consequently, to critique such language is to critique the relations it creates with its environment or within the assemblages that form its associations with itself and the outside world.

In the above citation, Deleuze regards language as an impersonal power in the socio-political body, but also as a source of transformation. Debord believes that transformation occurs through contradiction and dialogue, which serve to produce a "unifying critique" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.211) of social practice. Hence, to explore social relations through language is to explore society's demotic language through constructed assemblages. Deleuze and Guattari refer to assemblages as the root of desire comprised of two aspects: "content and expression" (Deleuze & Guattari 88). Content refers to the "intermingling of bodies reacting to one another," while expression refers to the "acts and statements that are attributed" to the bodies that are undergoing the process of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 88). From a Situationist and psychogeographical point of view, O'Hara's poetic assemblages provide a framework for social and cultural urban commentary. They can also be read as "a means of knowledge" that include "a whole spectrum of diverse feelings that one encounters by chance in everyday life" (Chtcheglov par.26).

Deleuze and Guattari believe that "the first determination of language is not the trope or metaphor, but indirect discourse" (Deleuze & Guattari 76-77). They explain that "language is not content to go from a first party to a second party, from one who has seen to one who has not, but necessarily goes from a second party to a third party, neither of whom has seen" (Deleuze & Guattari 77). In these orders of "bureaucratic language", the noun is king (Khayati par.8). O'Hara explores this function of language (as a medium that goes from second party to third) by constructing his assemblages as subject(s) of obscure and undetermined references that seem merely like lists of impressions and actions grouped together.

In the prose poem "To the Film Industry in Crisis"[46] (CP 232-233), O'Hara opens with what the subject or addressee of his piece is not. The speaker states "Not you" (line 1) to emphasize that he does not wish to admire or praise the "experimental theatre" (line 3) nor the "Grand Opera" (line 5) but "you, Motion Picture Industry,/ it's you I love!" (lines 6-7) The speaker resumes in the second stanza his emphasis on loving the movie industry by remarking that "in times of crisis" (line 8), it is not the "nurse" (line 9), nor the "catholic church" (line 11), nor the "American Legion" (line 13) who deserve our praise and embrace. It is the "glorious Silver Screen" with its "tragic Technicolor", its "amorous Cinemascope", its "stretching Vistavision" and its "startling Stereophonic Sound" (lines 14-15). Thus, the poem "reels" the reader into the world of entertainment and cinema, where the speaker chooses to name 29 celebrities (actors and actresses) who are constructed to appear as mere impressions that follow each other sequentially. These impressions or fragments represent the actors in specific movie roles. When combined into one assemblage, they form a unified space of "iconoclasms" (line 16) that captures brief moments of actions as documented on the screen. This documentation as well is to be regarded as the speaker's "knowledge" of Hollywood actors as they come together into one poetic assemblage:

> Eric von Stroheim, the seducer of mountain-climbers' gasping spouses, the Tarzans, each and every one of you (I cannot bring myself to prefer Johnny Weissmuller to Lex Barker, I cannot!), Mae West in a furry sled, her bordello radiance and bland remarks, Rudolph Valentino of the moon, its crushing passions, and moonlike, too, the gentle Norma Shearer, Miriam Hopkins dropping her champagne glass off Joel McCrea's yacht (CP 232).

[46] Dated 1955.

The brief roles construct an "ensemble of impressions" (the basis of Debord's theory of constructing situations) that provide a form of escape from "a self-consciously orderly, normative poetic of meter and regular stanzaic structure" (Stoneley 130). Peter Stoneley in "Frank O'Hara and French in the Pejorative Sense" suggests that the poem's structure invokes Whitman with its ironic form and longer lines, yet O'Hara differs from Whitman by having "lighter musicality, . . . nervous breaks and continuities [and an] interplay of iambic and anapestic rhythms" (130). This difference in form creates various and unsettling identifications that seem quite distant from Whitman's "euphemizing grandiloquence" (Stoneley 130) in the presentation of his subjects. Generally, cinema is an art medium that glorifies and romanticizes actors and their actions. However, when transposed onto the page, O'Hara's impressions de-romanticize the roles of celebrities by flattening their actions. "Eric Von Stroheim", a silent movie actor and director, is presented as the "seducer of mountain climbers' gasping spouses". "Von Stroheim" is then followed by many "Tarzans" who perform no action on their own, but are represented by the names of actors ("Johnny Weissmuller" and "Lex Barker") who played the role in early twentieth century cinema. Next comes "Mae West in a furry sled" with attention to her "bordello" and "bland remarks". Such details communicate pictures from her life, whether on or off screen is not determined. Names of other well-known silent movie actors appear in fragments of minimal detail and are brought together to form a collective of impressions that blend through clips of films that have resonated in the mind of the speaker. Thus, what emerges from such a blend is an assemblage of Hollywood icons who have been displaced from their original space and are situated in close proximity by their arrangement in the poem. By the time the reader reaches stanza three, the speaker is found to resume his praise "to you", but by now he includes "all you others" (line 37) who "pass quickly and return in dreams saying one or two

lines" (line 38). Here, the speaker's admiration for the film industry leads him to give credit to the "greats" as well as the "extras". Finally, the speaker presents the film industry as a form of "edification" (line 43) and ends the poem by proposing that as long as "the great earth rolls on", movies should "roll on".

O'Hara liberates language from "order-forms" by constructing intra-textual relations that defy conventional signification and that deliver a reel of impressions just like a film preview. His assemblages become sites for constructing situations (past and present, on and off the page). Under such demonstrated conditions, the appropriated context or poetic subject is transformed from its original narrative to depict "diverse feelings" constructed in fragments in O'Hara's assemblages.

O'Hara tries "to make up in motion what [his poetry] lacks in meaning" (Altieri 113). With a syntax that lacks conjunctions, O'Hara's poem becomes the sum of a series of fragmented actions and impressions that collide to recreate the experience of viewing a film. This constructed situation in poetic form refers to an experience outside itself and therefore "detournée" from its original function. O'Hara's assemblages transform "physical presence into metonymic capturing" (Gray 18). Under Debord's notion of *Unitary Urbanism*, the *spectacle* does not unify complete and pure historical truths. Its role and function is to constantly hinder the truth (with its "accumulation of representations" (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* par.1)) in order to separate[47] people from what they really need or desire by bringing together "unconnected phenomena" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.10) that are purely based on the "social order of appearances" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.10). "What appears is good and what is good appears" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.13) is a statement by Debord that sums

[47] The spectacle is a "society that functions on separation; a split between reality and image is its goal" (Debord par.7).

up the difficulty of accessing reality, shaped and unified as it is by "fragmented views" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.2) grouped together under false pretenses of unification. O'Hara unifies surface impressions of various subjectivities, in this case silent film actors and Hollywood icons, through syntax enjambment. Enjambment is said to achieve "a dramatic structure that engages readers to reflect on the desires informing their own sense of time and historical difference" (Lowney 256). In the terms of Debord's *spectacle*, enjambment helps to question the relationships constructed (by grouping separate cultural appearances together) in order to "recognize their own making" and thus proving capitalism's "inaccessibility" to pure historical truths (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* par.179).

Poetry as a Situationist Construct

In order to relate the theory of Construction of Situations to the composition of urban poetry, it is imperative to identify a number of associations that would make the act of composing poetry a method of construct. Generally speaking, the definition of the word *construct* in the Merriam-Webster dictionary brings together two important elements: the first is "to make or form by combining or arranging parts or elements" and the second is "a product of ideology, history, or social circumstances"[48]. For poetry to be identified with making means it is closely aligned with the classical demarcation of poiesis as an act or process of creation. This matter of poetic creation is best characterized by Heidegger as "a kind of building" "which lets us dwell" (Heidegger 215) and reflect upon the process of verbal composition. According to Situationism, the process of art composition that follows this latter definition is believed to enable a methodical examination of the environment (i.e. discourse or poetic representation) in order to "transform conditions in their entirety" (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* par.179).

[48] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/construct.

Subsequently, this notion makes its way to the creation of a "product" that embodies a social circumstance, or what Situationists would call an "event" that entails history, ideology and presumably the experiences of the time.

The construct of a poem does not solely consist of an assemblage of parts and elements deliberately put together to create an aesthetic piece. It is a bit more than this for the Situationists. The making of a distinct piece of art requires the artist to engage in what Debord calls the "*dialectical thought of history*" [49] which is "the thought which is no longer content to seek the meaning of what exists, but which strives to comprehend the dissolution of what exists, and in the process breaks down every separation" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.75). Debord suggests that only then can the artist experience the "inaccessible" reality imposed by the *spectacle* and "transform conditions in their entirety" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.179) through the act of making. The making leads to a realization of urban space, or what Debord calls a "regeneration of independent space" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.178) that is ultimately significant in the decomposition of the *spectacle's* assault on space and its entire history of falsification. The making is essential for Debord because it brings forward a 'dialectical' approach to "critique itself by its relations," causing a "reversal" of already established conditions and a "*détournement* of past critical efforts" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.206). Similarly, O'Hara's assemblages of connected phenomena, as in the case of "To the Film Industry in Crisis" and its iconographic uses of names of Hollywood stars, or of unconnected phenomena (as other examples in this chapter will show) re-arrange syntax and

[49] While Hegel, in his work on logic, stresses that there exists "different definitions of logical concepts that are opposed to one another" and that the "opposing sides" are "different definitions of consciousness and of the object that consciousness is aware of or claims to know" (From "Hegel's Dialectics"), Debord's dialectics revolve around a consciousness that seeks to find out the dissipation of what is known (regardless of "opposing sides") so as to build what has been broken without contradiction being the starting point for the need to progress or evolve (*The Society of the Spectacle* pars.75-76).

lineation for the purpose of breaking down separation and creating possibilities for reconstructing space. In "making" his assemblages, O'Hara engages in a self-critique that reevaluates intra-relations between poetic language and space, and subsequently, generates possibilities for the "reversal"[50] of the established conditions of a society, like the *spectacle*.

In Debord's *Spectacle*, the spatial dimension is ever changing with its notion of "Commodified Time" or "Spectacular Time". "Spectacular Time" is not real time for Debord. It is an "illusory lived time of a constantly changing reality" (Debord par.155). Debord suggests that real time is "replaced by the publicity of time" (par.154) just as a commodity is replaceable. He argues that the individual experience of "Spectacular Time" keeps one "disconnected" or "alienated" from everyday life because of this "false consciousness of time" (Debord par.157-158). As such, to read situations in O'Hara's urban poetry in relation to "Spectacular Time" is to perceive the poet's representations as detached fragments occurring in obscure temporality. This form, with its discontinuous syntax, suggests a representation[51] of a "false consciousness" of both space and time, thus implying a decoupling between the poetic subject and the poetic space.

In an essay entitled "All the King's Men", the Situationists assert that "only a language that has been deprived of all immediate reference to the totality can serve as the basis for information" (Knabb par.5). In turn, poetic language "must be understood as direct communication within reality and as real alteration of this reality. It is liberated language, language recovering its richness, language breaking its rigid significations" (Knabb par.5). For

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[50] In O'Hara's oeuvre, this term is discussed by Hazel Smith in *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara* as a creative linguistic possibility of poetic experimentation to "destabilize the meaning and create overlaying of different meanings" (Smith 11). Similarly, from the Situationist's psychogeographical point of view, reversal aids in understanding the deconstructive workings of poetic language that maps O'Hara's "syntactic ambiguity", "grammatical incongruity", and "discontinuities" that shape his social and urban resilience to postwar capitalism and/or language (Smith 11).

[51] This approach to poetry becomes similar to Jameson's "cognitive mapping" where representation is dependent on spatial relations between the subject and its present social space.

the Situationists, poetry should function as an expression of language that is devoid of immediate reference and signification if it wishes to offer information outside that of the confusing *spectacle*'s. Thus, the cinema-related impressions of "To the Film Industry in Crisis" construct unusual representations that were converted from their original narrative and transposed into a poetic space with fresh and new significations.

Just as language is the means for the *spectacle* to permanently falsify social life (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.68), a new semantic field is required to express a new truth that leads to what the Situationists call revolutionary action. The notion of expression is an essential argument for the Situationists in more ways than one. The first is by associating language to the "house of power" (Khayati par.2). In brief, to oppose society is to oppose its language. This voices the necessity to "replace a false idea… [with] a true one" (Khayati par.5). It also posits the power of change (social and political) that lies in the words[52] of every language. The second argument is directly linked to the first by proposing a new practice of language that depends on its older models, yet is appropriated for the sake of opposing the way bureaucracy uses language[53] (Khayati par.7). For the Situationists, the restructuring of language is also a main ingredient for the construction of original situations in artistic form. Called an "arch-deconstructionist" by Hazel Smith (9), O'Hara's restructuring methods are said to perform Derrida's concept of the "play of differences [in which] nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent" (Derrida 26). Through this process, one can understand O'Hara's assemblages as collections of discontinuities that generate,

[52] The Situationists state that "under the control of power, language always designates something other than authentic experiences" and that words, under the latter conditions, are merely "falsified information" ("All the King's Men" par.2-3).

[53] Its main usage is to impose on the masses its own messages and "reflect its thought". In doing so, it reduces the role of people to passive "receivers" in a "network of informationist communication" (Khayati 7).

by their arrangement in a common space (in the city or on the page), situations that would "reverse" the undesired conditions that dominate culture and language[54].

For the Situationists, language achieves its own desire or power when it questions notions of predetermined historical truths and expresses urban relations outside the control of the *spectacle* (Khayati par.1). In exploring the current conditions of society, the Situationists believe that modern poetry is the "antithesis of poetry, it is the artistic project coopted by power" as it lives "off its own continual self-destruction" (Khayati par.6). However, in the preface of *Poiesis*, and based on the concept of poetry as an act of making and building, Nathan Brown points out that poetry or any act of artistic making "depends upon configurations of social and technical forces" which eventually level the practices on "a common, though uneven, ground of historical determination" (Brown 8). This "historical determination" is the reason why the Situationists argue that poetry is inseparable from revolutionary moments in history because it critiques the dominant language as it performs a *détournement* of it (Khayati par.3). The Situationists also suggest that only after language's deconstruction or rearrangement can poetry become a possibility for changing life (Khayati par.6). This means that poetry can help us "forge our own language, the language of real life, against the ideological language of power, the terrain of justification of all the categories of the old world" (Khayati par.11).

Equally important, poetry-as-making could "transform" or shake up the status quo (in language and history) by using its form to (re)appropriate and critique its ancient models and historical truths. For the Situationists, the purpose of *détournement* in poetry is to bring "unsettled debts of history" into play or into the created event. By appropriating the language of

[54] The poetry analysis proposed under psychogeography (discussed in this chapter and the next) is to read O'Hara's assemblages as a "reversal" not only of language and its politics, but also specifically to find connections in spatial and textual relations between poetic/urban subjectivity and social (queer) implications of the postwar poetry of the New York School.

poetry, this play would embody the "history of everydayness"[55] in order to highlight possible situations that could "reorient the world to its own end" and not to the ruling capitalist system (Khayati par.1). This means that *détournement* shapes the situation constructed in the act of poetry to eventually contribute to the dialectical relationship[56] between both language and history. This is a major argument for Debord and the Situationists when it comes to what revolutionary action or efficient change can accomplish. The power of poetry lies in its struggle against the deformations of the *spectacle*; it critiques society and alienating social life in an attempt to transform reality through its (re)construction of lived and imagined urban situations.

Questioning Authenticity in Poetic Representation & Modernist Appropriation

For the Situationists, *détournement* and *dérive* are two sides of the same coin. *Détournement* is considered to be the "art of appropriation"[57] and the *dérive* the "art of detour" (Kaufmann 104). Both devices help in constructing urban poetry. The Situationists believe that such poetry "takes the shape of the city" by being open to the "provisional and the lived" so as to produce "new forms of behavior" (Kaufmann 92). By reading O'Hara's urban poetry through psychogeographical devices, we see it become an art of the quotidian and the ephemeral as it engages with the "aesthetics of disappearance" and "clandestine" elements of daily life. This leads to a transitory escape from the "clutches of the *spectacle* and representation" (Kaufmann 93).

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[55] Michel De Certeau in "The Practice of Everyday Life" suggests that the walker is the daily practitioner of play in city space where he operates with his "totalizing eye" to realize the present situations taking place around him (92). Discussed in more detail in the following chapter with the notion of the *dérive*.

[56] Revolution requires workers to be dialecticians and not be controlled by already existing ideological consciousness of the bourgeois (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.123).

[57] Many critics and notable thinkers have discussed ideas related to this form of art under the guises of other notions and concepts; to name a few: Jacques Derrida and his concept of *différance*, Roland Barthes and *bricolage*, Gerard Genette and *hypertextuality*, Julia Kristeva and *intertextuality*. For the purpose of this dissertation, the art of appropriation is communicated within postwar poetics (in particular Frank O'Hara's) in order to challenge and critique social values manifested by capitalism.

Debord's response toward representation is to refuse to accept it as authentic (Kaufmann 91). In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin proposes that "the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (3). Focused on technical reproduction, Benjamin argues that the "authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (4). In this sense, representation in consumer culture is never authentic unless one can understand its essence throughout its history. In the following excerpt from "The Image of Leda"[58], O'Hara's speaker ironically questions the authenticity of representation by being quite entertained yet also passive to the power of the image:

Our
limbs quicken even
to disgrace under
this white eye as
if there were real
pleasure in loving
a shadow and caress-
ing a disguise! (CP 36)

What makes art authentic is questioned in these lines. O'Hara's title questions authenticity by using the mythological story of Leda and the art (or experience) of cinema watching. Written in prose style, the poem begins with the "miracle" (line 2) of cinema. What follows is a speaker represented by a collective subject ("we") who experiences the empty white space of the screen as "pure" (line 7). The speakers/ viewers have no control over the timing of the film and so

[58] Dated 1950.

"despite us" (line 8) the screen "blackens" (line 9). The speakers add that even the writer of the film has no control over the mechanics of the cinema, yet it appears that the sensation the speakers experience in their surrender is pleasure. By showing how enthusiastic the viewers become during the screening of a film, the poem questions the cinema's effect on its spectators. "We scream/ chatter prance and/wash our hair!" (lines 18-20) are the reactions to the mesmerizing effect of the "light that/holds us fast" (lines 24-25). The last (selected) stanza suggests that under the "white eye" the "limbs quicken" to the pleasure caused by nothing more than a "shadow" and a "caressing disguise". The poem comes to suggest that the artifice of an image causes a questionable excitement on the part of the spectators. In reference to Debord's *Spectacle*, this effect might be considered as evidence of its controlling power over man's desire (represented through the media or through the medium of film). In "The Image of Leda", O'Hara portrays such effects as a pleasurable and thrilling, though artificial, condition of passivity and entertainment.

The effect of ambience on the spectator is reflected in the inability of language to construct a permanent and authentic experience. With the help of psychogeography, however, poetry can function as an experimental form of art, an art of immersion into language (re)configurations for the purpose of reinventing time and space (Kaufmann 101). This notion of experimental poetry is shared by modernists who find that such poetics are "unstable" to an ever-changing reality. The modernists were also against the representational and called for language figuration (Blasing 1) and for "direct treatment of the thing" (Hartman 169). In *Free Verse: Essay on Prosody*, Charles Hartman explains that modernist poetry is a "semiological artifact" (140) that intends to imitate the speech act. For him, speech "ultimately [reflects] thought codified" (140). This function gestures more toward William Carlos Williams's "American

Idiom"[59] than T.S. Eliot's mimesis and return to tradition. Here, form blends the old and the new in order to "revive poetic language" and to "revise the relations between the poet and reader" (Hartman 143). This formulation is essential in examining three key aspects of O'Hara's poetic composition. The first is the conversational tone and speech pattern imitation of his poems (as in his "self-talk" initiative). The second is the experimentation with language discourse for the purpose of creating new textual relations within the text and beyond. Modernists also perceive the poem as a space to document experience itself. This is similar to Imagism's "direct treatment of the thing" where the process of using words is to capture a "linguistic event" (Hartman 171) that necessitates the reader's participation in the experience itself. This participation poses as the external relationship that is thought of in the construction of the poetic text. The third, which directly links to the second, is the uncertainty of language and its changeability in regards to modernists. In general, modernists argue that language can never truly and fully capture thoughts, emotions and experience since they are never certain or fixed. They suggest that language is fluid and constantly changes. As a result, language is a process and can never be viewed as a final product (Karl 407).

The Situationists support this notion of language perception because for them the present rhetoric in verbal art forms is contaminated by the *spectacle*'s "confusionist" (Debord "Report" par.24) ideology. One way to escape this is to use psychogeography as a "narrative system" (Kaufmann 102) which focuses on text arrangement in space, instead of mere arrangement of things and memories. For Debord, sentences, for example, function as "meta-linguistic registers"

[59] Critics have considered O'Hara's early work as influenced by Williams's social function of poetry and the need to create new postwar forms where "the poet must meet the linguistic demands of his or her immediate time and place" (Lowney 254). For the purpose of this dissertation, this sense of immediacy directly relates to the effects of ambience on the construction of poetics. Thus, O'Hara parodies and appropriates Williams's objectivist poetics in order to emphasize the uses of commodities and colloquialism in his postwar constructions (see analysis of "Today" on pg. 76).

that when combined together in experimentation create "effects rather than things" (Kaufmann 102). This invokes the reader's role (and desire) to map these effects by exploring assemblages or by following the text's arrangement in space. Therefore, the significance of poetry lies in its ability to present a *carte du tendre*[60] or a network for the reader-as-explorer to seek and discover the space-as-text.

Mobility: A Key Construct in Poetry

The "impulse of mobility" that lies at the heart of psychogeography leads to an "art without works [and an] art without objects" (Kaufmann 101). An art without works means that poetry created out of this dynamism is shaped in such a way as to conform to the artist's desire to perceive the text-as-space as open to possible pathways that the reader can discover and rediscover. Furthermore, this type of poetry is one that drifts away from itself by "never letting things take shape" (Kaufmann 106). This notion expresses a sense of immediacy through the need to portray a constant shuffling of (discontinuous) imagery as a way of exploring new forms in language expression. The transitory effect that is achieved in poetic form carries two significant items for the Situationists. Firstly, the impulse of mobility that helps in capturing the disparate and fragmented entities of capitalist urban life presents in poetry the desire to reproduce the "lived experience of the city" (Kaufmann 108). Secondly, by intending to capture the present lived moments in verse form, the Situationists believe that one can study these immediate observations in order to (re)discover the effects of urban ambience on the behavior of the city dweller or the effects of language and history on the reader-as-explorer.

This type of poetry is one that is not about "works" or "objects", but about relations between ambience and behavior. This interaction, which is a crucial step in constructing

[60] An example of this will follow in chapter two with Debord's construction of *Memoires*.

situations, becomes in poetry what Debord calls a "genuine form of communication" (Kaufmann 86). Even though it intends to express or convey the clandestine experiences that surround us in our daily life, this type of poetry is believed to liberate language from its own signification[61] by creating alternative semiotic situations that include forms of "actual communication" (Kaufmann 177) that embrace both the impersonal[62] and the collective. For the Situationists, art should present a "totality in communication" realized by everyone rather than a mere passive acceptance of the *spectacle*'s "negative totality" or its unity of contradictions (Kaufmann 160).

For poetry to achieve this totality of communication, the Situationists have turned to a possible form of communication that can oppose the *spectacle*. The "anti-technique" of *détournement* is to produce no new work of art. This is not considered a form of refusal in as much as it is proof that the existing material has already been discovered; it is only a matter of "appropriating existing content" (Kaufmann 161) to make art new again. In following this "anti-technique", poetry utilizes its material from the already-discovered overused-social repertoire that is found in capitalist discourse, while the poet rearranges and reconfigures a different mold for poetic communication out of this *same material* as the *spectacle*'s lies.

O'Hara's material for poetic communication is regarded as colloquial and conversational. In his essay "Personism: A Manifesto", O'Hara declares that poetry is as direct as a telephone call. It connects two people together "instead of two pages" (CP 499). This form of communication is like a written conversation that is documented in all its informality between

[61] This comes from the Situationists' early influences in Dadaism and Surrealism where both art forms intend to distrust literary production and in any desire to change daily life (Khayati par.6).
[62] To be discussed later in chapter in relevance to the role of indirect discourse of poetic language.

two people. In "Metaphysical poem"[63], O'Hara constructs a situation out of quotidian conversation that enables him to level poetry almost exactly into a talking situation:

> When do you want to go
>
> I'm not sure I want to go there
>
> where do you want to go
>
> any place
>
> I think I'd fall apart any place else
>
> well I'll go if you really want to
>
> I don't particularly care (CP 434)

O'Hara's influential pointers of "unrhymed quatrains", "short lines" and "broken junctures" (Perloff 45) embody a documented conversation that would attempt to enable language to construct a situation that mimics a talking experience and challenges the function of poetry to portray a kind of "transparency" among its readers and the urban horde (Kaufmann 163). The ironic title suggests a transcendental subject matter, however as one reads through, the conversation does not lead to any life-altering decisions. It is merely a portrait of small talk occurring between two friends or lovers concerning where to go and what to do. The poem ends with "okay I'll call you/ yes call me" only suggests a casual and transient moment where the decision to plan something is postponed, and consequently, the dialogue leads nowhere. Through *détournement*, "Metaphysical poem" can be read as a copy of urban life and of conversational moments that occur on a daily basis, but its dialogue form suggests the possibility of savoring quotidian subject matter (and social interaction in specific) in poetic form.

[63] Dated 1962, this is one of the few of O'Hara's poems of the sixties that is selected for this dissertation. The majority of the poems analyzed were written and published in the (postwar) fifties.

By the "re-use of pre-existing elements in a new ensemble" (par.1), O'Hara's poem fulfills the definition of *détournement* in the Situationist essay "Détournement as Negation and Prelude". When this happens, there is a loss of the original element as it is restructured in a new manner. In poetry, this new ensemble is achieved by constructing situations (images) from existing rhetorical elements found in different forms of communication and arranging them in a totally novel way. The ensemble also challenges the spectacle's language of representation to critique itself by making "words take on a new sense" (Sadler 19) through their construction into unusual assemblages.

Situationist Appropriation and O'Hara's Postwar Experimentation

What makes the concept of *détournement* feasible for exploring discourse in postwar poetics is the fact that such technique illuminates the poetry itself by following postwar notions in verbal experimentation. The first notion is that verbal experimentation is an efficient and crucial way of examining figuration within the context of urban and cultural representation. This figuration becomes a possible way to discover what an object originally represented or stood for throughout its history. This leads to figuration being perceived as an "anti-hierarchal compositional method" (Blasing 15) that takes a shot at "reconfiguring"[64] the linguistic/ knowledge system. The second notion is one that perceives and attempts to utilize the rhetoric as a construct of the present material (medium &/or representations) with a view of history as one in a state of constant flux and urgency. Finally, and because such experimentation is dialectical in nature, it is considered open to exploring relationships within its reworked figuration[65] and

[64] Similarly, Derrida's "rewriting" in his essay *White Mythology* is essential not only to "avoid ending up with an empiricist reduction of knowledge and a fantastic ideology of truth", but to bring out an "articulation" that would highlight the "gaps" in epistemology; between "what it calls metaphorical and scientific effects" (Derrida 64-65).
[65] This can also reflect relations with modernist attitudes toward a history that does not cohere with the individual's reality nor with the ability to discover any or new meaning. The results are fragmented views of subjectivity while promoting the *how* over the *what* we see. Technically, the purpose of this dissertation is to read O'Hara's oeuvre as

semiotics (Blasing 10-12). All the above-mentioned conditions of postwar experimentation intersect with psychogeographical actions and techniques that offer new readings of postwar urban poetry, including the oeuvre of Frank O'Hara.

There is no evidence to prove that O'Hara was aware of the Situationist movement (Lawrence 94), let alone their psychogeographical technique of experimentation, that could have been implemented in the composition and praxis of his vanguard urban aesthetics. Nevertheless, O'Hara's "you just go on your nerve"[66]- type of city poems seem to function in a manner that resembles these notions of experimentation, while particularly reflecting a tension between spatial relations and social behavior. As discussed earlier in this chapter, O'Hara casually states in "Personism: A Manifesto" that, just like a telephone call, a poem occupies the space for communication between two individuals. This implies that poetry becomes a place for social relations to be (re)constructed. Therefore, a poem is "gratified by the situation" it creates between two individuals or between the constructed experiences that have been "detourned from the familiar" (Lawrence 98-99).

In the opening excerpt of this chapter, O'Hara clearly expresses his intention to play with "circumstantial" and "nebulous" details of his poetic composition. These are said to give his poetry an "intangible quality" (CP 500). O'Hara's experimental "Metaphysical Poem" clearly points to itself as a space for not only safekeeping social dialogue and casual conversation, but also for playing with the circumstantial nature of poetic references, as if they were transposed directly from a casual telephone call. Poetry to O'Hara "eradicates the gap between categories of art and practice of quotidian living" (Watkin 151) by "burst[ing] into a shower of bright

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a medley of experimentation that brings together modernist and postmodernist notions of postwar poetic and cultural appropriation.

[66] From O'Hara's "Personism: A Manifesto" (CP 498).

particulars and then extinguish[ing] themselves" just like "Roman candles" (Vendler 239). Like Debord, O'Hara perceives poetry as non-hierarchal and immediate. Like a conversation, it becomes a "transformative means of creating livable situations rather than simply aesthetic practice" (Lawrence 94). O'Hara achieves this by meddling with spatial relations in his constructed assemblages in order to create the "appropriate sense of space between two people" (Shaw 76) on the page as it is experienced and practiced in urban society.

Lytle Shaw in *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* states that O'Hara transforms international facts or references into a "community established discourse" (75). Shaw calls this the "referential space" where O'Hara freely reappropriates external references into a personal and a particular medium of discourse, like gossip for example (77). In O'Hara's poem "Biotherm"[67], the mélange between worldwide allusions and personal reference constructs a "non-hierarchal" discourse of subject relations:

> I know you are interested in the incongruities of my behavior, John
> just as Bill you are interested in the blue paint JA Oscar Maxine Khnute
> perhaps you'd better be particularly interested POOF
> extended vibrations
> ziggurats ZIG I to IV stars of the Tigris-Euphrates basin
> leading ultimates such as Kickapoo joyjuice halvah Canton cheese (CP 437)

In this selection, the speaker begins by addressing an indeterminate "you" about the "incongruities" of his "behavior" before naming other subjects or addressees in the assemblage. The dialogue form moves toward plain "John" and "Bill" (most probably referring to his friends and poets John Ashbery and Bill Berkson) who are supposed to be interested in "blue paint".

[67] Other excerpts from this poem are also examined in chapter two in relation to the dériveur. Dated 1962.

Through enjambment, personal references to O'Hara's casual friends are posited next to an imaginary character like "JA Oscar Maxine Khnute" without the need to clarify the nature of such a connection (whether syntactical or semantical) nor the apparent direction in which this dialogue might be heading. With a gap followed by an onomatopoeia, the speaker once again addresses a "you" who might be any of his previously mentioned or named encounters. Followed by fragments like "extended vibrations" and "ziggurats" in the next line, the speaker now engages with movement and place rather than people. This creates the sense of a non-hierarchal discourse that occurs in O'Hara's assemblages. With additional fragments aligned abruptly in the assemblage, other ambiguous and indeterminate references to place ("Tigris-Euphrates basin") or things ("Kickapoo"*)* or food *(*"joyjuice"*,* "halvah"*,* "Canton cheese") make up this appropriated construct. This constructed situation certainly brings together a "referential space" that connects the personal and biographical with exotic allusions to places and things that would eventually become as casual as a conversation between two people, even though their relations toward each other remain bizarre and sometimes banal. Consequently, the form the poem takes destabilizes referentiality through its fractured lines, gaps, and unclear links between subject and object.

This construct of a situation outside itself, i.e. in daily life and in social relations (even if the result is transitory and fragmentary), clearly demonstrates Debord's conviction that psychogeographical technique is a tool for understanding social behavior by experimenting with spatial relations. This is what Debord originally set out to achieve in his dialectical theory of history. Moreover, this dialectical theory not only assists in configuring possible social relations through an art medium, but also highlights the static effects of behavior in a given constructed situation. O'Hara's syntactical assemblages offer just that through their colorful mix of synechdochal and fragmentary configurations. In the latter assemblage of lines selected from

"Biotherm", the fragmented structure made up of incomplete parts and pieces, whether referring to places or to things and food, creates a space where unfamiliar relations interact together. This is precisely what Debord's dialectical theory calls for in an aesthetic assemblage or a constructed situation.

These assemblages also seem to point to new relations and associations between poetry and temporality. For Debord, alienation, for instance, is produced by the "estranged present" which is imposed by the *spectacle*. This in turn causes "spatial alienation" where the subject becomes separated from his "activity" and from his "time" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.161). To refer once again to "Biotherm", forms of communication like gossip and the news create an unusual relationship between friends and exotic places and things. Composed in fragments and synechdoches, the poem becomes a unifying space for unrelated and contradictory subjectivities. This reminds us of the *spectacle* and its power to unite disparate and contradictory entities together. The deconstructed and reconstructed forms of O'Hara's assemblages can be considered as imitations of an "inaccessible reality" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.12) (whether through unfinished activity or broken temporality), but on the positive side, these forms provide potential experiments for the reader to interact with what "appears" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.13) to be an inaccessible reality or structure. This attitude of composition[68] and experimentation follows rather congruously the practices of psychogeographical techniques as we can examine in O'Hara's "détourned" assemblages.[69]

[68] This perception of art as an engagement with space is also prevalent in action poetry and specifically in connection with Rosenberg's definition of action painting as an "arena in which to act rather than a space in which to reproduce" (Rosenberg 22).

[69] Readership qualities with regards to *détournement* and to O'Hara's assemblages are discussed further on in this chapter.

Fredric Jameson links this break in the "temporal unity of past and future" to a break in the "temporal unity of language or sentence" (Jameson 27). This lack of one-to-one referentiality in history creates a "syntactic opacity" where "langue" (linguistic system) becomes more important than "parole", or the act of expression (in Saussurian terms). In a system where "langue" dominates, what matters is the "arbitrary relation" achieved between signifier and signified over the "meaning as product of social interaction" (Nicholls 38). In Debordian theory, interaction is produced by a rejection of the dominant language which is considered a "rejection of false appearances of communication" and "an escape from power structures" (Kaufmann 176). In poetry, this Situationist approach permits a liberation from langue and an openness to figuring out referentiality in discourse. O'Hara similarly utilizes experimental poetry as an inviting space for readers to interact with discovered possibilities that would theoretically transform their experiences and behavior in real life situations.

How exactly does O'Hara perform *détournement* in his poetry? I suggest two main ways to explore a psychogeographical reading of *détournement* in O'Hara's verse. The first is to explore the ways in which O'Hara reappropriates images from the effects of urban and cultural ambiences surrounding his daily endeavors. With emphasis on notions of surface over metaphor, his rhetoric constantly challenges (poetic) discourse in form and content. The second, which lies in the very act of *détournement*, is to "re-invest [in the] cultural past [as an] attempt to re-use material to construct new ensembles" (Knabb, "Detounement as Negation" par.1). The re-establishment of representation into a new art form is a way to alter the arrangement of spatial and temporal relations in text form. This also means that the theory of Construction of Situations under *détournement* is deeply shaped by the spirit of immediacy as it reconstructs novel situations from pre-existing materials or from a previously established tradition. It is in this

process of transformation where *détournement* actually begins. Hence, the anti-technique of *détournement* is one that conditions the reappropriation of already used material by shifting its original purpose and relations so that it questions the nature of representation and the present conditions of social behavior.

Détournement is a necessity for Debord's "Dialectical Theory", since the theory is utterly dependent on a "critique of itself" through the relations it constructs and shapes. Its aim is to achieve a "reversal of the already established" and a "*détournement* of past critical efforts" in order to "reradicalize" truth and maintain "distance" from whatever influence that has shaped such truth (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* par.206). So, *détournement* aids our capacity to "forge our own 'real-life language' against an ideological language of power" (Khayati par.1) by experimenting with existing conditions as material for reappropriation and for new opportunities. Debord's dialectics illuminate O'Hara's poetry as it opens potential relations between surface and depth, the syntactical and the grammatical, the metonymic and the metaphoric, the surreal and the real, free discourse and rigid commands.

Constructing Surface Representations in O'Hara's Assemblages

In an interview entitled "Our Life in Poetry: Frank O'Hara", Mark Doty and David Lehman join their host Michael Braziller to discuss the influences of abstract expressionism on O'Hara's poetics. They iterate the notion of Push & Pull as an aesthetic approach to surface politics and to the process of democratization. Lehman claims that "everything that enters [O'Hara's] consciousness makes up the subject of his writing". This statement supports an important idea that is conveyed in the practice of Push & Pull. The Push & Pull is said to create a dispersion amongst the divided self (the self that is born out of différance[70]) or "splintered self"

[70] This is a Derrida concept where the subject is considered a construct made up of distinct and separate elements or differences and discontinuities. The subject is aware of its exteriority and in being a part of a whole.

(Smith 13-14) into distinct and separate directions. As a result, it creates multiple and different subject identifications. In other words, there exists no center of attention or singular subject in focus. As long as there are a number of things observed in the moment of creation, then there will be a constant tension in the merger of imagery (or fragments of imagery). According to the Situationists, this in turn conveys the process of constructing ambience in the subject's emotional experience during the time of the recorded observation. In regards to the process of democratization, though, Lehman explains that there is "equal value" of space given to a number of "happenings" that occur simultaneously or made to appear as if they are occurring at the same time within O'Hara's poetry. The present tense is also essential in the process of "egalitarianism and aesthetic of inclusion" (Ward 54) and highlights the function of language figuration in O'Hara's surface politics of subject "egalitarianism". Whereas these approaches could explain the mechanisms and appropriations of O'Hara's surface poems, critics tend to affiliate O'Hara's influences to both Abstract Expressionism and early modernist calligram constructions.[71]

Making "situational art" does not only subvert the already-established and controlling *spectacle*, but also assists in leaving traces of social and cultural constructs (like names and variations of commodities, products, places, people etc.) for the readers to pick up as they traverse the space-as-text. What is also important to note here is that Debord strongly believed that reading poetry like a map can prove useful in performing practical and day-to-day activities because it too relies on direct participation and engagement with the experienced and constructed ambience (Kaufmann 102-104). Psychogeography, then, becomes an art form that has "slipped into life [to be] reinvested completely in space" (Kaufmann 101).

[71] Please refer to Appendix A to compare examples of a calligram constructed by O'Hara (fig. 1) and others by Gregory Corso (a fellow beat poet) (fig. 2) and by Apollinaire (an early modernist influence on O'Hara's work) (fig.3).

Debord's *Memoires*[72] offers a visual or a geographical reading operation. Debord believes that his arrangement of text, like a map, gives the reader the opportunity to map their desire in reading from the book and branch out into life. This would make the book not solely a test in reading skills, but also a test of the reader's social skills as he "follows a labyrinth" that leads him outside of the book and consequently creates "his own map", i.e. "a plan for the art of living" (Kaufmann 104). Therefore, arrangement and disfigurement[73] is what matters in the anti-technique of *détournement*. Moreover, based on this new constructed ensemble, the reader can reinvent text as a game in the "art of occupation" (study through geographical means and analysis of spatial relations).

Surface is to Debord another word for representation or image that reflects the "social order of appearances" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.10). It is highly affected and shaped by the "banalization that dominates modern society" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.59) and commodity culture. It is "devoid of individuality" (Coverley 46) since it reflects a "complacent acceptance of this status quo" (par.59). In Debordian terms, this is exactly how the *spectacle* is said to function in the age of capitalism and with the manipulating effect it leaves on its urban dweller. While critics have associated O'Hara's work with a "culture of surface" (Shaw 93) that implies a suspicion of historical truth, I would suggest that O'Hara's poetry conveys a natural acceptance of such a culture and its banality without much apparent opposition. O'Hara actually seems to approve of the *spectacle*'s construction of commodity representation and its desire to imbue the city dweller's quotidian social needs with banality.

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[72] Please refer to Appendix A (fig.4) to view a sample from Debord's visual *Memoires*.

[73] As we will see in this dissertation, O'Hara's major rhetorical tropes for his poetic disfigurement is aporia (to portray syntactical disjunctions and enjambments) and catachresis (to make his diction campy and subversive to discourse).

The following excerpt from "Today"[74] captures how urban commodities as surface representations take over poetic space in the same manner as they take over everyday life in capitalist society:

> Oh! Kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas!
> You really are beautiful! Pearls,
> harmonicas, jujubes, aspirins! all
> the stuff they've always talked about
>
> still makes a poem a surprise!
> These things are with us every day
> even on beachheads and biers. They
> do have meaning. They're strong as rocks. (CP 15)

In the first stanza, the speaker addresses different things and products that he praises as "beautiful". These "stuff" or "things" he states are what "they've always talked about". Without apparent signs referring to who they might be, the praise for those named products is said to "make a poem a surprise!" The second stanza resumes the importance for such products that are "with us every day" even in matters of wars and death, which are represented by "beachheads" and "biers" in the following line. Oddly, the poem starts with an animal like "kangaroos", but then resumes with counting products that appear to combine a wide range of merchandise or commodities. From "sequins" and "sodas", to "pearls", "harmonicas", "jujubes", and "aspirins", the speaker constructs a situation out of these disparate products that he says make a "beautiful" and "surprising" poem. In the last line of the poem, these things are said to "have meaning" in

[74] Dated 1950.

our lives although their assemblage in one stanza or poem might seem absurd at first glance. They are presented as "strong as rocks" when they come together in one space.

Viewed through Debord's *spectacle*, this poem can be considered an example of how the power of banalization has insinuated itself into our daily discourse by having commodities or names of products infiltrate our present language. The last line of the poem suggests that what seemed like random objects coming together at the start of the poem might actually be objects that have accompanied others (soldiers, perhaps) in times of battle and have probably saved them. This is why they are described as "strong as rocks" and thus give some kind of meaning to the everyday.

O'Hara makes use of such "stuff" to transform triviality and banality into an experience worth addressing in a poem. In the "Post-Anti-Esthetic Poetics of Frank O'Hara", John Lowney argues that "'Today' exerts no demonstrative control over reader's interpretations of the sequence of objects" (255). He further adds that "in relinquishing the will to power, [the poem] affirms not 'things' in themselves but the dialogue inherent in interpreting the codes that inform this surprising network of names, and that inform our conceptions of poetry's relation to the world of 'today'" (255). Accordingly, through O'Hara's usage of enjambment and colloquial language, the arrangement of commodities and "stuff" in "Today" invites readers to question their role in shaping the poem's meaning.

Marjorie Perloff, in her essay "Frank O'Hara and the Aesthetics of Attention", defines surface in O'Hara's poetics as a "field where physical energy operates without symbol or metaphor" (796). This highlights two important factors. Firstly, surface exists as a space for participation, which depends highly on what O'Hara would call his "aesthetics of culmination rather than examination" (797). The aesthetics of culmination is a process of unification in

which the observer or reader is invited to participate in the "ongoing process of discovery" by "continually revising" his/her sense of what the banal surface might be saying or constructing (Perloff, *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters* 24). In some cases, as in the poem "Today", the speaker invites the reader to interact with the constructed situation as banal objects are "détourned" from their trivial uses. Even though at first glance it does not make sense for the commodities selected to be assembled together, they are suggestive of the social ambience, and furthermore, they play an essential part in the speaker's (and reader's) transformation, as portrayed in the final line.

The notion of banality, or the documentation of it, is considered as an effective approach to observation or even transformation. Take the works of Georges Perec, for example, where the documentation of banal commodities in city space is a call for the *infra-ordinaire*; the documentation of the "not noticed- not important: what happens when nothing happens other than the weather, people, cars, and clouds" (Perec 3). While documentation seems like simple listing or cataloguing, Perec, in *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, uses it as a tool for including "everything" in his field of vision in order to portray details (the nitty gritty and the trivial) and as a "marker of time and its temporariness" (Lowenthal 49-50). Perec argues that the habitual and commonplace should be just as important, if not more, than the spectacular headlines in magazines and newspapers. His essay "Approaches to what?" explores the idea that the trivial and futile are essential to our lives and argues that people have forgotten this. He also thinks that only through documenting the habitual can one answer significant existential questions (178). Similarly, O'Hara documents the habitual and the banal as a way to explore daily matters and present social issues. His assemblages therefore list surface items, (i.e. banal

details,) in ways that propose how situations that appeal to public social space could be achieved through a temporality that would reflect the daily thoughts and emotions of the urban dweller.

Surface, then, in O'Hara's assemblages, is constructed within the notion of his "aesthetics of culmination" so as to coincide with a reality of commodities that, while unquestioned in its banality, simultaneously suggests a constant "revising" of its arrangement, effects, and time relations. Hence, this type of poetic aesthetics examines commodities as surface items necessary for constructing poetic space, but reconfigured and rearranged in such a way as to open relations between text, reader, and meaning.

This method of composition overlaps with the function of *détournement*; it utilizes surface representations from society (or living space) in order to involve readers in reappropriating them according to their desires and to the desired situations constructed by the poet. This brings us to the second point in Perloff's essay, in which she defines surface as lacking metaphors or symbols. In O'Hara's oeuvre, surface words do not rely on having a specific reference because their utility is not semantic in nature but syntactic. This means that the importance of surface lies in its arrangement and configuration within lineation and syntax. In "In Memory of My Feelings"[75], the assemblages that O'Hara constructs make up a surface filled with a "multiplicity of selves" (Ward 70) or what Hazel Smith calls in *Hyperspaces in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara: Difference, Homosexuality, Topography* "splintered subjectivity" (Smith 68). The discontinuous syntax is (re)arranged in such a way as to deconstruct references and allusions:

> An elephant takes up his trumpet,
>
> money flutters from the windows of cries, silk stretching its mirror

[75] Dated 1956.

across shoulder blades. A gun is “fired.”

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. (CP 253)

Semantically speaking, every sentence appears to be a fragment by itself. However, when joined to another, it forms a framework for a verbal collage that explores the speaker’s mobility or interactions as “experience not as explanation” (Rona 136). *Détournement* lies in the unrelated subjectivities that are synthesized together to form desires that create an unfamiliar situation for the reader. This unfamiliar situation depends on the readers’ involvement in trying to connect the dots to make sense of the synthesized imagery. In the first couple of lines of part I, there appears to be one speaker who admits to having a “number of naked selves” (line 4) that are said to be “borrowed to protect” (line 5) him from people who have “murder in their heart!” (line 7) Then the speaker moves on to describe his “withdrawn” (line 11) and “blue” (line 16) selves. On the surface, the speaker chooses the subjects “elephant”, “money”, “windows”, “silk”, and “gun” in fragments that do not necessarily perform together, although their assemblage in the form of enjambment creates a situation as an effect of ambience that perhaps leaves an immediate yet ambivalent impact on subjectivity altogether. The “elephant” playing music on his “trumpet”, “money” flying out of “windows of cries”, and “silk” stretching its “mirror across shoulder blades” are not constructed to be examined semantically, for they are not made to imply

symbols. What is important is the reconstruction of these images in a synthesis that performs a puzzling situation of circus elephants with “money flutter[ing]”, “silk” stretching, and “shoulder blades” melting. Finally, the sound of a “gun” abruptly ends the assemblage.

The defamiliarization that comes from this grouping of distinct images becomes more ambiguous as additional elements are added. As the “gun is fired”, just like one used to kick off a race, distinct voices splatter across the poem. Each separate voice seems to take a position that is particular to a singular desire. As the reader passes through these desires or experiences, a surreal situation is formed from their grouping. When “one of me rushes” to the window and “one of me raises his whip” and another “flutters… amidst the pink flamingoes”, the attention of the subjects shifts or changes as immediately as the line is read. This immediacy might be due to the effect of enjambment of the lines, but it is also important to note that the variety of verbs selected seems to offer different ways of portraying mobility. The change in subject such as “they” in the following line can represent the many “mes” or perhaps the “elephant” or the “pink flamingoes” or even all these subjects at the same time. However, by the end of this line, the subject switches once again to one speaker whose “lips are scarred”, “brushed by tails” and “masked in dirt’s lust”. By proximity and enjambment, the reader assumes that the scarring of the speaker’s lips is caused by brushing a tail (be it elephant or flamingo) across his/her mouth because it produces dirty and lusty thoughts. This latter idea makes sense of the assemblage as the last line of the excerpt bears a strong commitment to the idea of scarred and brown lips. As the “open mouths” gasp for air, the speaker of numerous “naked selves” becomes analogous to “bettors” who take risks and gamble for “the lungs of earth”. This implies that these “mes” have a resisting purpose in using their mouths and lips, which is to speak up for the health of the world or humanity. In confronting these situations in the poetic assemblage, the reader uses *détournement* to engage in

surface appropriation and construction, and thus reimagines social and spatial relations that occur in poetic form.

It is in the distinct characteristics and effects behind the assemblages of surface representations that New York School poets construct poetic situations. The New York School is known for its determination to portray a world of "indistinguishable consumerist reality" (Lehman 15), but one "defamiliarized" from its own nature. Postwar surface has been perceived by critics as the "superstructure of an economic and sociopolitical base" (Blasing 35), a "culture of the image" where artificiality has replaced "depth models" (Jameson 9). Since depth models like puns, symbols and metaphors offer a spatial hierarchy, they are not deemed useful in a world of surface commodities. This is why "temporality undercuts symbol" (Ward 58) in O'Hara's world of surface, where a remark like "It is 12:40 of/ a Thursday" (lines 23-24) from "A Step Away from Them"[76] has no symbolic relevance. This postwar surface culture, then, is one based on "spatial logic" over "historical time" (Jameson 18). The spatial logic in O'Hara's assemblages reminds the readers of early modernist formulation of the nature of image[77] as discussed by Breton and Reverdy. To them, the strength of the image is achieved by bringing together two "juxtaposed" realities and accordingly arrange them in such a way as to produce relations based on "distance". In doing so, the image is said to embody "emotional force" and "poetic actuality".

In *détournement*, spatial reformulation and reappropriation are considered more reliable than "historicity"[78] for exploring situations or experiences that map cultural concerns. *Détournement* offers a state of experimentation whose purpose is to convey new relations in language and art by reappropriating material (existing or past) into an original ensemble. These

[76] Dated 1956.
[77] In reference to the second opening excerpt of the chapter.
[78] Jameson refers this term to a history which has no referent to the past or pastness (Jameson 18-19).

ensembles are primarily based on a deconstruction that generates "deference in meaning and difference in identity" (Smith 10). This deconstruction can be seen in the works of O'Hara through his "syntactic ambiguity, grammatical incongruity, and discontinuities" (Smith 11). *Détournement* also helps in the "logic of figuration" (Blasing 58) and in liberating language from outdated models of communication by rearranging and reappropriating textual structure. By altering the function of the already established how-tos of poetic language, O'Hara's assemblages constitute a unique form of reappropriation that embraces distinct relationships and produces psychogeographical effects in the constructed situation of a poem.

Syntactical Discontinuities: Metonymical Reconfiguration in Poetry Form

In "In Memory of my Feelings", fragmented subjectivities are portrayed through syntactical discontinuities and, upon reading, form metonymic combinations conveyed through word choice and verbal restructuring (shift from direct to indirect voices[79], for instance), as well as through spatial operations such as constructing gaps and line breaks. The constructed situations or "détourned" experiences are brought together by the reader's involvement with the text as a space for play and arrangement. In this sense, O'Hara's oeuvre makes room for possible transformations that depend on the reader's sought desires in poetic readership.

Syntactical discontinuities are formal manifestations that reflect a world of contradictions and fragmented ideologies. If, in Debord, the *spectacle* is said to unite fragmented thoughts and ideas and make them "appear" as if they are whole and complete, O'Hara's synechdoches and syntactical discontinuities come to reflect such a world when distinct objects are "interwingled" (Smith 12) in a web of textual and social contradictions. The splintered subjectivities created are assembled in fragmentation. It is true that the purpose of the assemblages is not semantic per se;

[79] Indirect discourse is to be viewed as an essential marker for demotic language or language of commands (discussed later in this chapter).

however, this does not mean that the involved surface representations do not produce sensation. In postmodernism, everyday objects produce "multi-layered sensation [that causes] de-distantiation" (Smith 32) of the creator from his/her creation. In a manner of speaking, this distancing from the object portrayed points indirectly to affect.[80] When this happens, surface is not entirely stripped of content, for it still contains some implication or reference outside itself. "Drinking"[81] (O'Hara 57-58), a poem written in five couplets, opens with the subject of *light* which "falters because it's been on so long". However, "light" does not remain the subject of the poem. In the second couplet, other subjects are added such as "music" (line 3) and "satchel" (line 4). These subjects, whether presented in abstract form such as music, or in other forms like an everyday item such as a satchel, emanate their own exclusive object-sensations or affects regardless of their relationship with the speaker who only appears in the third couplet. The speaker then tries to describe the effects of drinking on his actions and body. His "face" that is "flushed with its wit and apprehension" (line 5) and "begins to pale" (line 6) conveys the speaker's first supposed bodily reaction to drinking and to the time the "waitress claims" (line 6) his drink. The speaker's second reaction to drinking comes in the fourth couplet when his gaze or "look" changes toward his "friends" and toward "strangers". How does his look change under the influence? The speaker says in the fifth couplet that it "drains the eye" and that it also makes him eager to bond with a person in order to quench his thirst or "rising fever", but to no avail as the last line "finds/ no neighbor to kill its rising fever". When the last three couplets are read and understood as the speaker's reaction and behavior toward drinking, the first two couplets and their affects start to make more sense in regards to the subject matter at hand. On the surface, the combination of such objects in syntax is what permits them to perform distinct and unusual

[80] Affect plays a crucial role in influencing ambience and its psychogeographical effect on the observer's behavior.
[81] Dated 1951. Check Appendix B for the complete poem.

sensations; the "music" becomes a tangible object that can "slip" into a "briefcase", the "satchel" is personified as a "hungry" organism, so does the "dawn alone/ drains the eye" (lines 8-9). Every single surface object, or what Hazel Smith calls a "surbol" (Smith 29), becomes crucial to understanding the speaker's condition and behavior after drinking. The different appropriations constructed by O'Hara in his couplets make way for unique portraits in metonymic play as he brings together surface representations and object-sensations to produce their own ambience. While they appear to flow independently, when read through *détournement*, the reader can examine the spatial relationships that occur in the poetic construction or situation. "Drinking" is an example of constructing a modernist assemblage[82] where the speaker's emotional behavior melds organically with surface-objects.

In addition to surface representations and metonymical configuration, it is important to note O'Hara's naming process. This process is derived from the intention of making a new situation or construction out of immediate experience. O'Hara explains best this sense of immediacy in "Poetry"[83] (CP 49), where he suggests that he would "deepen you" by his "quickness" (line 12) and "delight [you] as if you/were logical and proven" (lines 13-14). However, he claims in the opening lines that "to be quiet/ is to be quick" (lines 1-2). Subsequently, his thoughts surrounding quietness suggest a mark of intimacy when "to be quiet" is to be "used to you" (lines 14-15) and "as if/ you would never leave me" (line 16). These lines express that his "quickness" is not intended to be threatening to the reader when he "scare[s]/ you clumsily, or surprise/you with a stab" (lines 3-5). Thus, O'Hara constructs out of his "quickness" an intimate relationship between the speaker and the reader, or between text and reader. Considered an appropriation of Williams's conversational mode and use of enjambment

[82] In reference to Breton's and Reverdy's definition of image in the opening of chapter.
[83] Dated 1951, published 1969. Check Appendix B for the complete poem.

where “the breaks of short lines occur at surprising syntactic junctures” (Lowney 256), O’Hara’s “Poetry”, with its “quickness”, does not aim to deflect any “deep” and “delightful” relations toward its reader. Hence, its sense of immediacy is constructed by O’Hara’s speaker to address and support the interaction that occurs between the poetic text (the constructed situation) and the reverberated affect or emotional resonance the text leaves on the reader.

Naming, whether by allusion or by indeterminate reference, is important to how O’Hara achieves this “quickness”. Naming, as a process of constructing poetics, offers a transient sensation “perishable and immediate like a phone call” (Lehman 184) and suggests a “critique of itself by the relations it constructs” (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* par.206) within its poetic assemblages. So what remains of the constructed situation in O’Hara’s poetry are the casual, the conversational, and the self-critique:

> There are several Puerto
> Ricans on the avenue today, which
> makes it beautiful and warm. First
> Bunny died, then John Latouche,
> then Jackson Pollock. But is the
> earth as full as life was full, of them? (CP 258)

> the editor is delighted I
> hear his clamor for more
> but that is nothing. Ah!
> reader! You open the page
> my poems stare at you you

stare back, do you not? my
poems speak on the silver
of your eyes your eyes repeat
them to your lover's this
very night. (CP 24)

These excerpts from "A Step Away from Them" (first excerpt) and "A Pleasant Thought from Whitehead"[84] (second excerpt) show the very casual form of conversation that occurs between the poem and the reader. In the first excerpt, the dialectical relation lies in the ensemble of allusions that construct an emotional situation from multiple subjectivities ("Puerto Ricans", "Bunny", "John Latouche", "Jackson Pollock") brought together. O'Hara assembles primarily public features of people in his naming before listing the more private. Although there is no pejorative sign or label that would imply discrimination between his subjects, there appears to be a clear distinction between the privileged white personalities (celebrities), called by their nicknames, and the horde of Puerto Ricans on the avenue, "which/ makes it beautiful and warm". Peter Stoneley in "Frank O'Hara and French in the Pejorative Sense" argues that the people O'Hara alludes to "never quite become more than types, signs, or objects," and on this depends his own "sense of well-being" (133). Stoneley explains that this sense of well-being situates O'Hara (or his subjects) as simultaneously "distant and intimately engaged" just like Baudelaire's flâneur-type whose "spirit is independent, intense and impartial" (133). By naming, O'Hara conveys a sense of immediacy so as to give language an open structure for reader response. In this poem, naming people and places is a form of dedication to those artists who passed away and to those urban places (like the "Manhattan Storage Warehouse") that have been

[84] Dated 1950.

torn down and replaced by other structures in the city grid he traverses. The poem ends with a bittersweet line: “my heart is in my/ pocket, it is poems by Pierre Reverdy” (lines 48-49). As the speaker returns “to work” from his lunchbreak walk, the poems by Reverdy signal the end of pleasure. Here lies the poem’s self-critique. As the walk ends, so does the pleasure of remembering (by naming) the great artists that have influenced the speaker’s life.

In the second excerpt, the relations seem more dialogical between the poem and the assumed addressee(s). It constantly engages “you” in the ambience and dynamic of the constructed situation. This “you” circulates between the poem, the “editor”, the “reader”, the “stars”, and the “pelican”. In the opening stanza, the speaker/ poet feels “assertive” (line 5) to send his poems out “into the pelican’s/ bill” (lines 6-7). When the poems are received by his “editor”, he is praised for his work. However, the speaker seems to care more for the effect the poems leave on the reader. So the speaker addresses the reader by explaining how well-received the poems will be. He suggests that the poems “stare” at the reader and speak into their “eyes”, and they in turn, will “repeat” them to their “lovers”. The speaker does not stop there. In the last four lines of this stanza, he resumes his self-praise or his “clamor” for his poems by saying that the “stars/ read my poems and flash/ them onward to a friend” (lines 18-21). Through its conversational tone, the subject matter opens up multiple relations between the speaker, the poem, and the addressees. The speaker assumes that his readers and the stars will in turn recite his poems for their lovers and their friends. The last line of the poem ends with “Pelican!/ you will read them too!” The inclusive conversation that occurs between the speaker and his addressees builds a collective space for emotional transference. Pleasure or the pleasure from reading the poems is transmitted from poet/speaker to editor, to reader, to stars, to lovers, to

friends, and lastly to the pelican. This light and humorous assemblage shows how the dialogue form in poetry can provide "patterned relations" (Hejinian 10) in and outside the poetic text.

Dadaism & Surrealism à la Situationism

From outdated models of poetic structure and composition, O'Hara arranges his syntax formation as a reappropriation of the surrealist figuration of verbal ensembles and assemblages. This reappropriation is open to syntactical relations that seem odd in their discontinuities, but nevertheless come to highlight the effects of indeterminate references in constructing new connections with the reader-as-explorer. It is useful to note here what Debord thinks about surrealism in art. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord suggests that the "world of art" ended once it incorporated "art-historical memories" (par.189). Accordingly, the only possibility for change lies in the "dissolution of art [expressed in its] impossibility of change" (par.190). Debord believes that both Dada and Surrealist art contradict each other, yet form an "inseparable transcendence of art". Whereas Dada "abolishes art without realization", Surrealism "realizes art without abolishing it" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.191). Debord deduces then that in order to achieve transcendence in art, the artist has to explore the relations created between abolition and realization, i.e. between dissolving and reconstructing. Similarly, Walter Benjamin suggests in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that Dada emphasizes "contemplation" and "evaluation" over sales value. Benjamin states that "Dadaistic activities assured a rather vehement distraction by making works of art the center for scandal" with a chief requirement to "outrage the public" (17). He further adds that Dada creates "word salads [that contain] every imaginable waste product of language [in order to achieve] a moral shock effect" (Benjamin 17). This also illuminates why the Situationists and Frank O'Hara ("*the Dada*

baby"[85]) implemented the Dada process in their workings so as to reevaluate (by way of deconstruction) all previously conceived art forms.

In his manifesto, Breton defines Surrealism as a "pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought; [it is] thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations" (5). This definition is also present in Debord's belief that documenting ambience and its effects are ways of expressing thought and personal desire. This openness in surrealism is what both Debord and O'Hara were interested in, particularly when it comes to producing art that would make a difference in man's daily social endeavors. O'Hara explores unusual relations by utilizing the surrealist process of breaking down and rebuilding new structures in poetic language. In "Easter"[86], O'Hara's *détournement* does not simply construct imagery through juxtaposition; it also assembles fragmented and arbitrary parts into a "network of synechdochal associations" (Smith 87) that, in turn, is potentially open to the reader's will and desire for interpretation and creates a new sense of mobility. The following is an example of a surface-surreal assemblage that reappropriates, in its distinct parts, a dialectical web of experiences that is made up of psychogeographical elements of "free associations", "chance [and] possibilities of everyday life" (Solnit 160):

> every Nevada fantastic has lost his dolorous teeth
>
> when the world, smutty abstract, powders its pearls
>
> the gardens of the sea's come

[85] Taken from the poem "Night Thoughts in Greenwich Village" (O'Hara 38), O'Hara plays with the idea of mocking and taking things too seriously in poetry. He constructs his poem or "word salad" out of impressions that express the functions of humor, excess, and absurdity (among other subjects like art and life) to portray the limitations or possibilities of subject matter in writing poetry. The speaker ironically mentions that readers would accuse him of constructing his poem as such and implicates himself as a "Dada baby". Further details are discussed in chapter 2 (page 145).

[86] Dated 1952, published in 1969.

a mast of the barcantine lost flaming bearer of hurricanes

a hardon a sequoia a toilet tissue

a reject of poor people (CP 97)

This model of disjunctive imagery mainly serves as an escape from a hierarchal basis of language. By definition, the "synechdochal web" achieves a non-hierarchal approach to language by creating meaning from structure (Smith 96). The newly formed conjunctions (made up of disparate parts) create a movement between surrealism and symbolism (Smith 95). This "open-ended structure" enables the readers to move through the unfamiliar ensemble and "fish out" what their heart desires through the spatial relationships language creates.

With the help of his "synechdochal web", O'Hara's surrealist assemblage achieves its *détournement*, allowing the reader to infer what the situations created actually refer to. Such "activity of emotion" (Smith 98) is an important readership condition in understanding O'Hara's surreal constructs. In "Easter," the un-decidable reference is constructed by merging parts of a whole with other indeterminate parts that seem to morph into a hybrid surreal structure. In the selected excerpt, the naming of the subject "Nevada fantastic" takes on an unusual role. It is not an American state in this instant. It is followed by features that reimagine it as a distressed creature of some sort who "lost his dolorous teeth" in a world that also takes a new form: a "smutty abstract" one. This obscene and shapeless world is presented as a feminine entity that "powders its pearls" instead of its face. With such discontinuities and fragmented "visions", other subjects are introduced. Firstly, in its possessive mode, the "gardens of the sea's come" is a fragment which portrays an awkward play of nature and campy connotation. Can there be any gardens in the sea? Can these gardens produce come? Combinations like these posit surreal forms in subjectivity and emotional transference. The fragments resume with sea-related imagery

such as “masts” of “lost” vessels that are probably destroyed by the sea, who is named the “flaming bearer of hurricanes”. Following such surreal composites comes disparate words in sequence starting with a “hardon”, then a “sequoia” and a “toilet tissue”. At first glance, the reader can suspect a shift in implication from the preceding abstract creatures and the sexual performance of the sea. However, the campy construction of the latter sequence can be read as viable. The physical resemblances of masts, hardons, and sequoias imply the obvious thought of erected structures. Although toilet paper is not a matter of resemblance to the previous words, the reader might suspect a correlation with functionality between toilet tissue and the sequoia plant, not to mention the fact that it is an everyday commodity that is used to clean up bodily fluids like “come”. The variability regarding the parts that join this ensemble or assemblage offers a wide range of casual subjects that portray body parts, sexual and campy objects, Nature, everyday commodity and social commentary. With such a variety of parts and references, O’Hara’s subjectivity achieves its surrealist nature not through juxtaposition, but through the dialectical connections and defamiliarized syntactical relations that it (re)presents.

O’Hara’s *détournement* of surrealism offers new metonymies that depend on the reader’s “deconstruction and reconstruction” (Smith 99) of the selected parts that he has chosen from associations, chance, and commodity. Furthermore, these disparate elements from distinct realities offer emotional ambiences that test the limits of a non-hierarchal approach to language by simply being synechdochal in formation. Subsequently, the assemblage mixes topics such as sinking boats, erections and come, and social class.

With such a flamboyant mixture of realities, the assemblage reworks the intricacies of language production in poetic form. To refer back to Debord’s notion of the *spectacle*, O’Hara’s *détournement* can be read as one that does not offer commands to be accepted submissively (the

function of the spectacle), for his surrealist ensemble constructs a situation that necessitates the reader's active participation in configuring the imagery constructed. This is where the psychogeographical technique of *détournement* can make a difference and can effect change on the reader's social well-being and behavior.

In order to convey disparate social relations, the poet would wish to include contradictory points of view as representative in the play of difference and in the language of *détournement*. The kind of language used for such a purpose is one that is based on the arrangement of commodities in textual space and not in real life. This "demotic language" (Bernes 522) is said to offer "orders" or commands that express "grammatical and social" forms of relations between "people and things" (Bernes 523). Similarly, the Situationists have perceived demotic language as a language communicated to the masses in the form of "messages" sent to "receivers" on the other end. The "order form" of language implies a one-way transference of information that conveys the "militarization of the whole society" (Khayati par.8). O'Hara's *détournement* can be considered a process of appropriating the *spectacle*'s commands as not only signs of production in present-day capitalist society, but also as a novel form of arrangement that reflects indirectly relations between people and things and/or ambience.

"Song (is it dirty)"[87] is a poem by O'Hara that shows his uses of this demotic input in the form of an immediate and assuming surface dialogue, just like a telephone call.

Is it dirty

does it look dirty

that's what you think of in the city

does it just seem dirty

[87] Dated 1959.

that’s what you think of in the city
you don't refuse to breathe do you

someone comes along with a very bad character
he seems attractive. is he really. yes. very
he’s attractive as his character is bad. is it. yes

that’s what you think of in the city
run your finger along your no-moss mind
that’s not a thought that’s soot

and you take a lot of dirt off someone
is the character less bad. no. it improves constantly
you don’t refuse to breathe do you (CP 327)

Written in five unrhymed tercets, O’Hara opens with his first order, “that’s what you think of in the city”. The construction reveals a kind of a Q&A self-talk that brings the speaker, an absent addressee and the city together into the same assemblage. Followed by “you don’t refuse to breathe do you” and “run your finger along your no-moss mind”, the orders shift the attention from the speaker’s point of view to the addressee’s while retaining a form of association with a city element like “soot” and dirt of the city.

The correlation between point of view and things or different states of matter forms the basis for impersonal relations in discourse. This discourse, although it comes in the form of commands, cannot help but portray a struggle in representation between the “represented” and

"representing" subjects. In the third stanza, what seems like a Q&A type of conversation turns into one block of discourse devoid of any grammatical signs that would convey a shift in the speaker's role or a change from one addressee to the next. This play levels off the control of one speaker over another to bring out the impersonal relations in discourse, and presents as well a surface development of imagery in the shape of discourse. This process is quite successful, too, in combining distinct realities and thoughts into one single assemblage. In the fourth stanza, "That's not a thought that's soot" shifts the role of authority to one that constructs relations among distinct matter ("thought" to "soot", for example). This "subject egalitarianism" is made apparent by the relations the object or commodity procures. This process of construction continues into the last stanza where "soot" is no longer a "thought"; it has been transformed from the polluting condition of the city to an essential human condition like "breathing". Nonetheless, in the last stanza, the image occupies a space where trash exists alongside breathing (by arrangement of the lines). Such a construction of subjectivity is something expected in O'Hara; John Ashbery praises this quality and associates it with "wholesomeness". Speaking of O'Hara, Ashbery states that "the life of the city and the millions of relationships that go to make it up hum through his poetry; a scent of garbage, patchouli and carbon monoxide drifts across it, making it the lovely, corrupt, wholesome place New York is" (CP x).

In the shadow of Situationist philosophy, the only possible truth to fight the oppressive reality of bureaucracy over language is to rearrange the "order form" and eventually liberate the language from its commanding function (Khatyati par.8). Therefore, the language of the commodity is a language of orders that, once reappropriated, becomes free from all constraints and liable to exploring relational possibilities both internally and externally. Moreover, this demotic language is best represented in the form of free indirect discourse, or "language in its

entirety and before its individuation into direct discourse" (Bernes 530). It is noteworthy to express conflict through indeterminate points of view that are discernible in indirect discourse. This is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot, for whom point of view is related to a "technical excellence" (Eliot 1377-78) which depends on the "present moment of the past [and a consciousness of] not what is dead, but of what is already living" (1378). Eliot points to a state of being or situation which is shaped deliberately by the artist, very much like *détournement*, in order to be able to express the language in its entirety. So, by reappropriating free indirect discourse, one can express "communication of the incommunicable" that exists in surface living culture (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.191-192).

In expanding on the analysis of free indirect discourse and the impersonal character of language, Deleuze and Guattari refer to two significant notions for impersonal art. The first notion concerns the material and the duration of sensation, while the second concerns language. In regards to the first, the art object is held to emanate sensations from its own physical shell. In studying psychogeography, this can be interpreted as the effect of ambience, as projected by the body that the subject constructs. Therefore, the material and the sensate coexist in the construction of situations out of impersonal expression. This can be observed in O'Hara's choices of objects and their merging into assembling constructs that produce surrealistic and campy effects. The question that remains is one of duration. Deleuze and Guattari believe that sensation lingers as long as the material lasts (Deleuze 166-67). In the world of commodities and in an age of consumerism, the latter notion of sensation is one that is transient and fleeting since the commodity material is replaceable and is not made to last long. Such sensations are present in O'Hara's process of fragmentation and discontinuous syntax which in turn become signs of a

poetic construction that aims to capture the "nebulous", the "intangible", and the "circumstantial" (CP 500).

A psychogeographical reading of O'Hara's poetry considers his linguistic reappropriation as a necessary tool to critique social relations in textual space by inviting readers to interact with surface representations in such spaces. Nevertheless, some poetic assemblages by O'Hara also convey an accepting attitude toward consumerist culture with little room for critique. With *détournement*, O'Hara's synechdochies and syntactical disjunctions are examined as possibilities in reappropriating social and cultural relations that are structured between the speaker, the text and the reader.

The study of poetry under psychogeography, however, is not complete without the *dérive*. The *dérive* is another means of reappropriating spatial relations through constructing situations out of a walker's observations of urban space, as they are transposed into verbal exhibitions in textual reimaginings. In chapter two, we will further examine the second psychogeographical technique of the *dérive* as an essential method in illuminating and reading Frank O'Hara's urban assemblages anew.

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Chapter Two

Debord's *Dérive:* Revisiting O'Hara

> *I don't care how dark it gets as long as we can still move!*
>
> "To Canada (From Washington's Birthday)" (CP 396)

> *The poem itself will only present you with unfinished motions…to read a work like this, one which flaunts its roots in a street while transcending them and asking what use a street is to a poem anyway, is to become aware that travelling through a poem is a tricky business, which needs you to attend to your surroundings and, impossibly, every single thing goes into making you feel surrounded by a living place, not just shops and diners and back-street dives, but the history of the West* (Cal Revely-Calder 733-734).

Situationist Alienation & the *Dérive*

Guy Debord divides his concept of psychogeography into two aesthetic and practical approaches for critiquing an isolating urban society: the *détournement* and the *dérive*. The following arguments in this chapter intend to examine O'Hara's urban assemblages[88] in relation to Debord's notions of alienation and representation, walking and mobility, and the *dérive*.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord suggests that the proletarian revolution is difficult to imagine without the return to social geography. Social geography in general is the study of "history in social space" (Sadler 92), or, in other words, a study to perceive space as a social construct. However, this study is considered limiting since it is an "amalgam of decomposing parts" (Doel 378). The "synthesis of difference" is unable to create novelty for it merely

[88] Based on Elizabeth Grozs's model of the interface between body and city in *Space, Time and Perversion: The Politics of Bodies*, an assemblage is a "collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings…their interrelations involve a fundamentally disunified series of systems, a series of disparate flows, energies, events, or entities, bringing together or drawing apart their more or less temporary alignments" (108).

produces fragmentation and "parts-objects" (Doel 378). For Debord, to reexamine social geography is to pay attention to fragmentation and find ways of bringing the sum of its differences to the surface. By doing so, Debord aims "to resist essentializing forms of spatial representation" (Shaskevich 23) in order to "create places/events corresponding to not only their work, but their entire history" (Debord par.178). The significance of this statement becomes clear when Debord claims that this critique regenerates "a diversity of independent space" in order to revive the "possibility of the authentic journey" in a world that has become saturated by isolating realities (Debord par.178). In an attempt to examine issues of authenticity, to critique social geography is to critique the "construction" of history and social space. In a similar manner, I intend to explore how O'Hara's urban poems create an authentic narrative through an examination of the methods of appropriation in the poetic text. In the light of the *dérive*, the second most important psychogeographical technique, the poems under study may be seen as attempts in examining mobility and other performative practices[89] in the construction of an authentic urban experience.[90] These also offer potential routes for comprehending how O'Hara's urban assemblages have been constructed out of the *spectacle*'s amalgam of differences. Here lies the core of psychogeography: the potentiality of producing an engaging (authentic/ practical) experience (or an event) out of banal representations that embody difference and contradiction.

The purpose of examining authenticity in a capitalist world is to attempt to reevaluate history and social behavior in order to "transform conditions in their entirety" (Debord par.179). In "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography", Debord calls these conditions the "neglected

[89] Performance is considered essential for the Situationists since it aids in constructing/mapping a mobile situation and therefore aims "to become an event in the universe it inscribes" (Doel 128).
[90] This expresses indirectly the two opening statements: the requirement for mobility to survive an alienating world (O'Hara) and the requirement to examine the image/representation of the existing landscape (specifically city space for Debord) for any possibility of change to occur.

phenomena of city ambiences" (Debord 1) and suggests that these conditions evoke feelings and desires that are hidden, by the manipulation of the *spectacle*, from historical change and development. In chapter one of *The Society of the Spectacle,* Debord attributes these unregistered feelings to the alienation that the urban dweller experiences in a world that is dominated by "the social order of appearances" (Debord par.10).

Debord believes that representation is directly caused and shaped by the *spectacle*'s alienating forces to monopolize images; images that are presented as "fragmented views" (Debord par. 2), yet are united with other "unconnected phenomena" (par.10) to produce an "inaccessible reality" (Debord par.12). Even though the relations constructed in O'Hara's assemblages initially read like an inaccessible reality, under close psychogeographical reading they offer cultural and political possibilities. In *The Society of the Spectacle* and in other Situationist essays, Debord reiterated and relentlessly struggled against social alienation. The *dérive* was meant to help diminish such negative social effects and to comprehend society by drifting through its urban space. In "Theory of the Dérive", Debord defines the *dérive* as a "technique of rapid passage through varied ambiences" which involves "playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects" (Debord 1). This description relies on traversing "the attractions of the terrain" while exploring "encounters" that exist during every particular drift (Debord 1).

The importance of the *dérive* lies in "[the] changing meaning of the city by way of changing the way its inhabited" (Debord 1). The ultimate goal of the *dérive*, therefore, is far more complicated than the act of meandering or promenading, for it is an act that attempts to construct a "concrete collective space possible for a narrative of a new urban terrain" (McDonough 77) that is brought about by the interaction and integration of the engaged drifter or

"dériveur" (Kaufmann 116) around the "new habitual axes" (Debord 2) of the traversed environment. Accordingly, the *dériveur*-poet constructs his allusions for "marketing purposes" and from representations[91] that depict his speaker as a "consumer-poet who [finds] an entire range of cultural goods to purchase from all over the world" (Ross 384). For Debord, these representations are considered useful for collective and objective consciousness as they are "devoid of individuality" and therefore speak "the mass" (Coverely 46).

In the "The Day Lady Died"[92], O'Hara's representations are not only synchronous with urban elements observed while walking and represented through naming, but they also chronicle "taste and sensibility" and "news and cultural commentary" (Lehman 184) in the form of a casual speech-like conversation:

> I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
> and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
> an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
> in Ghana are doing these days
>
> I go on to the bank
>
> and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)
> doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life
> and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine
> for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do
> think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or
> Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*

[91] Defined by Hazel Smith as representations which convey the "alienation of the human condition" (32) or in simplified terms, those images that lack human performance and emotion.
[92] Dated 1959.

of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine

after practically going to sleep with quandariness (CP 325)

By naming people and places, the speaker's solitary drift through New York is turned into a space for collecting urban experiences that are "lived at high speed, in the new pop continuum of a consumer culture" (Ross 383). In the first stanza of the poem, the drift starts with the speaker going to "get a shoeshine" (line 3) before attending a dinner without knowing "the people who will feed" (line 6) him. In the process of "self-talk"[93] (Smith 144) or conversation with an absent addressee, the speaker relays primarily his observations as he walks "up the muggy street" (line 7) at "12:20" (line 1). He picks up a "hamburger and a malted" (line 8) before he stops and buys the literary magazine "NEW WORLD WRITING" (line 9) to check what the poets in "(Ghana) are doing" (line 10). After this pause to buy the magazine, the speaker makes his way to the bank and encounters his bank teller ("Miss Linda Stillwagon"[94]) (line 12) who is usually suspicious, but not on this day. Andrew Ross in "The Death of Lady Day" points out that the narrative around the bank teller occurs at a time where "America's consumer markets have never been busier; bank tellers are dispensing cash to spendthrift clients without even consulting their balances" (384). The speaker resumes his urban journey and it takes him to visit a bookstore, the "GOLDEN GRIFFIN" (line 14). The name alludes to an ancient mythical creature famous for guarding treasure and priceless possessions, appropriate for a bookstore where his favorite writers and artists are found. He intends to get "a little Verlaine/ for Patsy" with "drawings by Bonnard" (lines 14-15) while also thinking of other literary works like "Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or/ Brendan Behan's new play" (line 16) or "Le Balcon" or "Les Nègres/ of Genet"

[93] This concept is discussed in more detail with O'Hara's "Biotherm" in the last section of this chapter.
[94] Naming is critical for O'Hara for he writes in "Memorial Day 1950" that "naming things is only the intention/ to make things" (lines 51-52). Naming, though, in regards to the *dérive* becomes a medium or a required material for constructing situations.

(lines 17-18). Despite all these options, the speaker "stick[s] with Verlaine" (line 18) before resuming his drift through the city. This simultaneous drifting and listing of names (while occasionally hinting at personal preferences like "I stick with Verlaine") could serve to portray a man of intellectual taste who wishes to share his literary preferences at a time where "poets… are no longer immune to the contagious seductions of the commodity world" (Ross 384). Along his walk, the *dériveur*-poet becomes a "consumer of outside products" (Blasing 50) who feeds on whatever commodity comes his way. After his stop at the bookstore, he resumes his "stroll" which leads him to "PARK LANE/ liquor store" (lines 20-21) to buy a bottle of "Strega" (line 21) and to "Ziegfield Theatre" (line 23) to buy a pack of "Gauloises" cigarettes and a "carton/ of Picayunes" (lines 24-25). In the last line of the third stanza, he sees Lady Day's[95] face in the "NEW YORK POST" (line 25). This makes him "sweat" (line 26) and stop walking as he gets to the "5 SPOT"[96] (line 27). When "everyone and I stopped breathing" (last line), the singing of Lady Day is heard as fading "whispers". The break in mobility brings a break in breathing. On the one hand, this echoes a perception that links immobility to death. On the other hand, it conveys a collective empathy for Lady Day (i.e. Billy Holiday) upon her demise and "invokes a spirit of authenticity" (Ross 386) in capturing the influence of postwar jazz culture.

The method of naming places within the "self-talk" mode makes O'Hara's assemblage a "space for cultural exchange" (Smith 149) that invites the reader to follow along and experience the mood of transience and immediacy as "details replace each other by cancellation" (Rona 167). This immediacy is achieved through the act of mobility and the choice of words the poet utilizes to create situations out of the commodity world and the relationships the speaker is faced

[95] The news of the demise of singer Billie Holiday at the age of 44.
[96] A place where O'Hara "frequented jazz clubs and even gave readings" (Ross 385).

with as he traverses the city grid. This makes O'Hara's *dérive* a space for tracing co-existing variations in distinct landscapes of information, whether cultural or emotional.

The encounters that happen along the walker's route may be thought of as effects of ambience that make the observer aware of everyday conditions that might eventually suggest possibilities beyond the alienation of the confined city grid. Thus, the *dérive* is an activity that "denounce(s) alienation and extol(s) revolution" by taking the "marginal as an urban asset and not an ailment" (Sadler 60). In doing so, drifting becomes a form for transgressing the alienating world, a "game to provoke situations and encounters with people and places in the city" where "spatial exploration meets behavioral disorientation" (Sadler 94). "The Day Lady Died" is not a simple elegy for Billie Holiday in as much as it is an account of a speaker's quotidian experience of death in his urban surroundings. Moreover, in the late 1950s, the concept of social masculinity had started to change as more attention was paid to "style, feeling, taste, desire, consumer creativity, and sexual toleration" (Ross 389). According to the construction of the *dérive*, this can mean that O'Hara's assemblages intend to portray social (transient) situations that highlight effects of urban ambience on the behaviors and emotions of the *dériveur*-poet. This, in turn, can be viewed as a poetic construct that is made for readers to map the presented social effects and transform them into key observations that chronicle the behavior of postwar urbanites in city space.

Cognitive Mapping* & the *Dérive

Published prior to Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City* also proposes that the city produces an alienating effect on its residents due to the power of the image to "fuse and distort" (87-88) elements and parts of city space. Lynch speaks of "Imageability," a notion that suggests that the physical objects experienced in city space produce

strong images that help the observer recognize "distinctions and relations" (Lynch 9). Moreover, this mental image of the city is perceived as an "organizer of knowledge" that opens the "possibility to further explore and learn" about the environment (Lynch 4). Lynch suggests that a continuous "re-arrangement of elements" is essential for an image to have value. He adds that this continuous reconfiguration of the image should "carry identity (individuality), spatial relations (with other objects) and meaning" (Lynch 8) if it is to function as a de-alienating entity in urban capitalist space. The observer is not only "highly aware of his environment", but is also able to "identify parts of the city and understand structure of its whole"[97] (Lynch 13). Lynch's notion of image resembles Debord's model of spectacle in two aspects: the first lies in the alienating nature of the image in the capitalist city, and second is in the necessary (re)configuration of images and their relationship to urban space in the attempt to critique society's alienating effects.[98] Consequently, to logically examine image and urban capitalist representation, one has to take into account the psychogeographical effects of ambience; in other words, the "genius loci"[99] of the urban totality.

As to the nature of representation, the study of image within space or by way of spatial relations is further elucidated by Fredric Jameson in his explanation of Althusser's notion of ideology. In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism*, Jameson discusses how Althusser's thoughts on ideology are highly pertinent to an aesthetic that is dependent on spatial relations and eventually to his own notion of *cognitive mapping*. The term "representation" for Jameson implies a "figuration" (2) that comes from the subject's everyday conditions (in this

[97] This emphasizes the importance of totality in art. The Situationists argue that art presents a totality in communication which is realized by and for everyone in contrast to the workings of the spectacle which intends to prevent such a totality (Kaufmann 160).
[98] Debord believes that the social function of the image is alienation; the closer one gets to the image, the farther one moves from life (*Spectacle* par.32-33).
[99] In contemporary usage, it refers to the spirit of place or a location's atmosphere (Coverely 18).

case the conditions of capitalism). In "Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser states that ideology is the "representation of the subject's imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence" (1). The notion of space suggested in this definition is one that projects one's lived experience onto an imaginary realm. However, the proposed aesthetics in Jameson's notion of *cognitive mapping* is an attempt "to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to the vaster and properly unpresentable totality" (Jameson 50). The function of representation then depends on the transient relationship the image constructs with its totality. For Jameson, geography and cartography are the means for examining further this type of relationship that occurs between the subject and its existential space at the time of figuring representation. Therefore, the aesthetics of *cognitive mapping*, which consist of navigational and geographical tools, introduce new ways of examining the existing conditions of the subject and its relationship to urban space while taking into account the "unlived abstract conceptions of the geographic totality" (Jameson 51) within one's urban environment. Accordingly, for Debord, these operations are "necessary reconfigurations" in order to be able to understand representation away from society's alienating effects.

In "Cognitive Mapping as Literary Analysis," Margaret Freeman emphasizes the importance of the "structure of the relations" (471), for creating a literary work that reveals the mind or maps a mental space. In poetry, Freeman suggests that this ability to construct a mental space comes in the form of "suffixes," "determiners," and "function words" that indicate a shift (or a mobility) toward "counterfactual situations" (471). Freeman argues that "we create abstract thoughts by conceptually projecting them from our concrete experience of ourselves in the world…we articulate our ideas about life in terms of our physical movement in space" (472). This highlights the importance of mobility in gathering effects of ambiences and urban

experiences when constructing textual relations in poetic space. Through the *dérive*, O'Hara's assemblages may be read as passageways in linguistic and metonymic experimentation that serve as a "cognitive mapping" of a subject or *dériveur* in urban space.

Debord's notion of psychogeography considers this mapping as a "means of concrete interventions in urbanism" (Debord, "Report" 9) in order to focus on the "interaction between the material environment and the behavior that arises from it" (Debord, "Report" 8). However, Debord warns us that the "gestures" of the urban spectator "are not his" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.30); instead, they merely pose as representations or "simulacra"[100] that claim to be authentic. Hence, isolation and alienation for Debord are "weapons" created by the *spectacle* to "engender lonely crowds" (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.28). Debord argues that the *spectacle* achieves this through creating banal representations that lack depth in social critique and leave no room for constructing relations between the subject and its existing environment. This is another reason why the Situationists experiment by "making and remaking maps" out of quotidian life so that they can examine the traces or "versions of authenticity" captured in their psychogeographical and aesthetic techniques (Shaw 46).

Both Debord and Jameson argue that a geographical process like mapping can be a useful aesthetic tool for social change and transformation. Nonetheless, Jameson perceives urban representations as devoid of "historicity" which means that they depend only on "spatial logic" without having any reference to the past (Jameson 18). Debord, on the other hand, promotes the idea of urban representation within capitalism as one that is reliant upon spatial relations that do not necessarily negate the importance of the past nor utterly efface history in the construction of contemporary representations. Debord goes much further in his formulation of psychogeography

[100] Used by Baudrillard to describe the last phase of the role of the image: a simulation of reality that has lost its connection with reality, a *hyperreality* which is far worse than a false representation of the real (Baudrillard 1, 5).

by trusting in mobility and seeing that drifting (*dérive*) is a crucial phase for historical appropriation in the development of urban art and culture.

Walking as a *Dérive*: A Resource for Constructing Poetry

To offer a psychogeographical reading of O'Hara's city poems, one should look closely at the social and cultural implications of the acts of walking and *dérive* and their use in poetic aesthetics. Looking back to eighteenth century[101] philosophy, Rousseau remarks: "I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs" (Solnit 18) and "I could think of no simpler or surer way of carrying out my plan than to keep a faithful *record* of my *solitary* walks and the reveries that occupy them" (Solnit 22, emphasis added). In the early nineteenth century, Kierkegaard perceived walking as "a way to be among people for a man who could not be with them, a way to bask in the faint human warmth of brief encounters, acquaintances' greetings, and overheard conversations" (Solnit 24). Rebecca Solnit observes in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* that both philosophers perceive the act of walking as an important means of "modulating their alienation in intellectual history" (21). Solnit also argues that both Rousseau and Kierkegaard present themselves as solitary walkers "unsettled between places, drawn forth into action by desire and lack, having the detachment of the traveler rather than the ties of the worker, the dweller, the member of a group" (Solnit 23). However, the philosopher Edmund Husserl differs in his characterization of walking by emphasizing on "the experience by which we understand our body in relationship to the world" rather than depending on "the senses and the mind" (Solnit 27). He explains that the body in motion experiences the "continuity of self amid the flux of the world" (Solnit 26) and eventually the body comes to

[101] Rebecca Solnit traces the history of walking all the way back to the history of human beings and to classical Greece, but "the history of walking as a conscious cultural act rather than a means to an end is only a few centuries old in Europe, and Rousseau stands at its beginning" (18).

understand its relationships toward the world and others through its motion. The difference between Husserl's definition and the other philosophers is the emphasis on man's daily experience of the world through the act of the moving body, wherein the body unites the here and the there, the self and the other. This implies that the act of walking influences the direct experience of the walker in traversing space, whether physically, psychologically, or temporally. In addition, this awareness of space is important to the changing senses of perception and time in the act of walking.

Walking is no longer considered a simple activity of bodily mobility, but an "expressive medium" (Solnit 82). In her chapter "The Path Out of the Garden", Rebecca Solnit suggests that the purposes behind the act of walking in literary contexts are numerous. Solnit believes that from all the way back to Jane Austen's novels and Wordsworth's poetry, the act of walking has produced layers of implications. To name a few, walking is perceived as an activity for escape, for thinking, for examining relations, conversing, exercising, travelling, paying attention to daily activities, and freeing oneself from the binds of social strictures (Solnit 81-82). In Solnit's list, one can see how walking is in fact a set of distinct, yet vital behavioral actions that is broad enough to encompass psychological and intellectual facets of human mobility. However, we are not so much interested in investigating all the different actions that come from walking, as suggested by Solnit, as we are to demonstrate how the Situationist's *dérive* can play a major role in the creative process of producing and reading poetry. Primarily, for the Situationists, the walking act of the *dérive* is a tool to understand urban living for they believe it to be attached to "values, beliefs, and feelings" that focus on "attention" and a "bombardment of the senses" as the walker (*dériveur*) interacts with the ambience of the city (Brown & Shortell 226). Secondly, this "ethno-Situationist approach" to the act of walking is also essential to the act of reading

poetry for it helps us experience "moments of uncertainty and possibly openness" in semiotic encounters and attempts to "re-establish a connection to the habitat" while exploring transgression and alienation in the urban space or text (Brown & Shortell 243).

In reading and writing poetry, the practice of walking helps with the peripatetic process of "mapping" relations between the walker (and/or poet) and the world. The walker can mentally (re)create a path from actual or imagined space. The method of "retracing" passageways allows the walker to "travel" to places (images or impressions stored in the memory) that are triggered while physically taking a walk. In reading the path taken by the walker, the reader (re)travels the walker's journey, and pays attention to the effects of the walker's desired (urban) ambiences that are transposed to poetic form.

In O'Hara's "Walking to Work"[102], the spatial relations constructed in this *dérive* achieve two psychogeographical effects. The first creates a visual form of representation that can be experienced like the reading of a city map (by way of line breaks and spacing), thus perceiving every line as synchronous with the imagined street traversed by the *dériveur.* As for the second effect, it comes with the speaker engaging the reader (represented by "you") with his observed city ambiences or with elements suggestive of the surrounding urban environment like "traffic", "range", "round", "street", and "light" as he traverses "straight against" the crossing:

It's going to be the sunny side
from now
        on. Get out, all of you.
This is my traffic over the night
and how

[102] Dated 1952, published in 1969.

should I range my pride

each oceanic morning like a cutter

if I

confuse the dark world is round

round who

in my eyes at morning saves

nothing from nobody? I'm becoming

the street.

Who are you in love with?

me?

Straight against the light I cross. (CP 126)

Joshua Clover, in "Avant-Situ: Apollinaire, Dérive and the Politics of the Third Dimension," suggests that to think of poetry through the *dérive* is to construct a space that allows "otherwise-unavailable forms of consciousness, and as a motion of consciousness itself" (par.4). In passing through the city's architecture, Clover adds that one can discover a line like a sentence "supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience" (par.4).

The *dériveur*[103] establishes a conversational space for merging the subject's emotions with daily ambiences and city signifiers. This "self-talk" poem revolves around a playful relationship in which the speaker is set apart from the collective. The lines "This is my traffic over night/ and how/should I range my pride" (lines 4-6) are contrasted with the addressees of

[103] Discussed in more elaborate terms in comparison with the flâneur. Refer to the section "The Situationist *Dériveur* & the Flâneur" (pg. 160).

"all of you" (line 3). The first self (represented by "my") appears to own the traffic at night as if it is taking the place of a living and breathing city. The second self (represented by "I") expresses doubts about the "range" of its "pride" and about its ability to "save/ nothing from nobody" (lines 11-12) each and every "oceanic morning" (line 7), thus suggesting an entirely different subject or self than the opening one. However, the next subject soon shifts back to the role of first speaker as he "becomes" the street or one with the street. This first person speaker readdresses the reader with the line "who are you in love with?/ me?" (lines 14-15) only to transform the role of the *dériveur* into the role of city or street. The speaker then comes to behave like a city by having both spatial ("range") as well as personal ("pride") qualities in its subjectivity. Thus, O'Hara brings distinct selves and affects together at the surface. These psychogeographical connections come to bind geographical perspective (and urban lexicon) with cultural transformation. The doubling of representation of the self is dependent on the arrangement of lines in the textual or poetic space. This spatial configuration surpasses the somewhat bleak and uncertain desires of both speakers. The ending line "straight against the light I cross" turns the situation into a defiant walk of not merely crossing the street like any other day, but jaywalking. If the *dérive*, according to Glover, allows for "forms of consciousness" to move around urban space, then "Walking to Work" is an appropriate example of a *dérive* that documents the speaker's disparate social roles within an urban and textual milieu. Certainly, the last "I" is not the same as the other "I"s the reader encounters in the poem. This final "I" is proof that the fragmented selves, scattered throughout the poem, have constructed one transformed self that defies city regulations by walking "against" the light to "becoming the street" or an urban controlled entity.

Mapping the situations the distinct selves are presented in is one way of reading the poem psychogeographically. In other words, an urban poem can become a potential *dérive* when it attempts to trace transformations in the subject's behavior and forms of consciousness. "Walking to Work" drifts among multiple selves by taking in diverse representations and affects from city space. For O'Hara, feelings are "irreducible" and are "an expression of the power that holds the self together" (Mattix 55). This means that the subject cannot be reduced to one emotion or one consciousness, rather it is constituted of feelings and experiences of the material world that are considered "irreducible building blocks" that construct the self (Mattix 55). These produced testaments of self are what the *dérive* attempts to unfold; they become the narratives of events or situations constructed from the ambience that has left its impact on urban subjectivities.

Indirectly, the *dérive* is similar to *détournement* in that it tends to reconfigure space as the observer physically interacts with it. This means that a walk depends on chance to a certain extent, although Debord asserts that a *dérive* performed in a city "discourages entry into or exit from certain zones" since cities have "psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes" (Debord 1). So, the *dérive* is partly a walking act that places the observer in touch with the effects of ambient behavior experienced upon crossing city space, and partly a way of reaching awareness by "calculating" possibilities of "psychogeographical variations" that the urban space can leave upon its observer (Debord 1). The spatial relations constructed in O'Hara's "Walking to Work" permit an awareness of the *dériveur*'s emotional impressions as the "selves" interact with the urban world they traverse and experience changes in the condition of the ambient surroundings, thus permitting a poem to be read as a *dérive*.

Constructing Situations in Walk-poems

The poems that are based on the psychogeographical notion of walking are known as walking poems or walk-poems. Such "topographical writings" are said to represent "multi-layered planes in one place"[104], as well as an "alternative to the power structure of the city" (Smith 61-63). This means that to view walking as an alternative to the city's power structure is to view walk-poems as attempts to challenge poetic structure by engaging in "counter-elements", or in multi-layering planes, while simultaneously offering a constructed space to "externalize interior seeking" (Ammons 4). Moreover, to have an open structure means that the walk-poem must include "patterns" to totalize the observed experiences while it retains an "unreproducible" form since it is also open to "chance and the act of discovery" (Ammons 5). These latter characteristics of a walk-poem cannot take shape without mobility, be it physical or verbal. They also create synchronicity between walking and poetry, and thus make the construction of a walk-poem a "verbal source" or a documentation of its physical counterpart that is experienced during walking (Ammons 6, 8). A. R. Ammons in "The Poem is a Walk" clarifies the latter "synchronicity" between poetry and walking:

> As with a walk, a poem is not simply a mental activity: it has body, rhythm, feeling, sound, and mind, conscious and subconscious. The pace at which the poet walks (and thinks), his natural breath-length, the line he pursues, whether forthright and straight or weaving and meditative… all these things and many more figure into the 'physiology' of the poem (8).

Even though walk-poems are constructed to promote the "texture of everyday life" highlighted in the form of representations that make up an "inventory created by the city" (Solnit 152), this kind of narrative becomes a place to observe urban experiences constructed and documented by

[104] Hazel Smith defines place as a constantly shifting socio-economic inter-relations of place to other places and more fluid than map (55-56).

the mobile poet. While reading O'Hara through the *dérive*, the reader understands that a variety of representations make up the 'physiology' of his assemblages. These representations are non-referential to themselves or to their preconceived notions of meaning. Only in their (re)arrangement and positioning in the space of a poem can these representations take on their role or function in the overall constructed assemblage. This also means that language no longer functions as a Saussurean signifier-signified dynamic. The relationship is broken since the signifier or signified are not dependent on each other any longer; what matters is the space they take and the relations they form with other words, fragments, and/or lines. This kind of composition creates a "break in temporal unity of language or sentence" (Jameson 27). As a result, O'Hara's assemblages are adopted as an "aesthetic and cultural style" (Jameson 28) meanwhile allowing for other potential relationships to be formed by their spatial constructions.

To consider the poem a Situationist construct or a *dérive* is to examine how the theory of constructing situations works in verse form. In "The Theory of Moments and the Construction of Situations", the Situationists try to explain the construction of situations as a spatio-temporal technique of everyday life. The construction of the situations along and within the *dérive* are considered irreplaceable since they occur on the spur of a moment (for the moment consists of "ephemeral instances" that are unique and created by chance (par.2)). However, if one attempts to repeat the method by which the construction of a situation has been performed, then such a construction may be repeated (par.2). Although it is difficult or even challenging to capture same results in the construction of situations, the Situationists consider that there might be a possibility to reach an awareness of an absolute moment through a "series of situations" that tackle a "single theme" or a particular "desire" (par. 6). In O'Hara's walk-poems and urban assemblages, most constructed series of situations lead in one way or another to a transformed culmination in the

narrative or in the speaker's behavior and identity (although chance and a sense of urgency [noticed by way of wording] create distinct combinations every time). As discussed earlier, in "The Day Lady Died" and "Walking to Work," the situations constructed offer room to explore urban ambiences and their effects on the subject's performance and realization.[105] Moreover, in an earlier essay entitled "One More Try if You Want to Be Situationists," the Situationists argue for constructing situations that critique the existing society in order "to reach a higher harmony of form and content" (par.5).

Like the *dérive*, walking is considered an act of its own that is not only "peripatetic" (Solnit 17), but also proposes three motifs that are crucial to psychogeographical studies of poetry and culture. Rebecca Solnit, in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking,* suggests that the purpose of walking is to comprehend "place" and "oneself" through a documented "record" (Solnit 101). In parallel, Debord and the Situationists have constantly emphasized that their aim for critiquing urban art is by examining the effects of ambience on the behavior of individuals so as to detect and evaluate any opportunity for change and transformation. In keeping a record of the experienced spatial ambiences, the walker/ observer is able to trace significant characteristics of social urban behavior.

The construction of situations within the *dérive* is to construct experiences based on individual new desires. For O'Hara, these new desires appear in the form of experimentations with the nature of representations that "consciously keep the surface of the poem high and dry, not wet, reflective and self- conscious" (CP 497). Furthermore, representations, under the theory of constructing situations, become the material to provide "décor and ambience of power to

[105] In "The Day Lady Died," the news about the death of Billie Holliday causes the subject to stop walking and to stop breathing, whereas in "Walking to Work," the subject(s) somehow reaches a moment of self-realization and self-love after becoming one with the city street.

stimulate new sorts of behavior" (Sadler 105). This material is experienced primarily face to face between the *dériveur* and his direct engagement[106] with people and places in the city. Through this spatial exploration, the poet attempts to perceive the city as a theatre of encounter and play, and hopes to discover through the lived ambiences of the city, new assumed forms of social and cultural behavior.

O'Hara's Walk-poems: A Site for Situationist Documentation

Debord explains in the "Critique of Separation" that the possibilities for change and revolution lie in the destruction of already-established conventions in communication. To achieve this, Debord states that the form of the documentary[107] embodies "conditions of noncommunication" (par.2) and thus could be a suitable form for constructing situations that are not dependent upon memory and outworn forms of communication. Through active observation and engagement with urban space, the *dériveur* constructs situations from the experiences and ambiences recorded along his/her journey. These documented observations become the footage "existing at that moment to study organization of the place and event to produce desired ambiences" ("Report" par.53).

It is important to note that Debord in "Report on the Construction of Situations" distinguishes the *dérive* from *détournement* by being an activity that extends to "all known forms of human relations" in order to influence "historical evolution of sentiments" (par.52). The *dérive* becomes a study of social behavior and emotional development by examining collective ambiences of place and event. This means that the *dérive* is not solely a geographical exploration

[106] This participation is dependent on Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" that employs "irrationality, spontaneity, & the right to defeat theatre-as representation" (Sadler 106).
[107] This relates to the act of the documentary form in general and not to be confused with documentary poetry per se. At the same time, documentary poetry offers a similar end to the *dérive*: it seeks to uncover hidden truths about historical events and to explore pre-existing cultural mediums by documenting current social moments (http://docupoemunit.weebly.com/).

of urban space, but also a psychological study of ambiences and impressions that are associated with "emotional transference". This condition is central to the study of psychogeography as well as to the "quality of a moment" that is determined by investigating the situations that are constructed from the existing "collective ambiences" (par.53).

To study walk-poems as *dérives* is to explore them as open forms that embody the "interferences of situations" and "meshing of chance encounters and influences" that are experienced through the subject's drifting (Sadler 79). In so doing, walk-poems relay the web(s) of different relationships that are created by the surrounding ambience. O'Hara's lyrical poem "Walking" for instance brings together part-objects that are explicit to the human anatomy with emphasis on documenting the actual pressure points that the body performs during a walk. By mixing these part-objects together in open form, "Walking" becomes a space for documenting varied moments that reflect the multiple effects of urban ambience on subject(s). "Walking" as a *dérive* captures fragments of objective experiences that interact primarily and simultaneously with the speaker's physical act of walking, and secondly with part-objects observed through urban architecture and city ambience. The walk-poem begins with a speaker who appears to be uncomfortable with a "cinder" that "streams" in his eye. The lines that follow do not relate directly to its effect on the speaker, but to the effect of the movement of this particle in the "sunlight" (line 3) and in the "air" (line 4). The attention to the cinder switches in the next lines to other movements and effects such as dropping the "hot dog/ into one of Seagram Building's/ fountains" (lines 5-7) as the speaker takes a walk on a "watery and clear and windy" (line 8) day. While the focus in the beginning is on the effects of ambience experienced outside the speaker, the second stanza (the selected excerpt) resumes to convey the effects of walking on the body or parts of the body:

the shape of the toe as

It describes the pain

of the ball of the foot,

walking walking on

asphalt

the strange embrace of the ankle's

lock

on the pavement

squared like mausoleums

but cheerful

moved over and stamped on

slapped by winds

the country is no good for us (CP 476)

The (re)arrangement of human body parts is captured in fragments that are positioned in a descending order from one side of the page to the other.[108] As the speaker is "walking on/ asphalt", the reader is made to follow the subject's imagined pace while deliberately focusing on the "shape of the toe", "the ball of the foot", and the "ankle's/lock". Like walking (or putting one leg in front of another), the structural configuration permits the reader to imagine moving from the left side of the poem to the right side, and thus, engaging with the speaker's imagined experiences of walking "on the pavement". However, at this precise moment, other ambiences are added to the walking experience that are not part-objects of the leg or footstep. They are observations and emotional effects of the urban ambience that convey the *dériveur*'s

[108] An order that takes the form of footsteps marching, parallel and sequential.

idiosyncratic experience of the "pavement/ squared like mausoleums/ but cheerful/ moved over and stamped on". The mobility of the leg correlates with the mobility of other objects existing in the same space. This *dérive* unites the shapes of the pavement with "verbal elements" (Mattix 24) that express nuances of emotion that one feels after "moving over" and being "stamped on" and "slapped by" winds. In a way, the sum of these ambiences creates a "cheerful" effect that comes to contradict the implication of the last line of this assemblage. The reader who is engaged in the synchronous walk with the speaker is surprised by a fragmented and political comment like "the country is no good for us" although the reader can imagine the speaker's disappointment with country and nation. Nonetheless, the path the speaker takes in the lines that follow return to the pavement walk without any objects to "bump into" (line 23) despite the "poured concrete" (line 26) and "brassy/reflections" (lines 27-28) that the walker encounters. In the last stanza, the walker ends up at "The Narrows" (line 30) before seeing the range of the city of New York that is "greater than the Rocky Mountains" (line 33). As the reader accompanies the walker through cityscapes and encounters bodily bombardments and emotional reactions with the "concrete" jungle, there appears to be a sense of relief and pride toward the end of the journey as New York is depicted "greater" than one of America's ultimate natural sites.

The effects of ambience in this O'Hara poem comes from the play with part-objects that is arranged next to chance encounters occurring in urban space. This makes his assemblages textual spaces that embody a unity of distinct entities (observations, impressions, discontinuous thoughts) that are captured along the urban drift. To Debord, this process is said to produce and "realize" ("Report" par.49) a number of unnoticed effects of social and emotional ambience as they are constructed by the playful and crafty *dériveur*. "Walking" is a good example of how a walk-poem or a *dérive* attempts to portray a constant struggle of urban elements and blends

"subjective and objective modes of study" (Sadler 77) in order to examine the emotional experience that emanates from urban and spatial relations.

Constructed with a different structure than "Walking", "A Walk on Sunday Afternoon"[109] is formed by short lines aligned to look like an alley or a pedestrian path. It is made up of observations and impressions experienced by a walking subject who appears to be accompanied by a friend named George. As both subjects stroll through the city, the names of public places and urban landmarks suggest the couple's itinerary. With verbal elements that represent situations in motion, images such as the "gulls wheeled", the "sun boomed calmly", the "wind around", "walked round", "children jumped", "leaves shook", the "trolley trundled along" and the "wind waved" convey variations of ambience and affect. Nevertheless, these ambiences experienced by the *dériveur* occur around both architectural constructs and living things:

The gulls wheeled
several miles away
and the bridge, which
stood on wet-barked
trees, was broad and
Cold. Rio de Janeiro
is just another fishing
village, said George.
The sun boomed calmly
in the wind around
the monument. Texans
Cars honked. Leaves
on trees shook. And
above us the elevated
trolley trundled along.
The wind waved steadily
from the sea. Today we
have seen Bunker Hill
and the Constitution,
said George. Tomorrow,
probably, our country
will declare war. (CP 20-21)

[109] Dated 1950.

and Australians climbed
to the top to look
at Beacon Hill and
the Common. Later we
walked round the base
of the hill to the Navy
Yard, and the black
and white twigs stuck
in the sky above the old
Hull. Outside the gate
some children jumped
higher and higher off
the highway embankment.

The construction of situations, based on the *dérive*, comes from the actual journey experienced in a given space, and also and more importantly, it is one that documents the traversed experiences and sensations captured through spatial ambience. The documented observations make up the details of the traversed terrain and the attempts to "draw connections between areas, mental or geo-spatial, that otherwise remain distinct" (Lawrence 97). The union of distinct material is not only comprised of living and architectural combinations, but also those that bring together the seen (the physical) and the unseen (the mental). The ambience from the "broad" and "cold" bridge triggers an indirect observation of "Rio de Janeiro/ is just another fishing/ village". Although the walk appears to take place in Boston, the ambience the *dériveur* experiences takes him out of his present place and time. Being able to create this in his assemblage, O'Hara

attempts a poetic practice that maps potential relations and concerns that can operate through a dialectical[110] composition, and at the same time, can indirectly critique social behavior and emotional gestures that are experienced through the walk.

The "gulls wheeled", the wind blew "around the monument", "Texans and Australians climbed" to look at "Beacon Hill" and the "Common", "children jumped" off "the highway embankment", and "we walked round the base/of the hill" are all lines that merge situations of multiple subjectivities documented in mobility. As the *dériveur* travels through these places, his observations converge and interact with urban part-objects to create moments that are shared with the speaker's walking partner, George. The naming of the landmarks brings a sightseeing or tourist perspective to urban observation (while other impressions indicate daily encounters along the taken passageway) creating a tension in the building of situations so as to achieve different perspectives in the *dériveur*'s scope of vision. As these constructions come together in one journey, the effects of ambience on the walking partner (and/or reader) leave a transformative realization that only appears in the last line of the poem when "tomorrow, / probably, our country/ will declare war". As we have seen previously in "Walking", the latter statement of an approaching political instability challenges the quotidian stability of the casual urban walk with a friend. Therefore, by way of the *dérive*, O'Hara's poem is an "operation" (De Certeau 158) to reproduce the ambience captured during the walk only to reveal by the end of the walk (and/or poem) a personal and spontaneous "awareness" that was neither experienced nor intended at the beginning of the journey.

[110] The term "dialectical" follows Debord's notion of the dialectical theory which suggests that the artwork should critique itself by the relations it constructs. Debord argues that this will help with the reversal of the already-established efforts of past critiques by maintaining a distance from whatever entity that had been transformed into truth (*The Society of the Spectacle* par.206).

The Situationists consider the act of the *dérive* extremely useful because of its "ability to recognize the city's temporal strata through constant mobility" (Kaufmann 111). In highlighting the fact that psychogeographical tools are implemented as a study of time as much as a study of space, a single image by O'Hara captures temporality in the subtlest way. The line "the sun boomed calmly /in the wind around/ the monument" in "A Walk on Sunday Afternoon" can be seen as a perception that touches on an approximate time constructed simultaneously "around" location. The *dérive* attempts to reappropriate different perceptions of space-time relations into one assemblage (or even one line) by documenting and arranging diverse observations of ambience experienced in urban space. This makes the study of the *dérive* in O'Hara's pieces a technique of "double meaning" when exploring issues in space-time relations; the first being the "observation of present-day urbanism" and the second being the "development of hypotheses on the structure of the city" (Sadler 81). Accordingly, the *dérive* becomes a process that operates on two levels simultaneously and unites perceptions of time (present and future) and space (physical and mental) into a single ensemble.

In poetry, the *dérive* is experienced best by constructing and documenting temporal and spatial relations in discourse and poetic structure. Documentation achieves its psychogeographical purpose when it captures older conditions of recorded social behavior that have become redundant and inapplicable in the present society. Hence, it is the task of the *dériveur* to "capture intricacies of the city" (Coverley 50) by taking notes of his/her observation of the effects of ambience experienced during the walk or in states of body or object mobility. This makes the practical act of walking only one part of the technique. To refer back to the poem "A Walk on Sunday Afternoon", the intricacies of the city are mostly felt with O'Hara's choice of verbs that depict motion through space and time. Ultimately, his desire for such a lexicon

supplies the material needed to capture the experience of ambience and in turn attempt to trace "new objective conditions of behavior" ("Theory of the Dérive" 3) that come with the documentation of ambience. Furthermore, to perceive poetry in a psychogeographical light is to "comprehend buildings through their use, their history, and their collective generation of mood and meaning" which is said to naturally deter an analytical response in favor of one that is "full of assumptions shared by city dwellers" (Sadler 160).

Multiple-Orderings & Urban Metonymies

When Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* defines urbanism as "capitalism's method to control human or natural space and to shape it to its own décor" (par.169), he implies not only capitalism's power over working class space, but particularly over the architectural space as an "authoritarian decision making to shape the environment into one of abstraction" (par.173). Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" argues much earlier than Debord about the study of architecture being an efficient way to understand the mass and its relationship to art (18). However, Debord and the Situationists, in their formulation of the practices of psychogeography, ascertain the necessity for having tools in architecture (as well as in geography) to study and explore the historical consciousness of the city and its effects on man's behavior in society. Consequently, these tools allow its users to investigate urban space away from the power of the *spectacle* which is said to stupefy its social subjects and sidetrack them from their human right to effect radical change in their daily life tasks. Therefore, to rebel against succumbing to alienation is to achieve an immediate realization of the subject's separation from this type of society and to getting involved in overcoming it by taking matters into their own hands. This means that the social subjects would "directly produce their own life and modes of self-activity and collective practice" (Best & Kellner 3).

Faced with "crippling" capitalist conditions, the *dérive* is the "art of experience" which is assumed to follow or perceive life "free from any form of representation" or any form of decision making that the *spectacle* has control over (Kaufmann 127). This concept is an early vision of what psychogeography has come to represent. In "Formulary for a New Urbanism", Ivan Chtcheglov highlights a key concept that has been adopted by Debord and has become a pillar of Situationist philosophy: to consider psychogeography as an architectural method for comprehending social urban behavior. The "play with architecture" (par.17), Chtcheglov suggests, is the "simplest means" of "articulating" time and space and of "modulating" reality in constructing situations (par.11). He also argues that this "new vision of time and space" that comes from "experimentation with patterns of behavior" in the city would eventually open up relations to "desires, forces and events, past, present and to come" (par. 21). This means that by following an architectural approach to understanding history, one can attempt to conceive of urbanism as a "means of knowledge" of spatial relations and social behavior.

Exploring O'Hara's urbanism through psychogeography is to study his poetic assemblages as an open medium of 'desires, events, and temporality' that are born out of the surrounding urban ambience while performing the act of walking. According to Debord's psychogeography, it is "experimentation by means of concrete interventions in urbanism" ("Report" par.49). The importance of this definition is that it can also describe the act of the *dérive* and its necessary function in urban experimentation. For O'Hara, the constructed assemblages in his poetic experimentations take the city as the source for his observations, as well as the means for documenting the projected and experienced urban ambience. In the form of "multiple orderings"[111], the ambience of the city is transposed from the streets to the text by

[111] Orderings mean in this instant a space embodied by signs, objects, and images, and not a space for chaos (Clarke 57). It can also be related to the various social stratifications found in one city grid.

constructing situations made up of the "desires, forces and events, past, present and to come" that Chtcheglov claims to be essential to experiment with for a "new vision" of urbanism.

Although most O'Hara's walk-poems portray the journey of the speaker on foot in urban space, other walk-poems do not necessarily include a visible or a clear walking subject. In "Poem (for Mario Schifano)"[112], O'Hara's speaker maps the effects of ambience that reside in multiple orderings. Whether in urban part-objects or allusions to people and places, the speaker situates his/her orderings without saying much about the act of walking. The *dérive* works here as a connector of ambiences that are produced by the situations constructed when combining part-objects with multi-layering context. The result is an assemblage that posits a visual and imaginary representation similar to one tracing a journey on foot:

I to you and you to me the endless oceans of

dilapidated crossing

everybody up

the stench of whoopee steerage and candy

cane, for

never the cool free call of the brink

but cut it out this

is getting to be another poem about Hart Crane (CP 477)

Addressed to Mario Schifano, a painter who collaborated[113] with O'Hara in his final days, "Poem" follows similar conditions of a "self-talk" construction. The multiple orderings of part-objects vary among naming food, things, weather conditions, seasons, countries, celebrities and

[112] Dated 1964.
[113] A limited edition of their collaboration (1963-1964) was published under *Words & Drawings* (Feb. 2018). Note: "Poem" served as a catalogue text for Schifano's 1964 art show at the Odyssia Gallery, New York (Schwabsky 1).

random city elements. These distinct elements are conveyed as fragments and are positioned as separate entities constructed on the page. Like a map, the reader has to explore every line as if it's a distinct "street"[114] that carries its own emotional and urban ambience. Without much mobility occurring to the part-objects themselves, the reader functions here as the interlocutor who moves from one side of the poem to the next (on the page) so as to grapple with these parts-objects and experience the dialectical aspect behind the drift of such a poem.

In the first stanza, the speaker addresses his relationship to his fellow friend or perhaps his reader (represented by "you") as exhaustive and distant, like "the endless oceans of dilapidated crossing". Without any syntactical connectors and conjunctions[115], the speaker disappears into a set of distinct effects that comprise experience (impersonal and personal) and taste that are contrasted with the speaker's addressee. These effects come in fragments, and form and map unusual metonymies as they are posited in close proximity to other part-objects like food ("candy cane") or speech fragments ("whoopee" and "cut it out") that are casually uttered in daily life-situations. The first stanza ends with a line of self-reflection[116] and ironically with a self-warning to avoid writing a poem about "Hart Crane".

Stanza two brings together fragments that construct unfamiliar situations that portray the speaker's taste:

do you find

the hot dogs here better than at

Rosati's, the pepper mills

[114] In reference to the opening excerpt of this chapter from Revely-Calder's "Frank O'Hara in Transit".
[115] "*but*" (line 7) does not perform the function of a conjunction since it does not follow or oppose the logic of the previous fragment.
[116] Like metapoetry, O'Hara most often constructs lines in his urban poems that convey that the poem itself is aware of its own making.

lousier, the butter softer

the acrid dryness of your paper

already reminded me of

New York's sky in August before the

nasal rains

the soot comes down in a nice umber for the scalp (CP 477-478)

The phrasal interjections like "the hot dogs better here than/ Rosati's, the pepper mills/ lousier, the butter softer/ the acrid dryness of your paper" capture the speaker's desire for personal and "discordant"[117] constructs in his assemblage. In arranging multiple food and consumer goods together, the speaker portrays an unfamiliar relationship to "New York's sky in August before the/ nasal rains". Semantically speaking, how do better hot dogs, lousier pepper mills, softer butter and dry paper remind the speaker of New York's sky? This union of effects of unusual ambiences, as they share a common space, captures indirectly the speaker's emotional memory of the city's summer sky before the rainfall. Although the last line of this stanza suggests that the rain makes the "soot" come down in a "nice umber for the scalp", it is not intended to produce a serious effect, only one which is ironic and at the same time relevant to the sky of New York. The openness of the speaker's observed ambience combined with chance encounters of urban space compose these random orderings that come together on the page. More orderings are revealed in the third stanza while an important speculation, and perhaps transformation, finally conveys the role of walking in poetry composition:

and when the cartoon

of a pietà

[117] Influenced by Grace Hartigan's art composition, O'Hara's poetry functions through "textual discordance" which creates a "network" of external relations (Blasing 36).

begins to resemble Ava Gardner

in Mexico

you know you're here

welcome to the bull ring

and Chicago and the mush in the enclosures

so brave

so free so blind

where the drawings are produced on skin, not

forever

to stay under

it's not the end

but for tattoos, you will

like it here, being away and walking

turning it into sky again

In creating allusions to the Renaissance and to the sculptures of Michelangelo, the form of the third stanza descends like an escalator that passes by Hollywood icon Ava Gardner to bull rings in Mexico and to reminiscences from Chicago. Using names of celebrities, from "Hart Crane" in the opening stanza to "Ava Gardner", the fragments gain abstraction as they engage with names of countries like "Mexico" or cities like "Chicago". The uses of proper names of celebrities and toponyms, just like consumer goods and commodities, are only examples of how O'Hara cunningly develops the surface representations in the space of his poems. Nevertheless, these surface representations construct the fragments that make up his flamboyant signifiers. The image of the "pieta" for instance returns by building spatial relationships with "drawings are

produced on skin" and "tattoos". By the end of the stanza, the *dériveur* resumes the desire to communicate with the absent addressee by playing with the notion of place represented with the words "here" and "away". In the last line of the poem, the word "away" with its close proximity to "walking" suggests that the act of walking in New York could produce the effect of 'letting go' and indicates a clearing of the mind when the walk "turns" the situation toward looking at the "sky again". This ending line suggests a positive turn by the end of the walk as all the prior ambiences have led the *dériveur*-poet into an emotional realization. "Poem (for Mario Schifano)" could be read as a *dérive* for it brings multiple orderings and relations together into one textual space, and thus, proves that the construction of situations in poetry is possible. Furthermore, by documenting the distinct relations in such space (even though they are constructed in fragments), the poem becomes a grid to map urban, social, cultural, historical, and metonymic relations in verse form.

While most walk-poems follow a similar conditioning of the *dérive* experience in regards to the effects of ambience, O'Hara's word choice is open to chance and to the spirit of mobility, from walk-poems that intend to be synchronous in representing the act of walking, to other walk-poems that appear to be less direct yet still offer effective representation of the *dérive*. In the following examples of walk-poems, walking is not only a mobile performance of urban elements contained in assemblages, but also a place where the effects of a global ambience can be detected on the behavior and emotion of its evasive speakers and subjects.

In "Rhapsody"[118], O'Hara's *dérive* alternates between mapping *local* sites sporadically throughout the five-stanza poem while shifting attention to the outside world as a way to gather

[118] Dated 1959. By definition, the title can reflect the compositional elements that are examined through the poetic *dérive*: the "integrated" and "irregular" composition of "emotional utterance" and "extravagant discourse". (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhapsody)

some sense of a collective and global ambience. The speaker's journey starts on "Madison Avenue" which is represented in the first stanza as a "portal" (line 2), a "door to heaven" (line 2), a "doorway" (line 11), a "tunnel" (line 13) into midtown New York. The speaker's initial perception of this avenue as a passageway contributes to the idea of connecting the speaker to the "jungle" (line 4) of possibilities that are about to follow. In the second stanza, the speaker's drift takes him to the jungle of awkward relationships where the imaginary and the social ambiences come together. Lines such as "agony's needlework grows up around the unicorn" (line 16) meets with "when I see Gianni I know he's thinking of John Ericson/ playing the Rachmaninoff 2nd or Elizabeth Taylor/ taking sleeping pills" (line 18-20). These lines perform distinct effects that create an unorthodox mix of ambience as the city portal influences the speaker's thoughts and observations. Nonetheless, in the third and fourth stanzas respectively, urban and social relations are constructed by way of arranging diverse and global subjectivities into one local space:

a sight of Manahatta in the towering needle
multi-faceted insight of the fly in the stringless labyrinth
Canada plans a higher place than the Empire State Building
I am getting into a cab at 9th Street and 1st Avenue
And the Negro driver tells me about a $120 apartment
"where you can't walk across the floor after 10 at night
not even to pee, cause it keeps them awake downstairs"
no I don't like that "well I didn't take it"
perfect in the hot humid morning on my way to work
a little supper-club conversation for the mill of the gods

you were there always and you know all about those things
as indifferent as an encyclopedia with your calm brown eyes
it isn't enough to smile when you run the gauntlet
you've got to spit like Niagara Falls on everybody or
Victoria Falls or at least the beautiful urban fountains of Madrid
as the Niger joins the Gulf of Guinea near the Menemsha Bar
that is what you learn in the early morning passing Madison Avenue
where you've never spent any time and stores eat up light (CP 326)

The journey which the speaker takes from *"*Madison Avenue" resumes toward "Manahatta" and the "towering needle" of the Chrysler Building as they are perceived through the "multi-faceted" lens of a fly. This insect perspective may be understood as analogous to O'Hara's diverse and dynamic constructions of mixing imagination with surrounding ambience. As the speaker continues walking, his observations lead him to a "stringless labyrinth" that consists of other architectural structures like the "Empire State Building" and neighboring "Canada". This urban labyrinth leads to the speaker's shifting in direction. Uncertain whether the speaker is still viewing the city through the eyes of a fly, he stops walking and gets into "a cab at 9th Street and 1st Avenue". Inside this city maze, the "cab" introduces a different type of space with its own set of orderings. The encountered macrocosm of the city is juxtaposed with the microcosm of the car space and the relationship between the speaker and the cab driver. In such a space, the speaker engages in casual everyday conversation, and specifically in this section, the conversation is about renting a cheap "$120 apartment" in the city. Whether it is the cab driver or the passenger talking, it is not clear. What is evident though is that no one would rent an apartment where walking is not permitted "after 10 at night". For this reason, the speaker concludes by saying:

"well I didn't take it". This shows that the speaker is not willing to accept a curfew for walking, let alone walking in one's own apartment. As this "supper-club conversation" comes to an end, the journey resumes (unknown if still by car or on foot) and reveals the time of day ("humid morning") and the desired destination ("work").

In the fourth stanza, the speaker addresses an absent "you". By addressing someone who is presumably close, the tone is that of giving advice to a friend on how to be "indifferent" toward "everybody". The advice suggests that "it isn't enough to smile" and thus the absurd solution is "to spit…on everybody". Constructed in the form of similes, the humorous tone of the speaker suggests outrageous ways of spitting. Here is where other forms of orderings and external relations are introduced into the stanza. The speaker uses the analogy of spitting to the rushing waters of "Niagara Falls", "Victoria Falls", "the beautiful urban fountains of Madrid", and the "Niger". These allusions to natural locations outside New York indirectly alters the nature of the drift and the journey itself. Such names of international locales form a broader map of relations between the speaker and place, or between "mental or geo-spatial" (Lawrence 97) areas that remain otherwise distinct. So, the speaker's *dérive* not only turns our attention to details of local urban landscape and personal effects of ambience (whether produced through small-talk or scattered points of view), but most importantly, and by way of syntactical (re)arrangement, it captures indirectly the effects of social behavior such as acts of smiling or spitting in public space while the speaker crosses "Madison Avenue" in the "early morning".

By way of psychogeographical experimentation, the *dérive* itself ends with yet another form of transformation the speaker undergoes along his urban journey. The interactions constructed from the numerous effects of ambience and the naming of places positioned beside them leads to a personal proclamation or awareness in the last stanza. Although the drift takes

the reader along the subject's local observations, personal impressions, and passageways in city space, it also traces abrupt routes and relations outside New York City before returning to "St. Mark's Place sorting my poems" (line 43) and to the "enormous bliss of American death" (line 47). Only in the last stanza does the speaker transform into the poet-maker of this piece when his urban drift into the jungle comes to an end. With an homage to New York and "this mountainous island" (line 44), the speaker-poet or *dériveur* takes one last "portal" to the "holy ones" (line 45) of Tibet and back to the "enormous bliss of American death" to which he "historically/ belong[s]". The *dériveur* certainly proclaims in the end his desire to be considered holy, yet also loyal to his American roots and belonging. This celebration and sense of awareness is found in most endings of O'Hara's walk-poems. When read in a psychogeographical light, the sum of ambiences constructed in his poems offer a discourse and a narrative of "projection(s)…of a temporal experience" (Kaufmann 109) as they celebrate "the incidental and inconsequential" (Solnit 150) meanderings of the urban walker. While the incidental represents a textual openness to diverse planes that occur through chance encounters, the inconsequential is represented by a fragmentation that remains as such in a web or network of distinct ambient and emotional experiences.

***Dérive*: Passenger on a Locomotive**

In "3rd Avenue El", O'Hara's inventory of the city consists of multi-layered planes that mesh part-objects from urban space with the speaker's emotional experiences and openness to chance encounters along the traversed path. However, this path, as the title suggests, takes the form of a train ride:

Cold, dark, wet, the lanterns

of Chinatown are hung with icicles

and I am standing on a carpet
atop the telephone pole. And

in the near future rumbles
the vehicle of my adventure,
winding its monstrous way as if
I were the waiting minotaur. (CP 130)

During this journey on the "El" train, the observations documented embody multi-layered planes in a space that "speed[s] swimmingly" by (stanza 4, line 16) like watching bodies passing in motion. At a much faster pace than walking, the representations of the city and the emotions that rise from mobility and proximity cause immediate effects that are simultaneous to the rushed and transient observations (auditory and visual) brought forward by the speaker-as-passenger. It appears that the city elements become animated with the help of emotional gestures posited by the passenger. As the "lanterns of Chinatown" are "hung" in the "cold" and "wet" air, the speaker-passenger seems to be in a "standing" position at the start of the journey. As soon as the train moves, the speaker experiences his mobility by becoming the train that "rumbles" in the "vehicle of [my] adventure". The ambience captured by the locomotive is made to overlap with the speaker's imagination and identity. He also perceives the train as a mythical creature which is said to be "winding its monstrous way" like that of a "waiting minotaur" [119] . This overlap comes to suggest an arbitrariness between the speaker-as-passenger and the train-as-object which makes the imagery engaging as well as utterly idiosyncratic. These distinct transformative planes, which

[119] The inclusion of the minotaur elevates the waiting experience to new heights since the minotaur is known to represent a creature that guards the labyrinth (perhaps in this case the city grid) and is often ready to pounce or move, but in this case is made to wait like another passenger on a train.

do not meet ordinarily, create a unique amalgam of subjective representations (whether train or minotaur) into a single poetic assemblage.

While the first two stanzas are made to depict the standing position of the speaker-passenger on a moving train, the last two stanzas resume the flow of the speaker's journey as if he himself has been completely transformed in place of the moving object i.e. the moving train:

> In trances, past turbines,
> With empty lunch boxes and all
> The cracking evening journals
> I speed swimmingly to 106th St.
>
> sixty blocks beyond my goal,
> and numb with fear for that devil
> river, the munching steel wheels,
> and beyond, the open mountains. (CP 130)

The speaker-as-train switches from a standing position of a passenger to becoming the train itself speeding "sixty blocks beyond [his] goal". Along this ride, "trances" and impressions of visual and auditory snapshots are captured rapidly by the moving train: the "turbines" are heard, the "lunch boxes" are found "empty", someone perhaps is flipping through the "evening journal" and the "cracking" of the pages is heard, and as it approaches "that devil river", its "steel wheels" are "munching" forward and "beyond" the range of the "open mountains". The constructed assemblage forms a united sensory experience out of the ambience of the surrounding environment (whether inside the train or outside). The multi-layering observations, although represented by part-objects, construct a texture of mobility as the passenger-morphing-

train traverses "sixty blocks beyond" its usual destination. Since the *dérive* by definition is the "rapid passage through varied ambiences" while paying close attention to the "awareness of psychogeographical effects" (Debord 1), "3rd Avenue El" can perform the workings of a *dérive* by merely constructing transient impressions and situations out of a moving subject; one which has been physically transformed from a passenger into an El train.

Effects of Dada in Composing Psychogeographical Mobility

O'Hara's walk-poems show the "inconsequentiality" of quotidian representations by constructing assemblages that offer an indirect self-critique. Like Debord's thoughts on *détournement* and *dérive*, O'Hara's assemblages pose a complicit new form of experimentation which constructs a "complete insubordination to habitual influences" (Solnit 164) from the daily encounters and attractions of the terrain, so as to offer possibilities for art to critique any subject within its scope. After all, and to refer to Walter Benjamin, authenticity comes from exhibition and not from production. By way of exhibition, the poet can offer and display possible connections within his poetic canvas and communicate them toward the outside world or the reader's world. Moreover, Benjamin believes that Dada art works in a similar manner to the act of exhibition because it is a form of experimentation that utterly focuses on contemplation and not sales value. For Benjamin, this contemplation (or self-critique) becomes a space to create "other forms of production" for the sake of "social distraction" and "moral shock effect" (Benjamin 17).

The inconsequentiality of O'Hara's urban constructs is linked to his inspiration in dada art. In *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters*, Marjorie Perloff argues that O'Hara exhibits in

"Why I Am Not a Painter"[120] the workings of his poetic design that can be read under the "aura of Dada inconsequentiality" (Perloff 39):

> One day I am thinking of
> a color: orange. I write a line
> about orange. Pretty soon it is a
> whole page of words, not lines.
> Then another page. There should be
> so much more, not of orange, of
> words, of how terrible orange is
> and life. Days go by. It is even in
> prose, I am a real poet. My poem
> is finished and I haven't mentioned
> orange yet. It's twelve poems, I call
> it ORANGES. (CP 262)

At first glance, the last stanza of the poem, offers a sense of spontaneity and offhandedness in composing an art form. It is even open to the speaker's engagement with chance as an element that "makes poetry experience itself" (Lehman 339). However, what is read as spontaneous may really be the product of calculation, for the speaker proposes that "There should be/ so much more, not of oranges, of/ words". Exhibition and contemplation are represented in O'Hara poems by (re)arranging the discourse into possible idiosyncratic constructions that would highlight and critique their own fabrication, and thus, offer a sense of immediacy and transparency of the poem's making.

[120] Dated 1956.

"Boston"[121] is a very good example of how O'Hara's speaker illustrates the process of dada inconsequentiality in his urban poetry. Even though the poem's title is not found in the poem, from a psychogeographical perspective, it indicates the transformative space where the speaker's observations of "beside the dumpy airport rotting soon/ a once-romantic colonial port/ the city guards" (O'Hara 59) are noted. The exhibition of urban elements conveys an idiosyncratic panoply of emotions felt by the mobile subject as he observes simultaneously nature ("gummy sky", "blinding grin of clouds") and the city's architecture in his ambient crossing:

> This time I can pick out the buildings my
> friends laugh and sulk interestingly in;
> with tears of relief I come roaring, thin
> and stinging lonely in the earth's flat eye. (CP 59)

The ambient emotions portrayed in the first two lines of stanza two are a sum of imagined sentiments ("laugh" and "sulk"*)* observed inside the homes of "friends" whom the speaker recognizes as he approaches their apartment buildings from the sky. In the same manner the passenger and machine become one in "3rd Avenue El," the subject here takes the form of a plane "roaring" as he descends to the ground with "tears of relief". Like De Certeau's "scopic voyeur" (De Certeau 93), the subject experiences a totalizing view of the city from the sky, including homes of friends and people he knows, yet at the same time he is "stinging lonely" like a plane that normally descends solo on its landing strip. Toward the end of the third stanza and the beginning of the fourth, the subject iterates his mobile perspective of this panoramic observation as "they run fast on fences/ towards me!" This line conveys a type of drift that is created by

[121] Dated 1951.

aircraft speed, but made to appear as if the objects ("fences") are "running" fast in the opposite direction toward the subject before alluding to the mythical "Icarus" in the final two lines of the poem:

> would have plunged like Icarus' foot 'tween sun
>
> and sea. Yet now on land, find close consort. (CP 59)

The speaker assures that the drift that is taking place is one that moves from sky to land and probably from a position of anxiety toward one of "close consort". Behind this dada inconsequentiality lies a poem that can be read as a *dérive* for a number of reasons. The first is the act of drifting that attempts to trace the effects of ambiences that get into the speaker's scope of vision, not from walking this time but from a speeding and descending altitude. The second is related to the emotional and "physical"[122] changes the speaker goes through as he passes across distinct spheres. From sky to land, the speaker's mood switches from "heavy wings lurch[ing] in a gummy sky" (stanza one) to "close consort" (last stanza) as he approaches land, home and friends. Based on proximity and mobility, the speaker expresses his personal relations with people and places as he imagines coming into close contact with both. As this occurs, the speaker with "tears of relief" (stanza two) experiences a change in his emotional behavior as he approaches land and his friends. The emotional changes caused by the effects of ambience on the speaker's behavior can easily produce a *dérive* from this dada construct and a *dériveur* out of its transforming[123] subject.

The mode of dada composition in "Boston" highlights issues pertaining to surface representation as a technique "by combining textual enunciation with the material realm of the…

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[122] This refers to the doubling of "I" where it becomes possible or "confusing" to detect the passenger (subject) from the plane (object).

[123] O'Hara regularly alludes to Greek mythology in his urban pieces. From a psychogeographical point of view, this can be seen as part and parcel of appropriating historical narratives into present time conditions and imagery.

cultural" (Watkin 153). In the same way that O'Hara uses surrealism to bring distinct parts together and not necessarily as a "reflection of unconscious thought" (Anfam 78), dada composition is considered by the Situationists as an important component in its relationship to psychogeographical methodology; it too creates representations of social space as a distraction from the familiar and the ordinary. This distraction, by way of the *dérive*, produces a "social geography of the city" which opposes "academic geography" and its "homogeneity" of capitalist space (Sadler 92). O'Hara's "Boston" creates a space for the intermingling of social and emotional geography within urban landscape markers.

Similarly, the Situationist Guy Debord in *Memoires* constructs a collage book that clearly represents a network of representations of social space in color and poetry. With associations to the inconsequentiality process of dada art, Debord's so-called "anti-book" has been considered primarily an art book which arranges and designs text in a way that displays spatial relations rather than relations with memory. It is said to use "prefabricated elements" (Kaufmann 102) in an assemblage of words and color that occupy its pages. Constructed as a visual and urban book, *Memoires* is an appropriate example to portray dada inconsequentiality in a psychogeographical light as it relates well with O'Hara's poetic and spatial operations. In a collage that dates back to September 1953[124], one particular sample shows drips of yellow splashed randomly on the white space of what appears to be a map. It supposedly depicts an aerial view with sentences that are positioned like buildings or streets across the space of the city grid. Made to be read like a *carte-du-tendre* or cartography, the collage offers a space free for the reader to wander in. For the purpose of this dissertation, I have arranged the sentences that are constructed randomly across the pages into one assemblage from top to bottom and from left to right:

[124] Appendix A Figure 4.

Ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui l'urbanisme, c'est-a-dire l'art d'aménager et d'embellir des divertissements

L'intrusion dans les fêtes futures

Les années n'infirment que les membres et nous avons déforme les passions

La dérive

En effet, c'est un jeu

Cette gratuite du mou-vement des groups qui se forment et ce déforment et qui pourtant ne pourraient suivre d'autre itineraire

Nous étions quelques- uns

L'apparition des dériveurs

Revenir tout le monde exterieur d'une intensite s'interet

Dans une aventure d'une telle envergure il serait ridicule de vouloir fixer des priorités ou des suites

Aider à créer une situation (Debord 27)

Examined visually, the readers' role is one that assumes the role of explorer of space. Regardless of the position they assume, the sentence fragments function in a "meta-linguistic register" that forms a "narrative system evoked indirectly through secondary details" (Kaufmann 102). This narrative captures the effects of ambience rather than things. In the selected sample, the sentences seem to portray thoughts about the psychogeographical effects of the *dérive* in urban space on its participants. This network of fragment associations in textual space makes such an art "an art of occupation rather than rootedness" (Kaufmann 103). Consequently, the purpose of such a reading is to reflect the reader's experience as an invited drifter in textual space. Furthermore, it is said to offer the readers a space to "wander without resistance" and to freely

alternate in "emotional and ambient intensity" (Sadler 90) as they engage with the constructed space. Similarly, in O'Hara's assemblages of potential *dérives*, the reader-as-explorer is faced with fragments that form synecdochal webs of surface representations that s/he would map or trace in order to reappropriate their own desire.

From the psychogeographical background of dada and surreal constructs, where art is able to transform the mundane into the marvelous, the *dérive* attempts to capture the material of quotidian elements found all around us in living space into potential arrangements that could convey awareness or change. This "surreality" (Coverley 34), which is made up of the real and the imagined, the physical and the mental, poses a mission in writing similar to that of drifting or walking in the city. The text, like the street, becomes a space where challenges of our daily perceptions and emotional behavior are documented and studied. The Situationists consider that surreal imagery is to be constructed around "chance and possibilities of everyday life" (Solnit 160) and thus should come to document a "way of life under threat" (Coverley 35) while utilizing the existing conditions and ambiences that are found in urban society as feasible elements of its critique.

In O'Hara's "Night Thoughts in Greenwich Village"[125], the speaker suggests that the constructed poetic discourse should offer a critique of its own making. The speaker declares in the following lines that "what we say is dry" (line 9), "but/ wheeling ridicule our/ meanings" (lines 9-11). In the form of a dialogue between an absent addressee and a plural first person, the speaker proposes that "wheeling", which is a playful form of communication or interaction (defined by the urban dictionary as the "phase before dating"[126] or before serious commitment),

[125] Dated 1950 or 1951.
[126] https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Wheeling

makes meaning "silly" (line 12) and "absurd" (line 13) but never "dry". Like flirting, perhaps O'Hara is proposing that in constructing idiosyncratic (and poetic) expression, "wheeling" helps in (re)arranging "part-objects" or "splintered subjectivity" (Smith 52) as a method of reworking the structure and content of discourse. In uniting part-objects together by parataxis for example, distinct elements of diverse ambiences are posited in close proximity to each other in order to communicate a heterogeneous fragment. In doing so, the poet implies that such constructed fragments or experiments in discourse may be more useful than "saying" because wheeling attempts to "ridicule" or critique meaning when it is implemented to a constructed space for discourse transformation. The importance of this poem lies in its implication of the misuses of language and of the difficulty of "saying" what one means. By the end of the poem, the speaker calls himself "the dada/ baby!" (lines 17-18) as if to ironically and humorously undermine his intention behind dada's playful decomposition and its relationship to composing meaning instead of breaking it. Like most of O'Hara's witty assemblages, when read in the light of the *dérive*, a subtle trace of awareness or transformation is noticed in the last lines when his speaker suggests that:

> Art is sad and
> life is vapid. Can we thumb
> our nose at the very sea? (CP 38)

This can imply that the outcome of art, constructed out of (over)used material, portrays sadness instead of inspiration. At the same time, art could be understood as superior to life because it has the ability to create feelings that offer possibilities to explore life; a life which by itself does not offer much. Based on this idea, the reader can assume that O'Hara's assemblages are constructed as gateways that offer a flirting or a "wheeling" of information and experiences that life on its

own is incapable of doing. Therefore, by reading O'Hara through the *dérive*, the reader can see that everyday conditions and thoughts are made to intermingle with the ambiences of city life in order to challenge and critique the effects of discourse on social behavior and emotional expression.

The *Flâneur* & the *Dériveur*

Détournement was examined in the previous chapter as a tool to reshape and explore new possibilities in textual and social relations. As for the *dérive*, Debord's second most influential technique in psychogeography, it is considered a walking act that presumes other shapes and tasks of experimental and poetic intervention. It is often mistaken for the act of *flânerie* which is generally defined as a casual walk or aimless stroll taken by an observant person walking through the metropolis.

The *flânerie* and the *dérive* are both acts of walking although the role of the *dériveur* is considered by the Situationists as slightly different than that of the *flâneur*. The *dériveur* explores the places we are drawn to and the places we are discouraged from. This means that the role of the *dériveur* is to experience urban ambience and examine its effect on himself/herself and on his/her habitat in order to be able to critique and hopefully transform his present living and alienating conditions. In reading O'Hara's walk-poems, the role of the *dériveur* is not only one who observes and records the effects of urban ambience, but one who transposes those emotional effects and cultural gestures into poetic form, thus making the act of the *dérive* one responsible for ways of poetic expression and composition synchronic to moving bodies (i.e. subjects and orderings) into one space.

As for the *flâneur*, he is considered to be quite spontaneous in his stroll. Likewise, Poe's "Man of the Crowd" is represented as a "detached" and "nostalgic" observer who "proclaims

wonders of urban life and acknowledges the flux" (Coverley 28). Baudelaire translates Poe's *flâneur* as someone who is a contradictory walker for he is said to "unite with the crowd and its movement" while remaining a passive observer (Coverley 28-29). There is a slight difference between the latter characterization of the *flâneur* and the role of the *dériveur*. While they are both set to roam in the space of a city grid, the *dériveur* walks with the intention to examine and to study urbanism (Kaufmann 116). Therefore, the *dériveur* is not as aimless and is perceived as a type of walker who contradicts the following qualities that usually depict the *flâneur* type: "never interactive," carries an "erotic gaze", is "gender-specific" and has "class-related" privileges (McDonough 73-74). These characteristics of the walker archetype seem very distant from what Debord and the Situationists anticipated of their *dériveur*. However, arguments made by Walter Benjamin and Michel De Certeau convey closer notions of the city walker to Debord's formulation of the *dériveur*.

Even though Walter Benjamin presents a description of a *flâneur* that best suits an observer of the Arcades, his walker or observer of the city is a "stranger among strangers" whose main purpose is to constantly "resist and accept commercialism" (Solnit 155). This *flâneur* is not as aimless and passive as the original Poe type. Benjamin believes that the act of walking is a daily struggle with the "commercial forces" of the times and with history that "conjures the past and not only his" (Benjamin 1). This means that the *flâneur* is represented by Benjamin as "quiet yet vigilant and subversive" (Coverley 31) because his walks portray an intimate concern with the changes undergoing his fast growing city. Benjamin also suggests that the *flâneur*'s detective-like observations "record moments in microcosmic life" and a "knowledge of dwelling" found in his attention and keenness for images (Benjamin 3-4). This description of the *flâneur* that is formulated by Benjamin is highly pertinent to Debord's *dériveur* because of two

key elements: the first is the recording of the effects of ambience as they are encountered in the city grid, and the second is the social and spatial relationships that are experienced between the walker, the urban street, and the city's history.

Debord's *dériveur* is never purposeless. The *dériveur* has a mission in walking or in being active: to keep a record of the traversed ambience while attuning to chance for shaping and structuring. By being open to chance, both Benjamin's *flâneur* and the Situationists's *dériveur* act as researchers who come across key information for survival no matter how banal they may first appear to be. In a psychogeographical light, this is believed to create "new fixations" (Coverely 44) that are random, though at the same time significant to exploring emotional and spatial urban relations. Similarly, in O'Hara's walk-poems, the speaker-*dériveur* is one who plays with language in such a way as to depict city space (as not only a space to diffuse banalization) indeed creating a space for constructing metonymies that might just hold essential critiques or potential transformations in culture and life.

The identity of the urban walker as an explorer of his dwelling is likewise portrayed at the heart of De Certeau's philosophy of "Walking in the City". In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau describes the city as an "operational concept" creating "its own space and becomes its own universal subject" and the walker would be the daily practitioner of these city space operations (93). However, this presumed identity of walker is linked to what De Certeau calls "texturology" (91) of representation, where the walker is considered a "scopic voyeur" (93) of the city who observes and records city space as a whole, taking into consideration the city as a sum of all its components. On the one hand, this totalizing eye of the walker is relevant to

Benjamin's formulations of the *flâneur* (by his keen investigation of his walking space and of his history) and to Debord's *dériveur* (by his experience of the city in its totality or entirety[127]).

On the other hand, the function of the city-as-concept for De Certeau is to offer "a space for appropriation and transformation" (De Certeau 105) with a subject "that is constantly enriched by new attributes and interferences" (De Certeau 106) which s/he projects unto an imaginary totalization created in the walker's visual constructions. Consequently, the "migrational or metaphorical city slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" as the walker articulates "poetic geography" through the process of naming place as a "direction to a social space" and not to the literal (De Certeau 107). This makes out of the act of walking a construct for inventing space; whether an exploration of another place (the exotic) or a rhetoric of semantic places that are made up of fragments of daily urban life. De Certeau's formulation for transposing the effects of the act of walking unto rhetoric and discourse proves more viable to the role of the *dériveur* than to the role of the original *flâneur*, especially when it comes to constructing new spatial relations in written or documented art form.

The fragments that construct De Certeau's concept of the city make out of language "a repository of possibilities" and of walking an "act of speaking that language and of selecting from those possibilities" (Solnit 164). This concept can be directly linked to Debord's *dérive* when it is perceived not as walking, but as a "pedestrian speech act" (McDonough 75) that would communicate the ambience of the urban landscape and the walker's desire. The *dérive* as such becomes the discourse that actualizes urban space by showing its projected language.

[127] The Situationists refute the role of the walker or *dériveur* as voyeur because this makes him a passive spectator and not one who is in a position to construct "operations" that extend "to all known forms of human relations" in the urban terrain "as to influence historical evolution of sentiments" ("Report" par.52).

Making the *dériveur* responsible for a totality of urban discourse, s/he would map his/her own desires and eventually replace the physical city with an imaginary one.

In O'Hara's "Biotherm", the *dériveur* experiments with casual conversation and indeterminate subjectivity to construct unusual assemblages in postwar poetic discourse. Through O'Hara's signature "self-talk" form, the speaker-as-*dériveur* constructs ambivalent situations with his subjects by the arrangement of discourse (made banal) in one space:

bent on his knees the Old Mariner said where the fuck

is that motel you told me about mister I aint come here for no clams

I want swimmingpool mudpacks the works carbonateddrugstorewater hiccups

Fun a nice sissy under me clean and whistling a donkey to ride rocks

"OKAY (smile) COMING UP"

"this is, after all," said Margaret Dumont, "the *original* MAIN CHANCE"

(fart) "Suck this," said the Old M, spitting on his high heels

which he had just put on to get his navel up to her knee (CP 437-438)

According to Hazel Smith in *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara,* she relates O'Hara's unknown addressee to the concept of "self-talk" where informal discourse is said to conjure thinking or "associations to other mental images" (144). The nature of "self-talk" is made to construct by itself a "sense of community" and a "cultural exchange" that challenges social difference (Smith 149). While "self-talk" sounds like a fitting and resilient approach to constructing this type of dialogue in O'Hara's assemblages, other critics have associated them to O'Hara's urban lyricism[128] in regards to Paul Goodman's essay "Advance-Guard Writing." In

[128] Known to express thoughts and feelings of a single speaker or to describe an object without the presence of a speaker (Kennedy 381), O'Hara's lyricism plays with this mode of poetic writing by making his poems sway between subject or "self" indetermination and definite powerful feelings. Based on psychogeography, the lyricism is found in the emotional effects and affects constructed by the surrounding ambience.

the essay, Goodman proposes a way out of society's alienation by creating an "intimate community"[129] (375) or a coterie to write and engage with. In general, Goodman suggests that to write to friends or to one's entourage can be a dis-alienating and satisfying activity especially when faced with the cold war's "hyper-conservatism and enforced consensus" (371). Therefore, and as a healing mechanism, O'Hara's speaker constructs social happenings out of the everyday in order to create a community that can face "the alienating homogeneous society" (Epstein 30). However, this approach to coterie writing brings a loss of selfhood and individualism. In *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry*, Andrew Epstein argues that the concept of O'Hara's individualism is inspired from an Emersonian "self-reliance". In brief, this concept simply implies that self has to preserve the "sanctity of the individual" and promote "self-interest" and personal freedom in the face of "conformity" and the "confining ties of community" (65). Nonetheless, this individualism is not perceived as a fixed essential representation of an "imperial self", but actually one that reflects a "freedom to reject any fixed sense of self" (66). This means that self is a mobile entity that constantly changes in order to "dismantle and rebuild" structures of "identity" and "language" (68). Drawing on this explanation, the reader perceives one side of the nature of relations O'Hara constructs between self and community (present or absent addressee). Another side comes from his essay or mock manifesto "Personism" where O'Hara suggests an analogous approach to constructing communitarian relations in poetry by suggesting that poetry is but a conversation that occurs between "two persons instead of two pages" (CP 499). In stating this, O'Hara makes out of

[129] Goodman declares that this type of community solves "the crisis of alienation in the simple way: the persons are estranged from themselves, from one another, and from their artist; he takes the initiative precisely by putting his arms around them and drawing them together. In literary terms this means*: to write for them about them personally*" (375). Such community is said to having its own culture, a culture made by the artist "starting with the artist's primary friends" (376).

poetry a space for "people to expose their separateness" (Diggory 25) in the distance the assumed dialogue creates. This distance is what permits the positioning and proximity of one self to another in the body and language of a poem. This selected assemblage, which is made up of a mixture of part-objects in multi-layered planes, is an attempt to embody the speech act as a way to reconfigure discourse language and express, through its fragmentation, an original communitarian narrative of self and relations. O'Hara achieves an unusual ensemble of fragments as he creates opportunities of interaction between and among his diverse selected planes. The assemblage begins with introducing the "Old Mariner", who "bent on his knees", is found asking for the whereabouts of a "motel" to an invisible addressee, represented by "you" and "mister". This imaginary addressee sets the conversation in motion for a slang-talking bad-mouthed sailor who says "where the fuck is that motel" and "I aint come here for no clams". The "Old Mariner" shifts self and subjectivity to an indeterminate "I", one that demands a list of random objects that are glued together without any room for conjunction, subordination or coordination. "Wanting" a "swimmingpool", "mudpacks", "the works", "carbonateddrugstorewater", "hiccups", "fun", a "nice sissy under me clean", and "whistling a donkey to ride rocks" posit a coexistence of varied linguistic orderings in order to puncture the status quo of conversation and reinvent an urban narrative based on fragmentation and interrupted associations[130]. These sporadic associations map urban spaces (like "swimmingpool" and "mudpacks"*)* with non-referential concepts that construct fragments out of assumed subjectivities ("sissy", "me", "donkey"). This way, the speech act can be perceived as a "cultural exchange" of inferences and differences thus bringing a "sense of community" (Smith 148) as it

[130] This touches on obscure references and allusions that might not seem pertinent to the created situation. Note: words stuck together are not typos but are constructed by O'Hara for the purpose of portraying transient mobility and discourse deconstruction in poetry composition.

challenges everyday discourse. As for the (re)arrangement of the distinct subjectivities, they propose a play in points of view to reveal the disparate characteristics that are brought forward by the mélange of orderings of description and speech fragments into one entire assemblage. The reader can correlate the "Old Mariner" to other subjects, however the registers of the phrases are constructed in such a way where it is difficult to determine its referent. This "undecidability" not only creates variation in point of view, but also challenges the merger of daily commodities with speech utterances. The constructed utterances posit an amalgam of part-conversations that have occurred by chance when drifting the streets or by engaging with friends and community. While some words are constructed in capital letters (to emphasize loud utterances or shouted dialogue), others are represented in parenthesis to emphasize documented emotional and physical gestures. These structural signposts engage the reader in the constructed assemblage as they create the effect of a real occurring conversation, one which reflects instances of eroticism and campy gestures[131]. Moreover, giving names to the different speakers such as "Old M" and "Margaret Dumont" portrays instances where social interaction appears to be more important that what the actual context of the conversation is about.

O'Hara creates in "Biotherm" a possibility for relations to exist among distinct subjectivities and among the situations created by their interaction with other planes situated in the same space. These spatial relations constructed between "verbal improvisation" (Smith 147) and "self-talk" are significant to the role of the speaker-*dériveur* and leads the reader to map new ways in exploring the urban poetic narrative. In Situationists terms, these new ways construct a poetic discourse as an "attempt to conquer such terrain by subjective reappropriation of social space" (Kaufmann 114). As a result, what remains from the *dérive* in poetic assemblages are

[131] More on the erotic aspects of O'Hara's poetry are discussed in the next chapter on camp.

traces of "allusions, maps, suggestions, pictures" (Kaufmann 119) that the reader can pick up instantaneously as s/he reads through. These "immediate experiences" (Kaufmann116) are usually situations that can occupy the reader's space and time relations and can offer some critique of these relations which might eventually lead to cultural and social awareness. In chapter three, we will further examine such nebulous experiences that are constructed in O'Hara's usage of camp while focusing on possible political and cultural connections that Situationism helps to identify in his poetic style.

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Chapter Three

O'Hara's Camp & Situationism

The sensibility of camp-recognition always sees that it is dealing in reader relations and in projective fantasy about the spaces and practices of cultural production (Sedgwick 156).

Psychogeography was primarily created as a social approach for the purpose of reimagining urban life using the same material as that of its existing culture (Coverley 8). Debord and the Situationists perceived the function of the psychogeographical techniques such as *détournement* and *dérive* as central to the actual process of cultural transformation, while taking the construction of possible spatial relations into account. In urban poetry, and as previously examined through reappropriations in O'Hara's assemblages and the function of his language workings in constructed space, there remains a key component in O'Hara's "detourning skills" that is essentially related to camp. Similarly to what Moe Meyer describes in "Reclaiming The Discourse of Camp"[132], my goal is to examine O'Hara's use of camp in parallel with Situationist philosophy in an attempt to offer possible insights on postwar queer, poetic and cultural appropriations.

My interests in capturing obscure mannerisms in urban poetry with "some sort of contorted psychogeographical sublimation"[133] (Benson 1) has led this study to correlate camp to psychogeography because of their common goal of performing experimentation for the sake of transforming the familiar and the mundane into something of cultural and aesthetic value. In an essay entitled "Campe-toi! On the Origins and Definitions of Camp", Mark Booth states that the

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[132] "Camp is solely a queer discourse. The un-queer does not have access to the discourse of Camp, only to derivatives constructed through the act of appropriation" (Meyer 4).

[133] This is only stated (without elaboration) in Steven Benson's article "In Defence of Camp Melancholia" (2017). One can deduce however after reading the article that Benson might have implied an *ironical* reappropriation that attempts to transfer *emotion* ("passion" for Sontag is "necessary" and more important than "preciosity" (Sontag par.27)) and *behavior* (which is to be considered under psychogeography a crucial effect of ambience) into critical contemporary artworks that depend on camp as a "style" or "mode of aestheticism" (Sontag par.1).

earliest signs of camp have existed since Moliere's play *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1671) in which a character gives advice for a campy operation: "stick your hat on at an angle and look disreputable. Camp about on one foot. Put your hand on your hip. Strut like a comedy-king!" (78) This type of performance or play on appearance and style is to be examined in Frank O'Hara's exuberant construction of his urban poetics.

In exposing the capitalist world's "degree of artifice" (Sontag par.1), users of camp[134], or what critics refer to as dandies[135], attempt to relay and express their private desire in the face of impending social and urban isolation. Their "displaced" desire is considered a reaction to alienation, and thus, a construction of their own "standard on art and life" (Sontag par.34) is required. On the one hand, critics like Andrew Ross in "Uses of Camp" believe that camp is not only a form of displacement, but that its exaggerated style is a "celebration of the alienation and incongruity in the process, where value [of the object or representation] is located in an obscure manner" (146). This, he argues, makes camp a "subjective matter" that aims at expressing the serious in an artificial way, thereby creating a "democratic moment" in the face of capitalist institutionalization. Accordingly, camp is an approach "committed to the marginal" and to an "abdication of any pretensions to power" because its constructed stances and representations reflect self-mockery[136] through irony and parody (Ross 146). When it comes to O'Hara's camp, Nick Selby in "Memory pieces: Collage, Memorial and the Poetics of Intimacy in Joe Brainard, Jasper Johns and Frank O'Hara" emphasizes the performance of selfhood in his poetics in

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[134] Sontag capitalizes the term camp. In this dissertation, it is not emphasized as an exclusive concept, but is considered a pertinent study and device for understanding Situationist politics in O'Hara's modernist process of composition.

[135] Sontag defines the dandy as the "self-elected" gay person who is the "aristocrat of taste" and the "best contributor" of camp and the "modern sensibility of irony and aestheticism" (Sontag 50,51). Other formulations of the dandy are explored in the last section of the chapter.

[136] This self-reflective critique in O'Hara's works will be examined in this chapter through both modes of literary techniques and rhetorical devices, irony and parody.

regards to self-mockery. He claims that "any reading of O'Hara cannot escape the implication that his selfhood is a carefully choreographed textual performance, light and sassy, knowing we are looking" (230). Selby suggests that this kind of performance "challenges us to confront its own textual constructedness", while taking into account the "campy superficiality of his work" (230). This, he adds, continually draws or maps the "textual mechanics from which it is made" (230). On the other hand, through these self-reflective textual devices, camp users in general attempt to construct desire with a historical distance in mind (i.e. by remaining sentimental in relation to the past) and insist on promoting a form of aesthetics that is based on "taste over content" and "irony over tragedy" (Sontag par.13, par.37). In this process of reappropriation, camp shares the Situationist *détournement*'s approach and attitude of understanding the past by attempting to create a historical distance from the present context. Subsequently, such reappropriations are made to expose hegemonies of the present capitalist culture and its "heterosexist control" (Benson 1) by way of "stylization" (Sontag par.1) and "aestheticization of the trivial"[137] (Schreiber 79).

Other critics like Hazel Smith relate camp to the postwar attitude of seeking "feminized alternatives of the male body stereotype and model" (Smith 113). When it comes to O'Hara's camp, Smith suggests that his notion of subjectivity is a *parody* of heteronormative roles which are portrayed as displaced and "morphing" (114) into gender-related and sexual observations. While Smith touches on the significance of constructing dissipated roles of masculinity in O'Hara's campy structures, critic Lytle Shaw considers that O'Hara's campy diction "transforms the contingency of historical judgement into a value in itself" by "over- and underplaying

[137] The trivial is to be considered in this instance as a tool to indirectly promote personal desire. Debord argues that the act of trivialization dominates modern society's "economy of abundance" to the point where it leads to "complacent acceptance of the status quo" (Debord par.58, 59). By exposing this cultural banality, Debord believes that one can critique the "false models" (Debord par. 57) behind capitalism's social hegemony.

affective responses to a wide variety of cultural objects" (94). Referring to a Situationist philosophy that communicates particular notions of play and parody, I argue that the composition process of O'Hara's campy assemblages adheres to his "morphing" sexuality (of queer desire) and his appropriation of the "cultural" lexicon.

In imagining a space like Debord's *spectacle*, it might seem natural to use the language of farce, exaggeration, and theatricality, not only to expose the artificiality of the landscape, but also to seek an authentic urban experience in the present culture. Whether a code word that designates "an ironic attitude that derived sophisticated knowing amusement from such things as kitschy films, novels, and mass-produced decorative objects" (Schreiber 79), or a "sensibility" used as a "mode of aestheticism" to "transform experience" (Sontag par.1, 3) while simultaneously "acknowledging" and "undermining" high culture (Schreiber 79), the Situationists would have certainly reinforced any literary device that could expose matters of authenticity in society and culture. In the light of Debord's dialectical thinking, camp posits an ironic attitude by playing on "flamboyant mannerisms" and "private experience" of the object portrayed (Sontag par.17) in order to "critique itself by its relations" (Debord par.206) as it attempts to reverse and reappropriate context. This desire for theatrical play concerning the cultural object aims at examining the effects of behavior and emotion in the hopes of transgressing the experience of the controlling capitalist society. In constructing hyperbolic representations, O'Hara's camp sets its own standard for life and art that is based on "sensibility" (whether moral or aesthetic) and on the "degrees of artifice" experienced (Sontag par.36) by challenging the "patterns of high culture: truth, beauty and seriousness" (Schreiber 81). It is said that camp "always has an underlying seriousness. You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it" (Dansky 2). I argue that

O'Hara's camp offers a critique of social and emotional behavior in portraying "artifice" and "theatricality of experience" (Sontag par.36, par.43) when one reads his assemblages through psychogeographical methodology and their notions of (Situationist) play. Furthermore, by exploring the workings of literary devices like irony and parody in O'Hara's campy constructs, I intend to bridge Situationist appropriation to O'Hara's poetic (queer) diction[138].

On the one hand, the aim of this project is to explore possibilities for relations between camp and notions of resistance to social and cultural alienation that Situationist ideology has presented on postwar capitalism. On the other hand, it is to show how O'Hara has composed, through his campy representations, artistic impulses that have been *reappropriated* by a particular gay voice in the postwar urban culture of New York.

Psychogeographical Play in Constructing Camp

In the essay "Theses on Cultural Revolution", the Situationists suggest that in order to arrive at direct and honest communication, one must "destroy all forms of pseudocommunication" (par.6). The Situationists argue that this approach helps in overcoming "the established order" and its "cultural decomposition" (par.6). Debord's *spectacle* is a society that deliberately manipulates the flow of "disinformation" (Debord par.16). Therefore, the reader understands why it is difficult to acquire direct communication in such society. Because direct communication for Debord seems out of reach in capitalist propaganda, I suggest that what remains are *pseudocommunicative* devices like camp and its exaggerated representations that would indirectly play a critical role in examining the discourse and language of capitalist society, like those of the invented *spectacle*.

[138] This is to highlight that most critics have commented that O'Hara's work is campy without proving how practically and linguistically this works. Through irony and parody, I intend to highlight the mechanics behind O'Hara's camp in the analysis of his selected postwar urban pieces.

A key element in exploring camp in poetic communication is found in the process of play. In the essay "Contribution to Situationist Play," play is considered a "serious proceeding" with the goal of "provoking conditions favorable to direct living". This means that play is a "rational escape" from the intricacies of daily life and not "a break" from it (Keehan 1). Michel De Certeau affirms that city space incites those conditions when "pass[ing] through" the "spacings" to create "new realms of being" (Gray 16). This process is what De Certeau refers to as the workings of the "machine of modernity" whereby the function of the "concept-city" is to create "a space for appropriations and transformations" in which the subject/object is "constantly enriched by new attributes" and "various interferences" (De Certeau 1). With this in mind, to conceive[139] the text as a city is to have the ability to arrange or to make a wholeness out of the "attributes" that already exist. De Certeau calls this concept "texturology"[140] (De Certeau 1) whereby the *attributes* and *interferences* that are constructed by the arrangement of passage (through experimentation) only appear by interplay and interaction of subject/object with city/text.

In "Notes on Camp", Sontag suggests that camp "neutralizes morality and sponsors playfulness" (Sontag par.52). To really understand the concept of promoting play, critics have related this notion to gay semiotics and to notions of textual deviation. Bredbeck in his essay "Barthes's Text/ O'Hara's Trick" suggests that gay semiotics are not to be examined as "thematic" endeavors, but as "linguistic" ones. The gay semiotic is considered a process of absolute play of the "symbolic embrace of homo-eroticism" (Bredbeck 268) through the use of heteronormative representation. Bredbeck proposes that only through this heterosexual sphere

[139] Refer back to footnote #5 of the introduction.
[140] Texturology (texture, Latin: features of a structure of something considered as a whole, caused by an arrangement of its components; and logos, Greek: knowledge, doctrine) (http://knowingcities2011.blogspot.ca/2011/08/notes-on-micheal-de-certeaus-walking-in.html)

can one return to the "originary state" prior to a controlling heterosexual representation (Bredbeck 269). Hence, gay semiotics depend on this interplay with already established textual signification and representation of text in order to flee from the bondage of judgmental language. Originally based on Irigaray's model of text, representation is viewed as a play between agency and object while keeping both entities distinct. Such constructed *differance* offers an openness to "plural signifiers (unconstrained by representation)" and "transgressive[ness] of any totalized meaning" (Bredbeck 270-271). Multiplicity becomes a "desire-related" sensuality that overcomes heteronormative representation of sexuality. Examining this notion through De Certeau's texturology, O'Hara's construction of camp brings sexual divergence from the "norm" closer to textual deviation (Ward 50-51) in gathering attributes and interferences into one holistic assemblage[141].

Bredbeck also relates O'Hara's notion of play to the "doubleness"[142] or interchangeability of agent and object that occurs in the performing roles of homosexuality. This means that O'Hara's campy representations are to be examined as a "site to confuse" agency[143] by blurring the lines of subjectivity. Bredbeck calls this interplay between agency and the portrayed object as O'Hara's "trick", for he believes that O'Hara establishes "doubleness"[144] by repressing or dissolving their relationships in the text. O'Hara's campy text not only dissolves

[141] Examples from O'Hara's assemblages will follow to prove this liaison of texturology and sexual (gay) representation.
[142] The doubleness of homosexuality refers to the roles taken by a gay couple in the materiality of sexual intercourse (anus/penis division).
[143] Confusing agency can be seen also as an *Aporia*, defined as a perplexed subject who faces problems without offering any solution; a serious anxiety or perplexity; inconsistency in the narrative; relating to the Socratic method of raising problems without providing solutions (www.oxfordreference.com)
[144] Some critics correlate the notion of *doubleness* in the works of New York postwar poets to none other but Baudelaire's *duality* of object or subject. This means that the materiality of the given constructed subjectivity could hold "infinite abstract correspondences" or "correspondence between a thing and other heterogeneous things" (Watkin 24). The latter notion would open possibilities of viewing the construction of poetry as a space of multi-referentiality (including indeterminate thoughts) and material connections to and from subjectivity.

divisions, but also comes to express sexual materiality (penis/anus) over the symbolic (phallus) by reducing the representation of desire to one signifier which critically presents the "imaginings of heterosexuals on the experience of homosexuals" (Bredbeck 272-274).

O'Hara's "Returning"[145], for example, plays with the order (or arrangement) of signifier and agency in order to indirectly mock symbols, to portray the role of a dissolving doubleness in text formation, and to convey a mix of urban attributes in one assemblage:

> As Marilyn Monroe says, it's a responsibility being a sexual symbol,
> and as everyone says, it's the property of a symbol to be sexual.
> Who's confused? Dead citizen or survivor, its only your cock or your ass.
> They do what they can in gardens and parks,
> in subway stations and latrines,
> as boyscouts rub sticks together who've read the manual,
> know what's expected of death. (CP 246)

The poem starts off in stanza one with a speaker who is reminding "you" (an absent friend), as he descends the ladder of a plane, of things he can "hardly remember" (line 2) such as the plane landing "like a rabbit" (line 2) and like "diving onto the sea on your belly" (line 5). The speaker in stanza two resumes his listing of intimate remembrances, but this time "of things [you] haven't forgotten" (line 7) such as going to bed "with everyone who looks at [you] because the war's not over" (line 9) and because there are "no assurance yet that desire's an exaggeration" (line 10). The interplay on the idea of remembering and forgetting makes its way to the third stanza of the poem (the selected excerpt) where it appears that the speaker's attention moves from the personal to the public by alluding to the Hollywood icon "Marilyn Monroe". In this

[145] Dated May 1956 (CP 537).

stanza, the speaker begins by referring to the thoughts of Monroe as she once said "it's a responsibility being a sexual symbol" (line 12). This is followed with a line that refers to the public. In this instant, the public, represented by everyone, utter that "it's the property of a symbol to be sexual" (line 13). Having trouble in indicating what makes a sex symbol as such (whether it is a public assumption or a celebrity's inference), the speaker resumes his remembrances to such a "confused" (line 14) identification by dissolving agency into a state of doubleness. This doubleness[146] is captured through binaries (represented by "only" and "or" in line 14) that occur between death and survival, and the "cock" or the "ass". The remaining lines resume with a shift in agency. The collective addressee ("they") becomes the performing subject of this doubleness. "They" have the choice now to carry on their acts in "gardens" and "parks" or "subway stations" and "latrines." By situating the doubleness of the gay act in parallel to the life/death binary, the dissolving agency (represented by "they") parodies the social assumption that what is forbidden or tabooed by culture is not encouraged. However, this does not mean that gays will stop their promiscuous ways even though they "know what's expected of death" (line 18) and therefore are aware of the repercussions that they might face. Accordingly, the represented narrative of the poem relies on the slippery interplay in textual construction of agency and cultural assumptions of gay people in American society.

Texturology lies in the arrangement of "confusing agency" and shifting subjectivity with urban attributes and variations of thoughts into one poem. In "Returning", the "similarities" (line 6) that are expressed by the speaker after boarding off a plane are followed by remembrances of his lover's behavior which ends with a slippery doubleness between the sex drive and the death drive. The result is a portrayal of gay relationships that capture issues of sexual behavior in urban

[146] For Jonathan Dollimore, doubleness is a historical reaction to "perversion" or to social incompatibility. However, for Eve Sedgwick, it creates a binary and a hierarchy between gay and feminist investigation. (Boone 13, 17)

space by playing with the notion of doubleness of agency and campy subjectivity. With the help of the *dérive*, the reader is brought to pay attention to the process of verse construction that is introduced by the speaker's gestures along the attributes of the sexual and the cultural (where the arrangement and proximity of campy implications and cultural components coexist).

Just as Bredbeck proclaims that O'Hara's camp can be read as a mode of inversion in the linguistic/semiotic traditional praxis of gay writing, similarly, I suggest that through Debord's notion of the spectacle and psychogeography, O'Hara's camp can be examined and read as a linguistic practice of the effects of the urban environment and the landscape in which his queer subjects reside, whether in things from everyday life (objects and commodities), or in things abhorred (or tabooed) in the white heterosexual-literary canon. In "Homosexuality"[147], O'Hara's campy craft lies in building subjectivity in a space where emotional behavior dissolves in the doubleness of gay agency and its sexual representation as it is constructed in the configuration of the poetic line. Written in eleven couplets, the speaker starts off addressing the mass by questioning rhetorically how the piercing effect of a "glance" (line 2) can make people take off their "masks" (line 1) and keep their "mouths shut" (line 2). In the second couplet, the speaker assumes an analogy for such a glance when he utters that "the song of a cow is not more full of judgment/ than the vapors which escape one's soul" (lines 3-4). With such a line, the speaker emphasizes the act of judgement that comes from the public's eyes and how the public is perceived as quite regressive (like an "old cow") and worn-out ("sick"). As the speaker reaches the third couplet, he assumes that those "shadows around [him]" (line 5), i.e. those that carry the judging glances, should not weigh him down. Nevertheless, in the fourth couplet, he indicates that his reaction toward these shadows does cause some change in him. Subsequently, in the last

[147] Dated 1954, but first published in 1970 (almost four years after his demise) (CP 531).

line of stanza five and the beginning of the sixth, the concerned speaker evokes a personal introspection toward the latter glance when he questions that "it is the law of my own voice I shall investigate" (line 10) when the glance is felt from his "finger" to his "ear" and finally to his "heart" (lines 11-12). By this line, the speaker declares that "It's wonderful to admire oneself/with complete candor" (lines 13-14) as the poem comically resumes with "tallying up the merits of each/ of the latrines" (lines 14-15). The speaker's reflective observations lead him to present the "merits" of gay activity in "latrines" and in public urban spaces:

> of the latrines. 14th street is drunken and credulous,
> 53rd tries to tremble but is too at rest. The good
>
> love a park and the inept a railway station,
> and there are the divine ones who drag themselves up
>
> and down the lengthening shadow of an Abyssinian head
> in the dust, trailing their long elegant heels of hot air
>
> crying to confuse the brave "it's a summer day,
> and I want to be wanted more than anything else in the world." (CP 182)

In the last four stanzas, the speaker identifies a number of gay types observed and experienced through urban locales as a way to "tally up" his presumed candor. These gay types are the "good", the "inept" and the "divine". The speaker chooses to characterize these gay types depending on the places they frequently visit. The early modern French poet Mallarmé comes to mind in this instance because his poetry emphasized the notion that "indeterminate thought must

retain the specificity of place" (Watkin 25). In other words, "specificity of place" constructs an affect out of the types of characters presented. The "good" ones are the ones that "love a park". The "inept" ones are those that visit the "railway station". As for the "divine" ones, they are portrayed as nomads or those who do not reside (or seek pleasure) in the same place. By "trail[ing]" along "Abyssinia" in their "long elegant heels", the divine type is also presented in the last stanza as having the ability to "confuse the brave". In the last line though, the divine type can be considered as less passive and more outspoken than the other types for they appear to voice their concerns to the public by saying that they "want to be wanted more than anything else in the world". This queer[148] proclamation presents the readers with the desire to engage in the game of hide and seek that these character types play in order to "confuse" the public. Since camp is a sensibility shaped by combining sexual components within poetic structure and personal arrangement of syntax, traces of gay wording such as "drag" and "head" intercept with places such as the "park" and the "railway station" in order to address gay desires and thoughts[149] that reside in postwar public places. These campy representations can offer a reading of gay resilience as the poem clearly indicates a call for being "wanted" and accepted by a public that pierces judging glances. From a psychogeographical point of view, the speaker's desire to bridge gay character types with location and to proclaim by the end of the poem a transformation (one that was passive but now brave enough to shout out its desire) becomes a portrait of a *dérive* that maps possible social resilience in the face of cultural (pre)suppositions.

Disruptive Play in Semiotics

[148] Peter Stoneley in "Frank O'Hara and French in the Pejorative Sense" argues that O'Hara does not "manifest a queer intention in the late twentieth century sense." Although sex and gender could be read in O'Hara's work as "multiply transitive" (Sedgwick's term), his uses of "irony," "playfulness," "rejection of shame in favor of anger" could seem "proto-queer in the present day sense" (126-127).

[149] These assumed thoughts are said to align O'Hara with a "queerness of his own time" because they represent a desire for other selves in a mode that is self-consciously nostalgic, "a nostalgia for a pleasure that has been denied" (Stoneley 127).

In the concept of "textuality", Charles Altieri in *Enlarging the Temple* offers a similar linguistic notion to Bredbeck with regards to semiotics and play, to their relationship to camp in general, and to O'Hara's camp specifically. Altieri relates this notion to French theories of textuality[150] and specifically Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences". Altieri asks the question: what kind of "presence" does the text uphold? And to which he answers: a presence "stripped of […] ontological vestments" and a present conceived as a "landscape without depth" where "no underlying significance of meanings to be interpreted" (Altieri 91). Therefore, the "disruption"[151] of text comes from linguistic self-reflection without any relations or reference to meaning or to social practices. Thus, the importance of textuality lies in the "playfulness of recoding" (Boone 62) language from one that is referring to the bio-social presence to one that is purely linguistic, a text that is only constructed to refer to itself[152]. Here lies a crucial connection of language in textuality to the camp sensibility and to psychogeographical appropriation where language is *détourned* from its conventional practices and is removed from historical context.

In semiotics, what remains in language when it refers to itself is the *form* and not the *content*. This means that the significance of language used within the notion of textuality is to examine the critical discourse presented while suspending the traditional bio-social philosophy of language (Boone 62). Consequently, the playfulness or "arbitrariness" of textuality promotes a concept of language as a "rewriting operation". Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*

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[150] From Derrida's notion of jeu or freeplay in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966). "Freeplay is the *disruption* of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Freeplay is always an interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be radically conceived, freeplay must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence; being must be conceived of as presence or absence beginning with the possibility of freeplay and not the other way around (294).

[151] Using Derrida's terminology—taken from the previous footnote on the definition of freeplay.

[152] Through the formal usage and application of irony and parody in camp.

argues that the "author is dead: his civil status, his biographical person have disappeared" (26). The focus, Barthes believes, is on the reader who "desires [the author's] figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection)" (27) while reading. This does not correspond to the workings of affect, but actually to the process of textual pleasure that comes from language posing as a "lexicographical artifact" (27), an intensity creating the desire to need some kind of direction (assumed by the reader to be hidden in the figure of the author or in his trace "lost in the midst of a text" (27)). Barthes's notion highlights the "rivalry" (28) nature of language which he argues is a fight and a "struggle" (28) of jargons. He adds that this constant struggle is a game within the capitalist language, as he states that such language "is not paranoid, systematic, argumentative, articulated: it is an implacable stickiness, a *doxa*, a kind of unconscious: in short, the essence of ideology" (29). Thinking of this definition in light of O'Hara's postwar campy poetics, the reader would suppose that his multi-layering of allusions and arrangement of different modes of discourses that coexist in one poetic assemblage has something to do with presenting gay ambience within such a "game"[153]. However, O'Hara achieves his "struggle" within capitalist language by presenting obscure subjects in disparate textual forms and types of discourses (such as speech acts, gossip, news, social commentary, quotidian observations, impressions, etc…) within one poetic assemblage. Therefore, to read O'Hara's poems in regards to Barthes's definition of capitalist language, the reader has to trace the sense of the "unconscious" and the ideological within his constructions of postwar campy discourse. A significant component of this study conveys to the reader nuances of O'Hara's "doxa", especially

[153] This implies that the process of experimentation that language performs as it "fights" and "struggles" in capitalist jargons reveals what Barthes calls "language substance" (31). This substance is said to have "no voice, no genre, and no linguistic reference." Thus the "game" indirectly comes to promote an ambience (filled with affect and impersonal desire) that is produced from the tension that is caused by the performance of capitalist jargons.

in examining *cognitive mapping* (as discussed in details in chapter two) and its relationship to notions of "drifting"[154] in postwar poetics.

Situating O'Hara in relation to the theories of text might explain the function of language in his campy poetry and his relationship to his own historical context. His rewriting or recoding operation does emphasize the form of his critical discourse, however, as a subtle commentary on gay struggles and gay community life in US postwar culture. The recoding process for O'Hara is to make use of the dominating language praxis and reappropriate it into an "oppositional yet non-antagonistic" (Kirsch 1) type of language whereby nuances[155] or disguises of "gay language praxis" are made to blend into his poetic text. This defines how camp as a sensibility generally comes to imply a sense of opposition, and perhaps in some cases, read as violent or banal.

Bruce Boone, in his essay "Gay Language as a Political Praxis", states that O'Hara's gay language is oppositional, for it uses "strategies for disguising social contradiction" (71) in the same manner that Altieri claims is found in language and its process to suspend the bio-social referentiality. With these notions in mind, O'Hara, Boone suggests, not only intends to break down the social aspect of his poetic language, but also intends to bring to the surface his process of campy trivialization or what Sontag proclaims as the "aestheticization of the trivial" (72). In an excerpt from "Ode to Mike Goldberg ('s Birth and Other Births)", O'Hara's speaker

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[154] In chapter two, drifting is another word that signifies the Situationist process of the *dérive*. In this instant however, it is reflective of a Barthes's formulation in *The Pleasure of the Text*. For Barthes, drifting stands for the reader's drive into "language's illusions, seductions and intimidations" while remaining "motionless, pivoting on the intractable bliss that binds" the reader to the text (18). This impulse for the "intractable" in reading text is viewed by the Situationists as a tendency to psychogeographically trace its own construction so that it can critique the conditions of its own making.

[155] Nuance is "not a direct object; it is an aura that the object surreptitiously allows. Nuance, a trace, like dust on plush, resuscitates a lost instant when someone … raptly concentrated on a stray interpretive detail" (Koestenbaum xix). This definition of nuance shows that Koestenbaum's "traces" promote a psychogeographical interpretation of camp where the poet through "drifting" (a tactic created by Barthes) moves arbitrarily, "without signals", in search of gay linguistic "codes" (Koestenbaum xii). Koestenbaum believes that queer poetry has to "make murky" and distort its subject especially if its subject involves "subcultural identities" (Kirsch 1).

challenges social and spatial relations by arranging discourse in such a way as to trivialize and make campy the meshing of its constructs:

> he has had his balls sewed into his mouth
> by the natives who bleach their hair in urine
> and their will; a basketball game and a concert
> later if you live to write, it's not all advancing
> towards you, he had a killing desire for their women
> but more killing still the absence of desire, which in religion
> used to be called hope,
> I don't just mean the lack of hardon, which may be sincerity
> Or the last-minute victory of the proud spirit over flesh (CP 294)

The speaker unites in this assemblage multiple references and makes them appear campy and banal by the situations they create in regards to each other. From a story of castration and violent ritual behavior, the speaker assumes the position of spectator who watches the natives just like watching a basketball game or a concert. Without clear or logical connections, the speaker merges his initial impressions with fragments that follow the castration narrative. Whether the speaker is reflecting on having enough of an opportunity to write, or thinking of a paradoxical tension for performing and simultaneously "killing" desire, or thinking of a religious interpretation for the absence of desire, the fragments create an "improvised temporary social space" (Lawrence 92). The abrupt disclosures merge together and in their proximity construct unfamiliar liaisons to "sincerity" and campy twists of constructing the idea of abstinence in poetic representation.

Some critics have assumed that O'Hara's poetry is "trivial and frivolous" (Perloff xxxi), while others have related such comments to the inability to recognize the importance of the kind of poetry that embodies the trivial and the banal. In O'Hara's defense, triviality is found to function as a linguistic strategy to undermine the present social and cultural conditions by conveying a spirit of the unserious. To return to the latter excerpt, the "balls sewed into his mouth" or "natives who bleach their hair in urine" are made unserious by representing them as cultural impressions among other social and behavioral conditions. As for camp, it has been considered a gay sensibility that is represented through irony, and thus its linguistic strategy also points out to the banality behind its critical construction. Through this process, camp attempts to achieve its non-antagonistic attack on the current system by seeming, at first glance, to be unserious or even banal. So, the religious announcement of "hope" that gets intertwined between native rituals and the idea of abstinence becomes superficially banal, yet culturally critical to the overall narrative of the speaker.

In *The Society of the Spectacle,* Debord argues that "banalization [. . .] dominates modern society to the point of complacent acceptance of the status quo" and suggests that banality "does not offer real choices" (Debord 59-60) in its consumer culture. However, Ivan Chtcheglov, another member of the Situationist International, suggests in "Formulary for a New Urbanism" that banalization and its fragments of images "cannot be used in urbanism without giving them new meaning" (Chtcheglov 1). This implies that the process of banalization is to be viewed as an essential component in presenting the complacency of modern society, as well as a sense of change for its ironic uses of the urban milieu. I suggest that O'Hara plays with both notions in his poetic appropriations, and that this brings "humor and universality" (Boone 71) into his urban and campy content.

In "Poem"[156] (CP 29-30), the constructed fragments reflect campy and trivialized combinations that distort discourse by expressing gay praxis through irony. The speaker begins with "I am not bad although I am wicked/perhaps, and not too rare" (lines 2-3). The form of banalization captured in this particular situation appears through the speaker's playful emotional identifications. The reader does not notice the reasons for these multiple and distinct identifications yet. However, as the reader drifts through the poem, s/he realizes that these "too abrupt" (line 12) emotions are effects portraying moments experienced during sexual intercourse. What follows in stanza one is a speaker who depicts himself/ herself as "beat", "liquored to exhaustion", and "dead tired in sheets, still sings" (lines 3-4). In this process of enjambment, the last line of the first stanza continues its flow to the second stanza with fragments mixing amidst body parts and emotional behavior:

> to me the thunderous redwood's laughings
> at my ears, a lover patient and picked,
> and the crooning violet's not panicked
> by my bloodshot foreskin, swollen lips, wings, (CP 29)

The combination of the added observations reeled together hints at the speaker's relationship to his/her surrounding environment (whether to "redwoods", "violet[s]", or "lover[s]"). With emotionally charged word choices, the "exhausted" speaker conveys the effects of multiple emotional and behavioral relations that are constructed upon his/her state of mind or experiences. Without the use of syntactical connectors, the build-up of "thunderous" "patient" "crooning" that is "picked" and "not panicked" lead to the last line of stanza two which brings the speaker to correlate body parts into his/her assemblage. The result is a sum of the speaker's documented

[156] O'Hara has numerous poems that go by the title *poem*. This one is dated December 1950 (CP 521).

intercourse captured in fragments of "bloodshot foreskin", "swollen lips" and "wings". These captured moments of body parts reflect a campy and playful act of love making and sexual communication. Body language is merely one portion of this intercourse. The other portion is sound-related. In the third stanza, the speaker indicates that he/she is aware of the lover's singing as "her tongue stays in my ear and sings" (line 9). The stanza resumes with banal configurations of "purple/clouds, doubting, say hello across the lawn/ and linen, wondering if I'm too gay" (lines 9-11) that arrange weather conditions, emotional gestures, and a dialogue between public space and private. These unusual associations combined in such a way succeed in trivializing the presumed ironic confession of being "too gay". Consequently, the last stanza captures a more intimate sexual irony of gay relations by playing with the notions of "exits" and "doors". This can come to represent both the doubleness of gay agency and its psychogeographical commentary[157] on the nature of the lovers' relationship to each other:

> with exits, too abrupt with doors. Away,
>
> far! The scratchy tune "L'amant du peuple":
>
> I see a girl tap-dancing on the dawn. (CP 30)

The speaker's confession of being "too gay" is further developed in the last stanza by ironically playing with the idea of openings and exits that are experienced abruptly by the lover. This construction can express the evasive gay agency at work, and under psychogeography, the reader can imagine drifting into "doors" (of perception) to get glimpses and traces of a gay sexual act in motion. The "doors" can also represent the imaginary spatial openings that the speaker creates with his/her lover and with his/her relationships to the ambient surrounding. The stanza ends with the speaker pointing out to the "scratchy tune" that he/ she has been hearing throughout the

[157] The presence of exits and doors is recapitulating physical and mental mobility from one space to another (in reference to cognitive mapping & mobility in composition—see chapter two).

intercourse (or poem). The song "L'amant du peuple" is heard as a "girl tap-dancing on the dawn" brings the poem to an end. With such an ending, the reader is reminded of the nature of O'Hara's composition of banality as it is constructed alongside his campy imaginings. We can say then that O'Hara's assemblages tend to function as a spatial operation in semiotics where erotic representations merge with traces of cultural behavior. This offers a space for political commentary that conveys the elusive experiences of a gay postwar New York poet.

Camp & the Artifice

When Sontag relates camp to a "mode of aestheticism" and to "stylization", she is highlighting one facet of camp: the degree of artifice communicated in its representations. This implies that meaning in camp comes most effectively through the artificial. This artificiality[158] is experienced through a "seriousness that fails" (Sontag par.23) in the representations constructed. In a manner of speaking, camp "proposes itself as serious" (Sontag par.26), but this remains difficult to examine because of its ironic representations and its theatrical portraits. This conspiratorial approach of camp is what makes it an "ideal standard" (Sontag par.43) to communicate nuances of aesthetics without directly imposing any visible ethical stances on the reader. By doing so, Sontag believes that camp can "transcend the nausea of the replica" (par.46) in a world that is exhausted by triviality and banality. For Debord, such a banal world exists in the society of the *spectacle*. It is a world that presents no possibility for an "authentic experience" since communication and language are based on an "ideology of absent logic"[159].

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[158] Robert Mazzocco in the New York Review of Books discusses the experience of being artificial in camp when he states that "the camp temperament" is "the only possible solution to the intolerable problem of sincerity or of authenticity" so the camp user becomes "beyond belief" and "deliberately insincere, to exploit, to enjoy the unendurable" (Dansky 4).

[159] Debord explains this ideology as the loss of ability to evaluate logically a language that has been imposed by a capitalist society. This means that the followers of such a language are entirely passive users whose personalities and desires have been erased. They do not question its syntax even though they are *enemies of its rhetoric* (Debord XI, XII).

Therefore, camp can function to undermine this existing rhetoric (through its irony and theatricality of experience), by offering a "different standard" or desire about art and life by promoting style over content and aesthetics over morality (Sontag par.34, par.37).

The artifice of capitalist society cannot be discussed without touching on the process of banalization[160] or trivialization. Trivialization[161] (specifically of language) suggests its own displacement as a result of what Debord argues in *The Society of the Spectacle* when he refers to "commodity abundance [and] consumption [which] breaks the organic development of social needs" (Debord par.68). Debord passionately believes that what remains after the construction of representations in the *spectacle* is the "artifice" and the "unreal unity" (Debord par.72) of consumed production. However, in examining trivialization through camp, the reader has to consider artifice a key expression that reflects society's disconnections even while it seeks to promote a sense of urgency regarding the alienation of the gay community in postwar culture.

When the world strips down and rouges up
like a mattress's teeth brushed by love's bristling sun
a marvellous heart tiresomely got up in brisk bold stares
when those trappings fart at the feet of the stars
a self-coral serpent wrapped round an arm with no jujubes
without swish
without camp
floods of crocodile piss and pleasures of driving

[160] The Situationist Ivan Chtcheglov defines banalization as a "mental disease" where people are "hypnotized" by "conveniences- sewage systems, elevators, bathrooms, washing machines" (2).
[161] Trivialization is considered a tool that opens *relations* from the existing milieu of the hetero-normative into gay language and other relations. Critic Mutlu Blasing links O'Hara's other relations to postwar approaches in painting, and in particular to Grace Hartigan's "Functioning Relationships", where, through the process of composition, a network of external relations (social, historical, and political) are relayed (Blasing 36).

shadows of prairie pricks dancing (CP 97)

In the selected excerpt from "Easter"[162], O'Hara constructs a space for representing social alienation by carrying out impersonal images or images captured by an absent speaker. The opening line portrays the world as a possible person who "strips down" and "rouges up", a world that is getting prepared for sensual decorum and style. Later, trivial comparisons follow with impressions of "mattress's teeth" that are "brushed" by "love's bristling sun". This can be a surreal way of portraying the act of love making or representing an intimate encounter in bed. The result of this sexual intercourse can be seen as evident with the next line where the "marvellous heart" is constructed as too weak to get up. The campy representations assume obscene and promiscuous implications, yet are constructed in a very subtle manner. The following fragments can give banal and distinct variations. However, the reader can imagine that the "trappings fart at the feet of the stars" can denote any kind of paraphernalia that comes across the intimate experiences of the absent speaker or lover. The impersonal relationships built in this assemblage can be perceived as bits and pieces that await the reader's engagement for construction. The "self-coral serpent wrapped around an arm" for instance is a fragment that can take away the reader's attention from the previous build up. Then, an ironical twist occurs with a fragment stating "without camp" takes the reader back to exploring traces of this self-reflective announcement. Hence, the reader is given another attempt to associate (or dissociate) erotic impressions from trivialized and theatricalized (textual & physical) relationships. The reader can assume from the last lines that the absent lovers are entangled with paraphernalia of intimacy which include "floods of crocodile piss", "pleasures of driving/ shadows", and "prairie pricks dancing". The "pricks" can also be linked to the previous "serpent" and possibly elude from

[162] Dated 1952, published in 1969 (almost 3 years after O'Hara's death) (CP 526).

obvious sexual euphemisms. Psychogeographically, such an example of a poem would be encouraged by the Situationists who believe that one can construct an alternate reality to escape social alienation through the process of trivialization and produce a form of "self-renewal" (as it allows the reader to drift through) within capitalist discourse.

Artifice can be examined as a condition that is projected by gay writers in matters of constructing subjectivity and form. Jonathan Dollimore in *Sexual Dissidence* argues that the artifice in the gay writing of Oscar Wilde for example is related to his "transgressive aesthetic" which is a "strategy of concealment or a limiting abandonment of depth for surface [so as to] cloak [the] sincerest feelings" (75). Dollimore adds that Oscar Wilde "persistently inverted and displaced" the surface/depth binary which leaves an ironic effect on the nature of subjectivity and the use of "I" as a decentered self. I suggest that O'Hara utilizes artifice as a component for the workings of irony in his urban poems, and much like Wilde's decentered self, it is constructed to undermine the nature of subjectivity. O'Hara's sense of self ("I") is to offer a "rationalization of the homosexual's 'deep' inadequacy, his inability to be authentic (i.e. heterosexual)" (76-77) by constantly repositioning and reconfiguring (perhaps even reimagining) the gay self in relation to the heteronormative cultural space.

In the poem "For the Chinese New Year and for Bill Berkson"[163], O'Hara's camp plays with trivializing social issues that are supposed to be taken seriously. His added humor insists on trivializing religious agency before introducing a glimpse of an evasive (gay) self:

> which I have thought about but never really
> looked at well that's a certain orderliness
> of personality "if you're brought up Protestant

[163] Dated February 1961 (CP 550).

enough a Catholic" oh shit on the beaches so

what if I did look up your trunks and see it (CP 390)

Written as an occasional poem to celebrate the Chinese new year and O'Hara's relationship to his friend and poet Bill Berkson, the speaker begins by introducing a "face" that drifts between representations of his "youth" (line 6) and those of his "aged future" (line 7). While "it was red and it was strange and hateful" (line 3), it turns into a "face I fear under ramps" (line 10). The impressions concerning the speaker's "hateful face" appear to be displaced throughout the poem into fragmented passageways that capture discontinuous forms of behavior such as the ambience of "silent" space (stanza four), the "forgery" behind one's "smile" (stanza five), and the "stare" that can "swim away into the past" (stanza six). These subtle connections to the image of the face lead the speaker to declare that "nothing is vain" (stanza seven). Supposedly, the reader by now can pick up the speaker's insinuation around stares and their relationship to conceited people. However, only by the end of Part I does the reader assume that the effects of stares and fake smiles in faces are related to what the speaker calls the "orderliness of personality". In stanza eight (the selected excerpt), the reader can notice that this "orderliness of personality" is somehow depicting the effect of the act of being vain or conceited that is suggested by the speaker in the previous stanza. This personality trait is then suggested by the speaker to be an effect of religious upbringing. Whether one is brought up Protestant or Catholic, to be (or act) in vain is an identity trait in social behavior similar to other traits such as defecating on the beach or peeping into someone's swimming trunks to "see it".

The process of trivialization is observed by meshing external and flamboyant situations to the speaker's main focus or narrative. These situations appear in the form of assembling parts of "orderliness" together by suppressing connectives among the distinct observations and

experiences. Furthermore, they represent the speaker or his multiple selves ("faces") as displaced entities that are scrambled across the different stanzas of the poem. The speaker's campy self appears at the end of stanza eight when he assumes that religion is irrelevant and to look up into someone's "trunks and see it" does not account for vain behavior.

In the first stanza of part II of the poem, the campy representations do not only displace the self from the collective, but also, by choosing to trivialize the subject matter, the campy subject becomes funny and political all at once:

> then the parallel becomes an eagle parade
> of Busby Berkeleyites marching marching half-toe
> I suppose it's the happiest moment in infinity
> because we're dissipated and tired and fond no
> I don't think psychoanalysis shrinks the spleen (CP 390)

This stanza begins Part II of the poem where the speaker sways between "Busby Berkeleyites marching half-toe" and a self that is "supposed" to experience happy moments at a time when people are "dissipated and tired". The behavior of the individual self is a result of the effect of a collective behavior. This signals a unity between the speaker, the marching Berkeleyites, and those who felt "dissipated and tired". The "marching", which alludes to thirties musicals by Busby Berkeley like *The Gang's All Here*, with its extravagant "parade" scenes and iconic campy stature of Hollywood celebrities, is posited along with "happiest moment" in "infinity" or supposedly in history. The stanza abruptly ends with a humorous twist by the speaker who opens a dialogue with an absent addressee and gives his banal-seeming opinion that "psychoanalysis shrinks the spleen" [164]. The trivializing effect of "psychoanalysis" constructs a campy situation.

[164] One cannot think of the word "spleen" without the possibility of alluding to Baudelaire and his poems of the same name. In this instant, spleen is an example of a word/object made banal. However, I will refer back to

The assumed pun which naturally alludes to Baudelaire's poem(s) presents psychoanalysis as a resolution of the speaker's "dissipated" action while also suggesting a play on "shrink" and its outcome on the "body" and not on the mind. As the inviting speaker resumes his dialogue in the following stanza with "what the hell are we going to do/with it we are going to blow it up like daddy did" (lines 46-47), he interplays between a collective ("we") that wishes to "blow up" this festive march and a singular subject ("daddy") that presumably engages with the speaker in a sexual oral act as the stanza resumes with "we should go up for a change/ I'm tired of always going down" (line 49). The trivialization behind psychoanalysis returns in this instant to express Oedipal implications of the speaker's violent behavior toward "daddy". While already creating an ambience that is filled with sexual euphemisms and surreal situations, the speaker resumes his campy construction with "it's one of those timeless priceless words like come". In this final line of the stanza, O'Hara's campy process relates the effect of the speaker's experience of being "tired of going down" to the action presented by the word "come". The play on the word "come" is made theatrical by the situation it constructs in the stanza. Language in this instance gives birth to thought; it appears that this specific thought refers back to the reasons behind the "happiest moment" of the previous stanza which causes its subject(s) to be "dissipated" and "tired." By reading (or "drifting" through) the poem as such, camp for O'Hara becomes a tool to undermine social norms by carefully structuring gay-related (sometimes cultural) representations into the process of trivialization (whether toward the poetic subject and/or poetic text). An example of this appears two stanzas later when the speaker declares that "[He has] something portentous to say to [them] but which/of the papier-maché languages do [they] understand you/don't dare to take it off paper much less put it on" (lines 58-60). These lines certainly

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Baudelaire's "Spleen (II)" when examining parody and the relationship to object construction under the milieu of O'Hara's campy subjectivity and the relationship with O'Hara's short poem of the same name.

continue to trivialize current social concerns (such as the effects of understanding language[165] or effects of temporary discourse on behavior) by being arranged alongside sexual idioms ("like putting it on") and subtle gay agency in poetic space.

Camp & Objectivism

The art of appropriation in O'Hara's poetic constructions brings his campy fragments to the surface as an essential condition in assembling artifice and creating objectivism. Moe Meyer in "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp" suggests that a reading of camp has to be viewed through the lens of objectivism which he defines as an "independent reality based on sense-experience" (2). He adds that in the light of social behavior, the human subject becomes the object generating the sense-experience. Meyer suggests that this latter methodology is a "performance-centered" parody because it seeks to "construct agency of human realities [as it] re-assesses" past texts (2). This parody, he argues, gives "power regardless of gender" while its process of imitation becomes a "critical manipulation of cultural and ideological implications" (3).

The independent reality that Meyer formulates through objectivism might be recalled in Williams's perception of a poem as a "machine made of words" (Williams 256). In the introduction of *Invisible Terrain*, however, Stephen J. Ross claims that according to John Ashbery, a fellow New York poet and friend of O'Hara, language-creating-thought is the first stage in objectivity and in the "realist-practice"[166] of creating a poem as a new set of objects. (Ross 20) In addition to this, Ross claims that language for Ashbery achieves its own self-referentiality by creating no separation between the "word" and the "world" constructed.

[165] Language as papier-maché is a type of discourse that can be considered a composite and temporary space for gluing distinct and transient components together.
[166] Defined as an approach to construct product without allegorical meaning (Ross 20).

Language reaches the real world through "the word, the sound, the line break, and the experience of its reading" (Ross 26). In parallel, and as per Debordian thought, objectivism is considered an opposing factor to the alienation the *spectacle* imposes on society. The Situationists argue against the power of transformation that is caused by *commodity fetishism* as theorized by Marx. While Marx suggests that the fetishism of commodity in capitalism involves treating social relations as things and forgetting the social relations that are embedded in things (Jappe 16), Debord argues that such fetishism produces a "rejection of life in all its concrete manifestations" since the *spectacle*'s medium is considered a "visualization of the abstraction of exchange or relations between people" (Jappe 19). Objectivism, based on the latter statement, posits a difference between Debord's and Marx's notion of commodity fetishism where the power of the image becomes an essential condition of value of social relations, not to mention its power to "banalize" through its "totality of the fragmentary" (Jappe 25). Both notions, however, convey a subordination to the exigencies of commodity to the point where man becomes mediated by the thing and confined by its consumption.

As suggested in the previous section, O'Hara alludes to Baudelaire's "Spleen" in more ways than one. In the first instance, the word spleen undergoes the process of trivialization as it is portrayed in the poem "For the Chinese New Year & For Bill Berkson", and specifically in the line "psychoanalysis shrinks the spleen" (line 45). Tadeusz Pioro in "A Certain Kneeness: The Boring and the New in Frank O'Hara's Poetry" associates banality in O'Hara's poetics to the aesthetics of attention and to Baudelaire's dramatization of the spleen. Pioro argues that the claim that 'the slightest loss of attention leads to death' is how Baudelaire perceives his representation of the spleen: an object or agency that can reflect not just apathy or indifference, but a "constant fear of some unspecified calamity, as well as an acute sensation of being crushed

by the burden of the present" (92). Accordingly, the object for O'Hara can come to provide the conditions for combating an indifferent and present situation by being attentive to the urban ambiences no matter how banal their presentations might be.

In the second instance, O'Hara constructs a poem of the same name, and thus, parodies Baudelaire's "Spleen" poems. It is important to note, though, that form is not the point of investigation. The point is to examine objectivism and in the dissociation of "I" or what Alexi Kukuljevic in "The Happy Melancholic" calls a "non-identity [or a] lyrical I estranged from itself" (Kukuljevic 121). The speaker in O'Hara's "Spleen" [167] (CP 187) takes the form of an agency that interplays with the notion of what it is (what it knows) and what it could be. The opening lines of the poem that begin with "I know so much/about things, I accept/ so much, it's like/ vomiting" (lines 1-4) present a distinction between the "I" as subject and "things" as objects. As a result, the speaker declares a sickening effect of accepting and "knowing so much" (repeated in lines 9-10*)* of "things" which creates a conundrum for the perception of subjectivity (and/or queer subjectivity) and its relationship, primarily to "things", and secondarily to the text itself. For Eve Sedgwick in "From Wilde, Nietzsche, and the Sentimental Relations of the Male Body," the first person speaker is considered a "sentimental marker" constructed as a "gender-slippage" only identifiable by the "structure of relations" (Sedgwick 143). When situated as a parody of Baudelaire's "Spleen II" of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the speaker, presented by "I", slips in its identification from gender to object:

> I am a graveyard that the moon abhors,
> where long worms like regrets come out to feed
> most ravenously on my dearest dead.

[167] Dated 1954, published in 1970 (CP 531).

I am an old boudoir where a rack of gowns,

perfumed by withered roses, rots to dust. (Baudelaire 75)

While in O'Hara's poem, the "I", "nourished by the/ shabbiness of my/ knowing so much…and what/they do" (lines 5-9) hints evasively at a shifting identity by which the speaker is "nourished" by "my" utility of knowing and by the effect of things or objects ("they") on the speaker's knowing, Baudelaire's "I" functions as a "graveyard" in one instant and as an "old boudoir" in another. With Baudelaire, the "I" is constructed into two estranged objects that dissolve into their own identifications to create eccentric relations with their surrounding objects. So "rather than resolving" a consistency, the "I" is said to dissolve itself making the "moment of enunciation" only part of a whole, or in this case a whole spleen (as organ or affect). Kukuljevic argues that this contradiction "serves to divide the "I" as if forcing it to coincide with its own disjunction" (Kukuljevic 121). Thus, the "I" is said to evaporate, leaving behind it a "mist" (Kukuljevic 121) or a shadow of the subject's absence. The attention toward the "graveyard" dissipates as the "moon" comes to despise it and detest the "long worms" that feed on its corpses. The image of the "old boudoir" also disintegrates as the "gowns" fade and "rot" like "withered roses". If Baudelaire's subjectivity implies a disjunctive experience of itself in its constructed space with other objects, O'Hara's "I" parodies the subject's disintegration as it faces effects of hatred toward accepting what is known, as portrayed in the ending lines of the poem: "as if I didn't know/ what it is, to me. /And what it is to/ them I know, and hate". Although the subject is tricky[168] to identify, there seems to be a construction of a relationship that intends to erase itself in the face of "others" and "hate". The notion of such subject also recalls Rimbaud's famous exclamation: "je est un autre" (*I is an other*) in which the construction of the object is only made

[168] Linked also to creating Sedgwick's "gender-slippage" as discussed on previous page.

possible by becoming the object (or commodity). Meanwhile, the stylistic craftsman or the "dandy" responsible for the construction of this subject-becoming-object, fades out toward an *other*, an other described by Agamben as a "creature essentially nonhuman and anti-human" (Agamben 50).

The speaker in O'Hara's "Spleen" remains ambiguous and elusive in relation to "others". However, once posited as a parody of Baudelairean context, the psychogeographical reader can explore the uses of the same title as a gateway to early modern notions of subjectivity and can further examine the construction of other relations[169] with objectivism and with the "spleenification of the ideal"[170]. This form of parody brings O'Hara's notions of campy subjectivity closer to Baudelaire's early modernist constructions and his relationship to objectivism and representation. At the same time, it highlights its own workings in camp discourse as it creates dialogue between modernist and postwar queer poetics.

In "Grand Central"[171], O'Hara situates the speaker in a unique relationship with artifice and objectivism. The speaker is embodied in the object of New York's Grand Central station. The station itself is made to emanate sense-experience as well as impressions of affect or ambience. Based on Debord's notion of commodity fetishism, the city, or more precisely the commodities of the city, should be simultaneously mediated in the text, not to separate them into categories, but to offer a totality of distinctions that might just contest society's alienation (Clover 1). The poem "Grand Central" offers a totality which is not exclusive to commodity and

[169]From a queer studies perspective, the relations created from this parody are not thematic but become gender and culture-related.

[170]Kukuljevic argues that the "ideality" of a disjunctive subject is "always placed into relation with a counter image that decomposes the ideal" (121). He adds that the "spleenification of the ideal" creates an "immobile dialectic [with the] "idealization of the spleen" (121). This process contributes to the decomposition of the "I" into a "place holder of its own absence" (121).

[171] Dated 1953, published in 1970 (CP 530).

the city, but also mediates things-as-agency with word choice that is related to sexual identity (or the sexual act) in order to produce campy transformation through objectivism.

> The wheels are inside me thundering.
>
> They do not churn me, they are inside.
>
> They were not oiled, they burn
>
> with friction and out of my eyes
>
> comes smoke. (CP 168)

In the opening lines, fragments of train parts overlap with agency to break down subjectivity into object-focused reflections. This gives the train station a voice and even a de-gendered identity by which it functions. It transfers the affects and ambiences of surrounding objects and those that are coming daily from the trains in and out of the station. Impressions that follow use the first person subject to pose a more critical portrait toward agency and its close correspondence to objectivism such as "Now I am going to lie down/like an expanse of marble floor/covered with commuters and information:/ it is my vocation, you believe that, / don't you? I don't have an American/ body, I have an anonymous body, though/ you can get to love it, if you love/ the corpses of the Renaissance" (lines 9-16). The materiality or what Butler calls "corporeal style" (Butler 365) seems evident in the latter lines where the station considers itself to have an "anonymous body" in regards to other bodies such as dead ("corpses") and historic ("Renaissance") ones. The subject plays with the notions of portraying, through its own "marble floor" and physical space, its attention to its own body which constitutes a love for public anonymity in relation to national history (whether American or the Renaissance). The critic Peter Stoneley in "Frank O'Hara and French in the Pejorative Sense" suggests that the speaker "in resigning himself to his pejorative or cast-down status […] perceives other possible models for

the self" (129) that are outside an "American body" and its nationalism. The pejorative sense comes not merely from his foreign identification with the Renaissance, but as noted earlier, from the decadent "corpses of the Renaissance". As a result, the reader is able to identify and drift into the effects and ambience of the object that occur in the constructed dialogue of social and poetic agency.

In the same stanza, O'Hara constructs an assemblage of objectivism, performative agency, and poetry-as-object. The lines "I am/ reconstructed from a model of poetry, /you see, and this might be a horseless/ carriage, it might be but it is not, / it is riddled with bullets, am I" (lines 16-20) is a melting pot of self-reflections on the nature of poetry construction, the role of poetic agency, and the identity of the object itself, whether train or train station. The speaker is constructed like an engine (a "horseless carriage") to mimic the "model of poetry". However, the speaker also claims that he is "riddled with bullets" and therefore his ability to compose his identity out of poetry can be flawed or filled with errors. This type of slippery play persists well into the second stanza of the poem; however, this time the corporeal materiality of objects extends into the human sphere. In such a sphere, one can examine the ways O'Hara's camp represents much more than a parody of objects:

> windows which are the roof of the sun
> and knelt inside my cathedral, mine
> through pain! And the thundering went on.
> He unzipped the messenger's trousers
> and relieved him of his missile, hands
> on the messenger's dirty buttocks,
> the smoking muzzle in his soft blue mouth. (CP 169)

On the one hand, the object of focus, i.e. the assumed Central station, conveys a certain aura of pride as it compares its inside architecture to that of a "cathedral"[172] or a place of worship. On the other hand, the campy representation which follows comes in the form of oral sex or fellatio without any sense of shame or abnormality. It actually highlights the "pride" and the power of the agency to branch out openly as an object and toward its decentered subject which performs sexual acts in public spaces. To return to Stoneley, he argues that through the act of fellatio, "the poet must transform the center of business and power into a place in which violence is cathected and 'commuted' into privatistic ritual" (129). For the sake of this "ritual", the speaker uses his interpretation of European nationalism to "neutralize America" and "envision attenuated Renaissance forms within the order of the station" (Stoneley 130) or within the self-as-abject. This is where object appropriation can be examined as a process of offering alternative representation by attacking existing structures of signification that "appear [to] reinforce the dominant order" (Meyer 4). Through this game of appearances and allusions, O'Hara constructs his campy situations by defamiliarizing[173] public objects and trivializing discourse structure to create his witty poetic configurations.

Through camp, objectivism is achieved by the practices the language or discourse constructs, i.e. the "language creates its own object" (Smith 48). This offers two important possibilities in the construct of spatial and textual relations. The first is that camp offers a *democratic esprit*[174] (Sontag par.47) toward language that leaves no distinction between high art

[172] The word cathedral is not simply used here for its holy and sacred implication. I believe it also allows for possibilities in relations with history or historicity, as well as being a shared and public place.
[173] Marjorie Perloff argues that the role of the attentive artist is to "push himself to see in new ways by defamiliarizing his objects" (Perloff 20). The intention to defamiliarize is much like the intention to appropriate and that is to promote "a renewed and sharpened attentiveness to reality (Bennett 26).
[174] Andrew Ross in "Uses of Camp" explains best Sontag's phrase: "what Sontag means […] is that camp declares that anything, given the right circumstances, could, in principle, be redeemed by a camp sensibility. Everything thereby becomes fair game for the camp cognoscenti to pursue and celebrate at will" (152).

and kitschy realities. In other words, subject matter is completely open to the poet's desires. This brings us to the second possibility which is to challenge signification by constructing alternative codes in the dominant discourse. This suggests a challenge of the status-quo by transforming "historical judgment into a value in itself [comprised of] collectivities[and] shifting attributes" (Shaw 94). Camp's process of recoding, then, is not merely to play with sexuality and word choice, but also to "invalidate specific gesture, to usurp specific meaning, and to annul specific thought" (Bredbeck 276) by being "open"[175] to shifting attributes.

In an excerpt from "Easter", the significations are made to fluctuate as the words shift from their standard relations in discourse to unusual linguistic combinations that would overturn the nature of metonymy and objectivism. By their adherence to the "democratic esprit", the diction (word choice and arrangement in assemblage) comes to express multiple and campy implications:

> Boom of pregnant hillsides
> awash with urine
> a tambourine relieving the earth beside a hedge
> when the fingers tap against the spine its cherry time
> where are the suburbs of powdered corpses dancing
> O the amusing audience to all words shivers
> before the flashing sword of the thighs of the sun
> like a hangar the sun fries all mumbojumboes
> and the rivers scramble like lizards about the ankle
> until the ravishing pronunciamento of stone. (CP 99)

[175] O'Hara suggests in the poem "The Heart" (CP 231) that "you can't plan on the heart, but/ the better part of it, my poetry, is open."

Camp could be examined here as nothing but a similar psychogeographical technique of *détournement* which attempts to reappropriate the verbal structure without any preconceived signification. With an absent speaker, the reader imagines the "hillsides" analogous to the bellies of pregnant mothers. Nature and motherhood are constructed to overlap each other due to their structural proximity. With the image of "urine" presented as a "tambourine relieving the earth", the reader can suspect that the pregnant mothers might have broken their water, and as a result, they have watered the "earth" and the "hedges". In the middle of the stanza, the absent speaker calls for the "audience" to "shiver" to "all words". This is an invitation for the readers to engage in and connect with the constructed fragments. The "fingers" that "tap against the spine" appear to question the whereabouts ("suburbs") of the dancing "corpses". The readers try to trace the unusual relations that mix into such O'Hara assemblages. The dead are portrayed as "dancing", while the "audience" in the following line seems "amused". This celebration can represent two distinct situations; one toward watching corpses dancing and another towards "all words" that "shivers/ before the flashing sword". This announcement makes the readers focus on the effect of emotions ("amused" and "shiver") on poetic subjectivity ("audience") in regards to two or more distinct and non-sequential observations. The assemblage proposes a vagueness of action or a discontinuity in the speaker's observations especially when celebration of the dead and of "all words" do not logically align with the odd fragments that face the audience's initial experiences. What follows then is an interweaving of body parts ("thighs", "ankle") and natural elements ("sun", "river", "stone") which produce combinations of abstract situations that would make the readers "shiver" as they engage with such poetic constructions. These "mumbojumboes", or supposedly the merger of such fragments, also present the banality of the assemblage in viewing the poem as a totality of separate parts. In the last lines, the readers can perceive that the body

parts appear to create a subtle and campy intercourse of swords and lizards as they get to proclaim ("pronunciamento") their right to exist in poetic space[176]. Therefore, in a stanza like this one, camp is a "coping mechanism" (Shaw 93) which offers to situate all "mumbojumboes" (all objects that seem disjointed from the narrative or discourse) next to the effects of the subject's emotions and behavior. This creates a network of potential reading operations that can follow traces of the social, sexual, and/or cultural implications.

Camp: A Play with Irony & Parody

Camp, defined as taste or a type of "sensibility of refinement" (Benson 1), is constantly carried out in poetry through textual play and linguistic experimentation. Using a number of rhetorical devices, most importantly irony and parody, camp attempts to reflect its theatricality through its "encoded" discourse. Throughout this process, possibilities in textual criticism are considered to highlight social criticism through the assumed perceptions created by the "heteronormative establishment of fear and control" (Benson 1). Similarly, in *Spectacle*, Debord warns his readers of society's manipulative power in spreading the "language of abstraction" to purposely alienate and obscure the urban observer from his own individual "desire" (Debord par.30). In addition to this, Debord argues that the observer's only gestures are not considered his/hers, but are representations constructed by the society of the *spectacle*. New York School poets such as Frank O'Hara, who were the "aristocrats of taste" (Sontag par. 51), frequently used hyperbolic representations in their poetic language. They perceived that by adopting aesthetics over morality, they could focus their attention on the effects of things in regards to social

[176] While some readers might think that the image created out of the sum of subjectivities is absurd, one has to know that such unfamiliar constructs offer a possibility to reclaim unrecognized social and spatial relations with their textual proximity of cultural tropes and stereotypes.

behavior. I suggest that these poets were thereby able to challenge the understanding of social behavior and its effects by using taste as their weapon of choice.

By Way of Irony

The constructed campy art form is not made to shock, but like a "blague"[177] it is made to amuse, and therefore, "deprive itself of contempt and antagonism" (Lehman 287) as it creates "manifestations of the impulse" (Lehman 354) that would render the effect of alienation. This same process is also considered an influence taken from postwar Abstract Expressionism as David Lehman claims in *The Last Avant-Garde*. He argues that in its attempt to imitate the process of composition of a painting, poetry has to be examined as a "play with language" in which the poets are "ironists" in the art of "wit and humor" (Lehman 3). It has been argued that poets like O'Hara used, along with literary devices like irony and parody, painterly devices like collage[178], for example, to "adapt, alter, and adjust" tradition through their play and experimentation in language and poetic form (Lehman 6).

Irony[179], (and often parody) as proposed by camp, are attempts to rewrite history by creating an elusive distance from the original narrative. This leads to meaning and signification being scrutinized whereby the subject's referentiality is made obscure from the actual register used and its possible known implications. For Kierkegaard, irony has "no purpose or its purpose is …metaphysical" (Dobbin 454). This implies that irony has no effect on "textual meaning" that may be "read as having no function at all" (Dobbin 454). This definition proposes an

[177] Defined by Lehman as an avant-garde method of mockery and irony (294).
[178] It is important to note that while O'Hara was influenced in Action Painting and its field of composition, Cran Rona in *Collages in 20th Century Art* argues that the role of collage in O'Hara's work is effective to examine dialogue and interaction as experience and not as explanation, for collage is used to "delineate intersections" and "defamiliarize the displaced/transposed objects" (135, 140). This adds another layer to investigating the intradisciplinary approaches utilized by O'Hara in shaping his poetic appropriations.
[179] Considered the "supreme expression of modernity" because it brings the "mind's ability to hold contradictory ideas and continue to function" (Lehman 344).

etymological connection to French[180] theories of text. However, another quite pertinent notion of irony is presented in Alan Wilde's definition as a "form of protection against the dissolution of self" (Dobbin 455). He argues that irony is a "response to the problematics of an increasingly recessive and dissolving self and an increasingly randomized world [and that it] strives by constantly reconstituting itself [in order to achieve] a simultaneous acceptance and creation of a world that is both indeterminate, and at the same time, available to consciousness" (Dobbin 455). This function of irony in regards to a "dissolving self" makes it a form of defense toward the absent or the indeterminate[181] of this world. Thus, to view irony in O'Hara's poetry through Wilde's latter formulation is to explore his camp representations as a mode of critique of subjectivity by way of presenting the absent self through sexual impressions and appropriated word choices.

In "The Young Christ"[182], O'Hara uses irony when constructing campy representations by bringing biblical allusions together with societal and sexual assumptions. Although the subjectivities presented are questionable in this piece because of its biblical title, the ironic twists of the verses remain critical to the sum of its campy relations. His use of the first person in such a context ironizes the construction of a decentered subject and in its relation to the figure (body) of Christ. This can show a resistance to religion, but through irony, present an indirect confrontation with heterosexuality and other relationships built along the speaker's sensual experiences:

> The hill my bones fornicate and thatch
>
> screams at the pure azure to get

[180] All poets of the New York School were "united by their influence of French Modernism" (Lehman 27).
[181] The indeterminate could also be considered a quality referring to the role of the modernist subjectivity as well as to issues pertaining to the constant flux in regards to sexuality and gender. (Boone 2-3)
[182] Dated 1950 or 1951 (CP 522)

bloody, at the immaculate ocean to be

purer than the royal motive, ticket
to Rome with a homosexual Pharisee.
Nobody'll be playing on that striped beach. (CP 46-47)

In the selected stanzas three and four, the speaker's self dissolves among disjointed clauses that are made up of words like "fornicate", "immaculation", "bloody" and "pure". However, the reader notices from the start of the poem that there exists a speaker who is struggling with his "skull" (line 1) or his body which "strains" (line 1) and "crashes" (line 3) as it faces the power of "God" (line 6). When the reader reaches stanzas three and four, s/he realizes that the fragments constructed present a play between acts of sexuality and acts of spiritual violence. When the speaker's "bones fornicate", the effects are "screams" that get "bloody" toward an "azure" and "immaculate" ocean. The reader can assume that with words like "fornicate", the speaker evokes a personal dramatization and allusion of Christ's crucifixion upon the hill (Golgotha) that overlooks the ocean. The purity of such ocean is traced to the fourth stanza and linked to the speaker's voyage to "Rome" (the holy city) as s/he is accompanied with a "homosexual Pharisee", a "Pharisee" who already assumes an ironic role by his hypocritical nature as narrated in the Bible. This figure proposes a play with biblical history by transforming its original representation into a theatrical and gay-infused construction. Moreover, the "playing" in the last line of the stanza creates irony by simply negating its own seriousness toward a hypocrite subject. The significance of the last line also dissolves the speaker into a "nobody" when the act of playing is performed with a religious and gay company.

In the last three stanzas, the speaker creates surreal assemblages that produce tension between the pastoral, the vain, and the social:

And on the way from the country I thought
my skull which like a sow burns fat
was ovoid rectum to a frightened girl

at her mirror. What think you? The grass
grows everywhere, I must be a pansy
myself, they say all the Jews are really.

Then, having left Nazareth once for all,
I'll thrust my skull between king's purple thighs
a burning child, adoring and my Father's pyre. (CP 47)

In the first stanza, the speaker who comes in from the countryside, produces a surreal play of experiences. By returning to the image of the "skull"[183], and to implications of the physical and of mortality, the speaker's skull is positioned next to a "sow burning fat" and an "ovoid rectum to a frightened girl/ at her mirror". The skull, made to burn fat like a sow does, can convey to the reader the extent of embarrassment the speaker undergoes as s/he is accompanied by a gay Pharisee. However, such implied "shame" is constructed with ties to the speaker's (gay) vanity as the "rectum" and reflections of a scared girl in the mirror come together. With such dream-like tensions, the reader can presume that the speaker's reflections come to undermine notions of

[183] This can also refer to Golgotha (or Calvary) hill which means in Aramaic "the place of the skull" (https://www.britannica.com/place/Golgotha).

divinity, idealism, and sexuality in the face of social assumptions as he registers the bizarre (or the reflection of his "unconscious" mind) in his return to the city.

In the next stanza, the speaker resumes his surreal questioning by a deflection of the phrase "the grass is always greener on the other side" although ironically the other side represents "all the Jews" as "pansies". The oversimplification made about the Jews is but an ironic construction of the character of the speaker and his relationship to a homosexual Pharisee making his way out of "Nazareth". This constructed situation in relation to the speaker's latter observations can be conveyed through what Jonathan Dollimore calls "heterosexual humanism" where the speaker creates a "tension within humanism itself […] by conceiving people at once as unique individuals and as instances of universal human nature: irreducibly different and yet ultimately the same" (Dollimore 78). This can correspond to why O'Hara's displaced subjectivities are portrayed best through the ironic situations he constructs them in. Therefore, the tension developed throughout the poem reaches its climax (or transformation) toward its ending lines where some readers might argue are obscene and perhaps even blasphemous. In the last stanza, sexual violence and spiritual devotion melt together to create the tension of its final line. The suggestion of placing the speaker's "skull" between the thighs of another man (be it "king" or "Father") echoes a campy and playful construction between notion of worship and "adoration" (by alluding to the site of Jesus's crucifixion and God) and notion of physical aggression (with the action of "thrust[ing]" the speaker's "skull" into another man's "thighs" and "pyre"). This play also communicates a sexual lunge for another man which may ironically lead the speaker into the "Father's pyre" or into his punishment for such "obscene" behavior. Therefore, in this poem, camp resides in such ironic arrangement of word choice and is best examined in its relations to the sexual, the Biblical, and the surreal.

Terry Eagleton in "How to Read a Poem" suggests that the nature of language is multi-referential; however, when it comes to poetry, he affirms that it is a "paradigmatic case" (Eagleton 51) of the notion of language. Eagleton suggests that poetic diction is "able to denote only through its complex interrelations with other words [since poems are] compressed structures of language which exploit to the full the crisscrossing affinities between their various elements" (Eagleton 52). This means that the uncertain registers of words is a given in the nature of language (or prose), but when this occurs in poetic form, diction only makes sense through complex interactions with the various elements of the poem. Consequently, and with regards to camp, irony becomes an essential tool in setting up a language structure that plays with hyperbole and sexuality in order to attempt to bring poetic language and subjectivity to the surface. Once this occurs, poetic structure can then capture cultural and social observation through its syntactical arrangement.

In "The Lover"[184] (CP 45), a poem constructed in nine tercets, the ironic play with poetic language brings the second person speaker into a displaced subject that drifts among natural[185] elements ("nightingale", "dew", "moon", "trees", "swan", "night", "grass", "stars", "sun") and among images of masculinity. The poem begins with the image of the speaker waiting and playing the guitar. In the first two stanzas, the effects resulting from his music are captured in dispersed ambiences that "tickle" a "nightingale" and reflect the setting where the "dew is perfect". In stanza three, the constructed situation focuses on the speaker's physical features where he "bitterly…beats/his hairy chest! because he is/ a man, sitting out an indignity" (lines 7-9). The reader observes that this ironic stance or situation (marked by exclamations) is critical for

[184] Dated 1950 or 1951 (CP 522).
[185] The Natural could easily be considered as the pastoral in O'Hara's oeuvre for nature is presented as a "situational concept of the city". This concept is a "useful disguise" to new communitarian identities where the "street" is replaced by natural elements and as "new possibilities for aesthetics." (Gray 4)

the speaker and his social identity or performativity. As the poem resumes its ironic construction, this type of performativity mélanges into other observations and impressions in stanza four and five as they depict harmful and violent relations between the speaker and nature such as the "mean moon", the "sniveling fir trees", and "let's throttle" a "swan". Moreover, in the stanzas that follow (the fifth till the seventh stanza), the speaker's point of view is altered to a collective one which invites the readers to focus on the speaker's performativity (and indirectly theirs):

> We, too, are worried.
>
> He is a man like us, erect
> in the cold dark night. Silence
> handles his guitar as clumsily
>
> as a wet pair of dungarees.
> The grass is full of snakespit.
> He alone is hot amidst the stars. (CP 46)

The collective subject "we" presents a change in point of view toward the singular male speaker who is "a man like us, erect". The readers, assumed to also be men, share their "worry" with this lonely "erected" subject. The "erected" subject then poses an analogy to waste and excrement as his guitar plays "clumsily" like a "wet pair of dungarees" (in colloquial terms, "he plays like shit"). With arbitrary lines that position the speaker next to natural elements (such as "grass" and "stars"), stanza seven ends with the speaker feeling "alone" and "hot" in his cosmos. The speaker or "the lover" then challenges some form of a sexual act when he is situated alongside domestic

objects and everyday commodities so as to open his experiences to infinite oscillations within camp's "democratic esprit" [186]:

> If no one is racing towards him
> *down* intriguingly *hung* stairways,
> towards the firm *lamp of his thighs,*
>
> we are indeed *in trouble*, *sprawling*
> *feet upwards* to the sun, our faces
> growing smaller in the colossal *dark*. (CP 46, emphasis added)

O'Hara's choice of words situates his ironic commentaries in close proximity to sensual gestures. This conveys a portrait of subtle sexual activity from an assumed collective standpoint. To remain in the "dark" and perform socially unacceptable sexual experiences (whether out of wedlock or same-sex encounters) is indirectly portrayed through the construct of the decentered agency ("our") which invites the reader to engage in "races" that simultaneously go in two directions: downwards toward the "lamp of his thighs" and upwards with "feet…to the sun". This collective agency appears to react to the speaker's "hotness" as they "sprawl" on their backs. Because the readers have been invited to join in the downward gaze of the thighs and have participated in the "feet upwards" position, they are considered to be "in trouble". This play between the collective agency and the speaker creates, from these combinations, an "intriguing" space for safekeeping campy representations that suggest ironic traces of social and cultural ambiences of gay relationships.

By Way of Parody

[186] Lytle Shaw in "Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie" associates the democratic spirit to Giorgio Agamben's idea of communities as "temporary, tactical social compositions based on contingent rather than organic bonds" (8).

Parody[187] is a rhetorical device where an artist imitates a subject or genre in such a way as to make fun or comment on the original work. This form challenges the act of rewriting through ostentatious exaggeration. Jonathan Dollimore in "Post/Modern: On the Gay Sensibility, or the Pervert's Revenge on Authenticity", argues that the type of exaggeration that is used in camp is that which undermines "the depth model of identity from inside [in order to] be taken to and beyond its own limits" (Cleto 224). Through exaggeration in parody, camp encapsulates a form of "subversion of other sensibilities", for it allows the portrayal of the "oppressive identity of subordination [in order to hollow out the] dominant formations responsible for that identity" (Cleto 224-225). In this formulation of camp, Dollimore opposes Sontag's original notion of camp as exclusively a gay sensibility, but affirms its role as a mocking tool that functions subtly and efficiently through parody. As for Debord and the Situationists, they believe that the development of a cultural *détournement* starts by imitation and appropriation in order to "realize…historical action and correction" (Debord 209). In the essay "Détournement as Negation and Prelude", the Situationists depict the centrality of parody of writing in capitalist times as they argue that "it is necessary to conceive of a parodic-serious stage where the accumulation of détourned elements, far from aiming to arouse indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity" (Par.6). With the Situationists in mind, one would examine a key component of camp's exaggeration and theatricality and recognize the "sublimity" behind O'Hara's parody of form. (An example of this will follow with the discussion of "An 18th Century Letter").

[187] www.literarydevices.com/parody

Under similar conditions of imitation, Jameson in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" considers pastiche as a mode that undermines and comments on the original rhetoric by revealing it to be a failed copy, however, unlike parody, devoid of humor and trivialization:

> Pastiche, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language but it is neutral practice of mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its humor (114).

To associate O'Hara's oeuvre with pastiche, i.e. as one without humor or even satire, is hardly reflective of O'Hara's "self-ironizing detachments" (Snediker 38) or any of his parodied situations for that matter. In the poem "An 18th Century Letter"[188], O'Hara's parody focuses on form and on configurations made banal and funny. From the very start of the poem, the title represents the form that the poem will take. Poems with long lines and ending rhymes (*aa*, *bb*, *cc*, *dd*, *ee*) is a typical eighteenth-century style that O'Hara intentionally imitates in this piece:

> To you who's friend to my angels (all quarreling)
> I write this breathlessly, marveling
> at the power of communication of the Word,
> which is not a mystery but is not bored
> at being an attribute of the Good. What
> is important to you, the angels & me is: Thought
> must somehow touch these larger links
> & not relax at movie references to the Sphinx

[188] Dated 1950 (CP 520).

& Word must not be shy of Good, but strong;

but not belligerent or painless, that is wrong. (CP 16)

Initially, the form follows the closed structure of eighteenth century poetic construction where lines are written in exact and equal metrical feet. However, in this parody, they merely pose as such. Secondly, another quality of parody is to revisit the past with an intention or purpose of reinvestigating critically and "not innocently" the form or subject in scrutiny (Calinescu 277). The speaker begins by addressing a "friend" who is captured standing next to the "angels" waiting to receive the good word. He declares that he is astonished ("marveling") to portray the "power" of communicating the "Word" which he thinks is "an attribute of the Good." Highlighting in capital letters the words *word* and *good*, O'Hara alludes to John 1:1 of the Bible which states, "in the beginning was the word…and the word was God". The reader can anticipate that O'Hara's choice of words is a parody of the biblical verse because of his swapping play with "Good" and "God", and because "angels" are also introduced, from the start of the poem with the line "to you who's friend to my angels (all quarreling)", as they themselves are addressees and participants of this parody. Then, the speaker appears to allude to another verse from the Bible. In constructing "Thought" (line 6) with a capital letter, the parody pays specific attention to the "Word" of "God" as a divine and ironic message. This verbal exchange leads to a humorous exchange in the role of authorship, making the speaker-poet assume the role of "power", the role of creator of all "communication". The speaker-poet is the one responsible for the good word and not the "belligerent" who is characterized as "wrong" in the final line of the stanza. Like a religious ritual, the role of the speaker-poet is elevated to a divine one.

This parody, though, achieves a humorous break from a divine and philosophical situation especially with the line "& not relax at movie references to the Sphinx" (line 8).

Although it sounds banal, the allusion to film references of the sphinx becomes an external and lightened reference to the seemingly serious "marveling" (line 2) of the "Good" "Word". Therefore, O'Hara uses parody to intelligently communicate the nature of his process of imitation, but also to ultimately highlight that the "Thoughts" that come out of his lips can somehow "touch these larger links" (line 7). Even though the poem is not sexual per se, the reader can notice how parody can aid in appropriating form and banal representation as a way to undermine the nature of relations that occur in the poetic construct of campy discourse, while also setting apart an eighteenth century poem from a twentieth century one in a funny and lighthearted manner.

Judith Butler in "From Interiority to Gender Performatives" affirms the humorous side of parody as she states that parody by itself "is not subversive" for it is "its own occasion for laughter" which lacks "an origin" (Butler 365). Butler suggests that a notion of gender parody that "postures as an imitation [creates a] perpetual displacement[189] [with its] fluidity of identities" (Butler 364). This notion is said to offer the possibility for "openness to resignification and recontextualization", which would eventually disrupt or "denaturalize" the heteronormative culture and its construction of meaning and identity (Butler 364). To consider it disruptive, Butler argues, is to examine its performance as a distinguishing tool in the copy/original binary in order to be able to rethink the "psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality" (Butler 365).

Based on the latter, I believe that O'Hara shows his cunningness and playfulness with performativity when his evasive campy subjectivity sways between homosexual representation and heterosexual agency for he wishes to remain subtle, and at the same time, "destabilize the

[189] To refer back to the poem "An 18th Century Letter," the displaced subject flows among a variety of identities like *me*, *you*, the *angels*, and the *sphinx*.

naturalized categories of identity and desire" (Butler 365). It is important to note that with this play in performance, O'Hara constructs a "corporeal style" which, like campy representation, suggests a "contingent construction of meaning" (Butler 365). Since Butler finds that gender is an identity "tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 366), this implies that the inclusion of bodily gestures and movements can construct a gendered self in relation to its social temporality (as examined with poems like "The Lover" and "The Young Christ"). Therefore, one can understand O'Hara's use of camp as a mode to reappropriate, through irony and parody, a space for (re)building representations that reflect "possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler 367).

The Dandies: Ambassadors of Camp

Examining performativity can prove useful in studying camp as a necessary style of expression for gay writing and gay aesthetics, not to mention its close relationship with psychogeography as a physical practice essential to the creative process of art construction. In a saturated consumer culture, camp proposes style as an "aesthetic filter" (Schreiber 81) to survive hierarchy and classification, as well as to make living possible in such a culture. The person who takes on camp in his/ her artwork is considered one who is a "surrogate in matters of culture" (Sontag par.45). However, according to camp, the perception of culture in language and discourse comes with experimentations in style that the dandy (de)constructs and (re)appropriates. Originally observed in Baudelaire's work, Peter Nicholls in *Modernisms*: *A Literary Guide* claims that the role of the dandy is "to substitute the aesthetic for lost space of social representation" and replaces "the political rhetoric with literary style" (11). The role of the dandy, often called the "arbiter of style", is to fight against "the political authority of a

controlling culture [in order to] assert [a cultural] resistance [while being devoted] to refinement and taste" (11). Stephen Dansky in "On the Persistence of Camp" asserts this modern aspect of the resisting dandy and adds that he makes up a "cult of self inextricably connected to societal rebelliousness" (1). This resistance suggested by his "aloofness of style" (Lehman 72) is a refusal to compromise between academic and commercial representation and between high and low culture[190]. By doing so, the performative role of the dandy in camp is to "déclassés" (Nicholls 12) social and gender identification in order to disrupt the "flow of social convention" (Dansky 2). Susan Sontag reaches back to the modernist qualities of the dandy in her formulation of camp in order to consider the "arbiter of style" an active participant in the understanding of culture and urbanism in postwar times. This means that although the user of camp might seem passive in his views on culture, he is said to "redefine relations" (Nicholls 14) (and is often "stigmatized as [an outsider], persecuted, and, at times, legally prosecuted" (Dansky 2)) in his resilient effort against the cultural alienation and incongruity experienced in the capitalist urban milieu.

Like camp, the formulation of the dandy starts by highlighting qualities of style and refinement. However, underneath the aesthetic observations lies a political mind that subsumes culture and the urban collective experience. It is crucial here to examine Debord's formulation of urbanism with regards to the experience of the dandy. Although urbanism provides the space for the deployment of the forces of capitalism (with emphasis on its "technology of separation"), Debord adds that it is an "isolating operation of the working class" as much as it is a "reintegrating system of those isolated individuals" (Debord par.171-172). To refer back to Sontag's characterization of the dandy as the maker of camp, I suggest that based on Debord's

[190]Contrary to the traditional dandy, O'Hara's was said to use style to connect to art and to gossip, thereby relating the high/ academic to the low/ commercial that O'Hara himself was known for (Lehman 72).

model of urbanism, O'Hara's dandy could be valued as a 'reintegrating operator' of the city and the urban space of his constructed poetics. Since Debord argues that to make the alienating society livable, one has to use architecture and surface representations as the "authoritarian decision" in shaping social and urban thoughts (Debord par.173). This latter conditioning and approach to urbanism conveys similar qualities found in the character of the modern dandy in which appearances and taste shape his identity to redefine social and urban relations.

In O'Hara's long prose-poem "Second Avenue"[191], the dandy archetype drifts in the city, however not aimlessly (as seen with the character of the Baudelarian flâneur). In the following excerpt, the campy representations depict particular elements from the urban environment with the intention of hinting at political stances that can come to highlight sensitive issues in heterosexuality and/or homosexuality. Linguistically, the choice of words conveys, on the one hand, a collection of assorted pieces from the urban spaces that are observed by traversing[192] through them, while on the other hand, it suggests details specific to the subtle portrayal of gay behavior and observation in public space:

> your *lamp* will never *light* without *dirt* and the speed
> increases of moving away from all rapturous ice-floes
> as a *shaggy* white figure approaches and sinks its fangs
> upon my brazen throat, so thrust into the wind that a *necklace*
> *of fur* such as this which drags me beneath the Bering Sea
> is the only possible adornment for this burning flight

[191] Dated 1953 (CP 528-29) In Revely-Calder's "Frank O'Hara in Transit," (2017) the second avenue is presented as a "through-street" that marks out territories while "plying its own route through them and past them." Because of the nature of the avenue, and because O'Hara never lived on Second, "his time there was a fitting kind of transience, taking in the sights and reeling along to end up somewhere else, or, at any rate, to get back where he started, at some distant address" (730).

[192] Importance of using "movement words" to glue together the assemblage: "speed", "moving", "rapturous", "approaches", "sinks", "thrust", "drags", "flight", "crash", "suspended", "crushing".

and the magnificent *entrance* to be mine as I crash

against the *portals* of the mistress of *chairs*, who is

yes, a bearded man suspended by *telephone wires* from moons

in alternate *sexual systems*. And then there is the crushing

drop! As the fur falls from me and the man crashes, a *crater*,

from the heavens which he so adored and which I also *decorate* (CP 140, emphasis added)

Experienced like the *dériveur*, the depictions of the dandy are related to appearance and decor of the elements observed in urban space. The commodities highlighted in italics suggest an abundance of ornamental objects and architectural silhouettes surrounding the experiences of the dandy. Although these represented objects do amplify the extent of O'Hara's interest in creating text out of surface rather than depth, (and metonymy not symbolism,) his textual assemblage poses as a "mediator between materialism and hermeneutics" (Watkin 169) as he constructs his assemblage out of words suggesting mobility (see underlined words). As a result, the mélange of verb choice with external shapes of objects creates a "decoration" that relies purely on style over content. Nevertheless, the portrait constructed in this selected excerpt conveys some sort of fleeing ("burning flight") from a "shaggy white figure" that "approaches", "sinks its fangs", "thrusts", and "drags" the speaker's "throat". The effect or result of this fleeing causes the speaker to "crash" against a "bearded man" who is "suspended" from another "portal" or "sexual system". As the reader realizes these surreal formations or disparate relations bombarding one another in the same space, the speaker drops the "fur" leaving behind him fragments that display his personal taste or decorum. The speaker or the dandy of this piece is the one who has an eye for "necklace(s) of fur", "magnificent entrance(s)", and "a crater from the heavens", not to

mention other flamboyant constructions like the “mistress of chairs” and “alternate sexual systems”. Using the dandy to observe and express the narrative, O’Hara is able to play with poetic signification and reappropriate it to his own poetic and political desires. Structurally, what is also important to note is that the campy representations in the chosen selection are constructed by using existing terminology that offer an array of urban objects (such as “lamp”, “dirt”, “ice-floes”, “entrance”, “chairs”, “portals”, “telephone wires”), yet their constructions function differently than a layman’s social discourse. The telephone wires, for example, do not represent actual phone wires stretched across city limits. Instead, they are used to suspend a man from the moon like a helpless marionette. Furthermore, the line resumes to the next by including additional objects that would produce a twist in the image’s representation. What we end up with is a bearded man who is suspended from an alternate universe or an alternate sexual system. This portrait certainly leaves the reader with something to engage with amidst the “burning” ornamentation of its decorative composition.

In the modernist characterization of the dandy, there is a “duplicity of self” that is created by the dandy as a defense mechanism against an alienating urban society. This multiplicity and evasiveness of self is exhibited in the process of camp as it attempts to use an aesthetic and political approach to promote social and cultural attributes. For gay poets like Frank O’Hara, camp comes to aid his seemingly banal enunciations into critical and sometimes sexual and social twists of identifications in linguistic and poetic experimentation. Through its play with irony and parody, camp bridges relations between language and representation, surface and depth, artifice and candor, style and content.

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Conclusion

Every poetic practice is a skillful process of composition that deals with creating possibilities in linguistic and metonymic configuration. Through Debordian psychogeography, the critical task of reading poetry aims at generally deciphering the linguistic arrangements that come to reflect social narratives and the effects of cultural conditioning on their construction. The reader-based analysis is then one which calls for the reader's close attention to the workings of poetic language and to the social situations that such discourse creates. According to Situationist psychogeography, the constructed situations (or assemblages as referred to in the dissertation) offer aesthetic opportunities that allow the reader to detect and map the effects of social and cultural ambiences throughout the poems. In examining the urban and campy poems of Frank O'Hara, the project draws social relations and cultural passageways between the text, the poet, and the reader.

Contemporary psychogeography is defined as a form of "writing with a sense of the past and an eye for the present that takes us close to the street. Street as in the color of the paving stones and the font of the signage and the shape of the sidewalk, and figuratively, as in the multitudes that pass by" (Weiland 1). In addition to this formulation, the British urban writer Will Self points out that, just like writing, psychogeography is a "meditational practice" which involves the writer to "get out and experience" his environment first hand and not to blindly rely on this highly "hypermediated world" (Bures 1). In retrospect, and based on both recent descriptions, one of my primary goals is embedded in exploring readership relations between the original Situationist coining of this "meditational practice" and how Frank O'Hara's postwar poetic appropriations and city drifting (as captured in his urban poems) could possibly be his aesthetical ways of coping with the late capitalist society and its commercial imperatives.

In creating a type of poetry that is inclusive to urban elements and multi-layering of subjectivities, I try to negotiate between O'Hara's postwar urban style and Situationist politics of appropriation with its emphasis on psychogeography. The first-hand experience of the street that naturally comes by walking in city space, is most often captured in O'Hara's poems as a delicate mapping of the walker's actual engagement (and dissociation) with his terrain. Moreover, the detachment and alienation that the walker experiences by walking are also part and parcel of what psychogeography is all about. And I quote Will Self who claims that by walking, the person "decouples" from the "human geography that so defines contemporary urbanity" (Bures 1). Based on this, the project presents O'Hara's campy subjects as subjects dissociated from the cultural milieu of capitalist urban space.

Through psychogeography, the reading of subjectivity as a "decoupling" experience conveys a central condition of this study and of portraying O'Hara's "personal desire and freedom for participation" (Keehan 1). This is captured in his speaker's nebulous passageways through an open structure that invites the readers to drift along the poem as a peripatetic journey. The psychogeographical practice helps the reader to "re-assess textual production" and further opens criticism to the "cultural and ideological implications" (Meyer 3) that appear in the dominance of capitalist and mass-culture discourse. By reading O'Hara through this practice, his poetic style becomes a "lesson in utility"[193] and his poetry as "useful as a machine!"[194] Although such Situationist applications are rarely implemented to poetry, their objectives in this research are to expose O'Hara's playful and campy (erotic) features of his urban style.

[193] From "Memorial Day 1950" (line 40) (CP 17)
[194] From "Memorial Day 1950" (line 50) (CP 18)

In conveying the poet's struggle with poetic discourse and with sexual expression, O'Hara seldom employs conventional uses of discourses. Through *détournement*, the reader notices the poet's linguistic transgression as an escape from the boundaries of culture and its social assumptions. In focusing on a number of significant elements of Situationist politics, *détournement* becomes not merely an identifying technique in art appropriation, but one that attempts to open relations with various theories that explore capitalist society and the ways the poet (and/or reader) can overcome or transcend society's alienating effects. With complimentary pathways to concepts such as constructing situations, mobility, Unitary Urbanism, play and experimentation, modern culture, Dadaism and surrealism, the project investigates a political view of O'Hara's poetic experimentation which focus on his evasive subjectivity in relation to social alienation of urban capitalist space. Accordingly, the poems read with psychogeography are perceived as documented moments that depict or capture effects of cultural ambiences in urban space. Furthermore, and with the collected views of Situationism, the project reassesses the poet's desires in capturing his detached speakers, whether through his process of trivialization, or his process of surface representations, or his structural (and French) (re)appropriations.

In considering walking as the basis for psychogeography, the *dérive* is a flow of personal desire that coincides with the thinking and moving process of the alienated speaker. As I examined through O'Hara's walk-poems, the *dérive* is a political technique that is produced through the personalized effects of urban and cultural ambience. O'Hara's speakers are portrayed drifting through disparate places only to experience at the end of their journey some kind of epiphany. Their realizations, whether experienced during walking or in a passing vehicle, transform into surprising outcomes and insightful (international and local) impressions. In studying O'Hara's urban form through *dérive*, the reader pursues, through the arrangement of

lines in the poet's fragmented structure, multivalent associations that refer to public and private variations of emotional and social behavior. This technique, considered in the study a building poetic strategy, has been found to trigger inspiration by constructing ambiences (or words representing effects of ambiences) and effects of behavior within textual and poetic spaces. Using all these different functions, the *dérive* proves to be much more than a physical act in traversing the urban environment. It is an operation to observe and critique text-as-(urban)space, and hence, considered a significant compositional process in the workings of postwar urban poetry.

Concerning the process of O'Hara's urban poetry with its relevance to the New York painters and Abstract Expressionism, and from a psychogeographical reading of his painterly gestures, the effects of chance found in his verbal assemblages also come to reflect an important factor in the making of the urban *dérive*. Issues such as multi-layering, collages of unusual metonymies, and acts of linguistic banalization, the *dérive*, with its quiddity in mobility, is open to invite chance into its construction of drifting spaces. In examining these conditions in poetic composition, the dissertation delves into O'Hara's intricate constructions as a way to prove that his urban poems are not merely reflecting capitalist (gay) culture of postwar New York, but also creating a microcosm of ample layering of perspectives in every single poetic assemblage.

To subtly reflect his gayness or queerness in pre-stonewall times in New York was a challenging task. Nonetheless, I believe that O'Hara succeeds in his usage of camp in his provoking poetry. Regardless of the effects of the cold war and the international political turmoil that was taking place at the time, O'Hara's relationship to the art world began in early postwar times. He wrote regularly art reviews and criticism for *Art News* before occupying the job as clerk and then curator at the *MOMA* of New York. With a style that was profoundly influential to

Abstract Expressionism and postwar American painting, the "poet among painters" came upon camp very naturally. However, for the purpose of this project, camp is weighed alongside Situationist politics on art so as to conceive social (gay) relations in O'Hara's urban discourse.

Besides being an expression of gay desire in discourse, camp, from a Situationist perspective, is constructed as a non-hostile mechanism to cope with an unjust modern society. Using the literary devices of irony and parody, the project focuses on the construction of O'Hara's subjectivity in relation to the camp sensibility on the one hand and to the nature of its modernist and capitalist appropriations on the other hand. While the focus remains central to linguistic experimentation in poetic construction, O'Hara's campy style is an aesthetic attempt of a gay poet to undermine capitalist discourse and thoughts on postwar art composition. This can be viewed as an asset to Situationist thinking and to psychogeographical mapping of art criticism and poetic investigation.

In the act of walking, O'Hara's urban poetry comes to life as it challenges the nature of poetic voyages and their effects on the mind of the city dweller and/ or reader. "Poem"[195] is certainly one of many pieces that speak to Situationist composition of art and politics. From its very beginning, the speaker invites the readers to join him for a walk "in spite of the/ weather" (lines 2-3). In this walk or "stroll" (line 5), the speaker declares his "excitement" of the urban "voyage" (line 9) as the movement of the body ("toes[196] together then/ maybe blood" (lines 11-12)) proclaims "meaning" (line 13) and a "sea" (line 15) of possibilities even though the speaker and his absent addressee(s) are "washed down a/ gigantic scenic gutter" (lines 6-7) in the city. With psychogeography, the reader focuses on the effects of urban ambience on the speaker's

[195] Check Appendix B for the complete poem.
[196] In the poem "Walking" (discussed in chapter two), the "toe" is regarded as the initial connection between the walker's body and his mental/ imaginative process that comes from the act of walking.

emotional and behavioral experiences along his journey. However, when the reader reaches the last stanza, s/he notices an impression or effect that diverts the observations presented in the beginning of the journey:

> And the landscape will do
>
> us some strange favor when
>
> we look back at each other
>
> anxiously

The excitement of the speaker and the initial positivity experienced in the speaker's urban stroll turn to feelings of estrangement and anxiety toward the end (whether poem or journey). These emotional repercussions which happen to O'Hara's speaker capture a kind of symptom of Debordian alienation while remaining content about the nature of this city "walk" that offers "scenic" views of its "gutter". In reading poems in such a psychogeographical manner, the reader investigates such scattered and decoupling effects of urban ambience and gets to evaluate the emotional and cultural milieus that make up poetic expression. Since O'Hara's inviting style calls for the reader's interaction with text (through "self-talk" for instance) and present a narrative of urban walking (including impressions of effects of ambience and effects of personal desire), I found O'Hara's poetic style to be most relevant to Situationist politics and psychogeography. It is in O'Hara's urban aesthetics and in his politics of composition that the reader can observe his resilience to capitalist culture. His ambiguous subjectivity challenges the status quo by presenting it as fragmented and as transformative to the effects of cultural ambience.

The nature of a Situationist analysis is to focus on the produced relations concerning the three French aspects[197] of O'Hara's mercurial style. *Détournement* is used to examine the reading criteria that can magnify the cultural process of O'Hara's appropriations. The *dérive* shifts the study to understanding O'Hara's city representations in poetic space and in relation to walking as a creative process of semiotic composition. In examining camp, the study presents a number of urban associations that contribute to mapping O'Hara's erotic and political constructions.

The advantages of reading and analyzing postwar poetry through Situationist psychogeography is its plausible process of decomposition in order to separate, isolate, and criticize the poetic material. In the article "Frank O'Hara: He Made Things and People Sacred", Peter Schjeldahl argues that "everything about O'Hara is easy to demonstrate and exceedingly difficult to "understand"" (1). Therefore, the aim of this project is to pay close attention to the decomposed elements of O'Hara's poetic constructs so that the reader can examine the effects of ambience in illuminating his process of composition, and in turn, "understand" his urban and campy poems. For this reason, the psychogeographical study is considered a seeking mechanism to find the bits and pieces that make up his poetic assemblages, with an awareness of the limitations in explicating the mental process of poetic composition. Consequently, the reader delves into the histories and backgrounds of the constructed subjects in order to communicate and transform a critical response. However, once the reader is prepared to do so, psychogeography offers multitude of possibilities in poetic analysis that could surpass the

[197] the playful (experimental), urban, and erotic aspects.

linguistic front and lead to critical mapping of the poet's personal reflections toward social and cultural behavior.

Contemporary psychogeographists are considered to be a mix of "one part local historian, one part flâneur, one part novelist, [and] one part raconteur" (Weiland 1). This explains that the user of psychogeography can go beyond the psychology and geography of chartered space, and thus, can expand the reader's knowledge and observations. The project considers Frank O'Hara a postwar psychogeographist whose life-packed (urban and personal) observations are documented and condensed in poetic space. Whether in creating a personal narrative or a reflection on the nature of space and time, the project communicates indirect traces of O'Hara's desires and his unique choices in mapping cultural knowledge in poetic composition. Consistently, this project intends to scan probabilities in understanding O'Hara's urban postwar poems because of the nature of his appropriated techniques and his ability to document multiple (social and cultural) ambiences at work.

The psychogeographical techniques were initially created to explore architectural contexts that conceal potential criticisms of the cultural and artistic milieus of urban life. However, instead of architecture, this dissertation implements the Situationist "anti-techniques" to the surface of O'Hara's campy poetry in an attempt to investigate the capitalist (and urban) effects that occur during his poetic composition. Furthermore, the psychogeographical techniques become conceivable devices in literary criticism as they can highlight the cultural and social components within O'Hara's fragments leaving a lasting impact of his "insufferable genius"[198] of urban and gay poetry in postwar New York.

[198] From "A Proud Poem" (lines 15-16).

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Appendix A

Figure 1

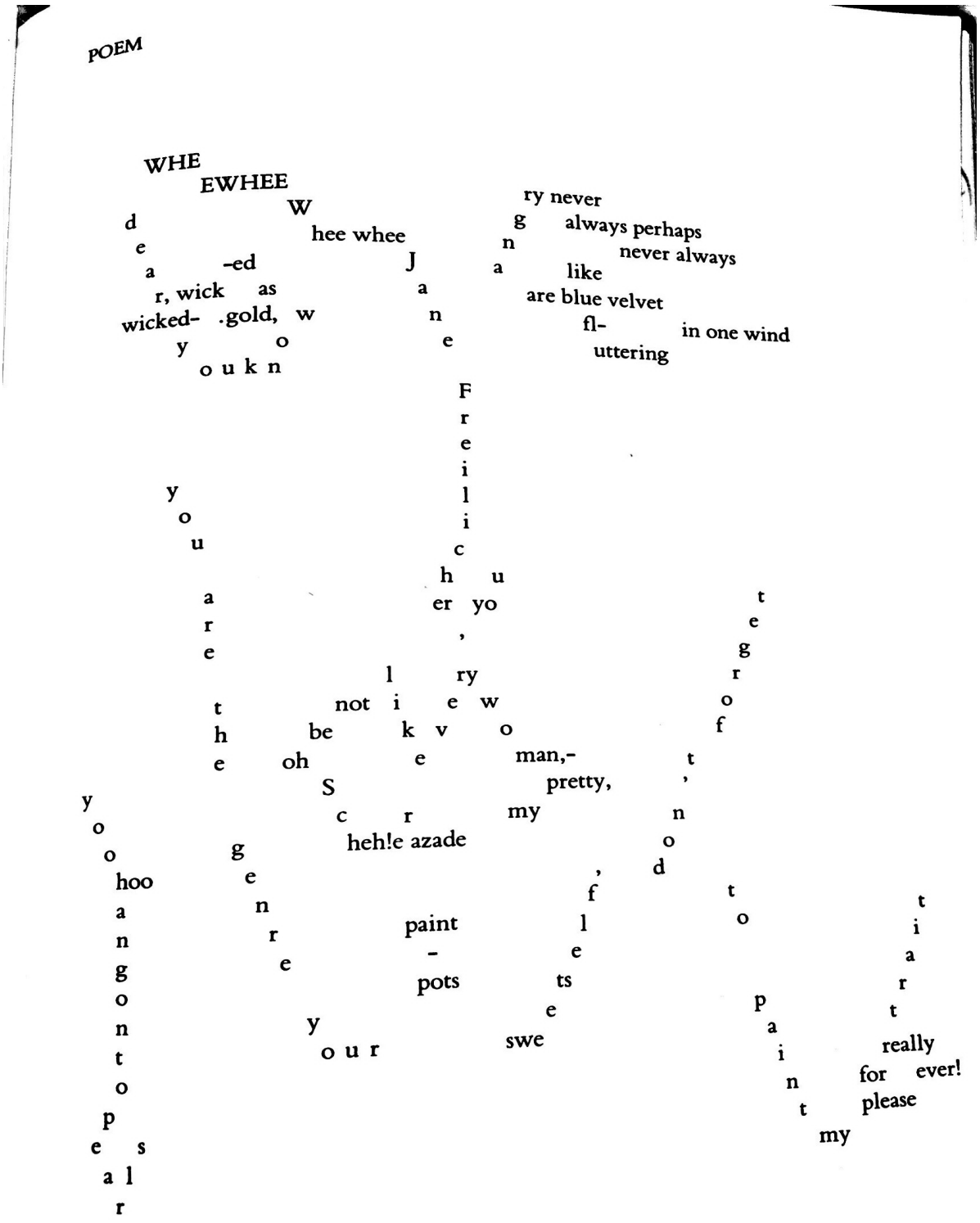


Figure 2

BOMB

Budger of history Brake of time You Bomb
Toy of universe Grandest of all snatched sky I cannot hate you
Do I hate the mischievous thunderbolt the jawbone of an ass
The bumpy club of One Million B.C. the mace the flail the axe
Catapult Da Vinci tomahawk Cochise flintlock Kidd dagger Rathbone
Ah and the sad desparate gun of Verlaine Pushkin Dillinger Bogart
And hath not St. Michael a burning sword St. George a lance David a sling
Bomb you are as cruel as man makes you and you're no crueller than cancer
All Man hates you they'd rather die by car-crash lightning drowning
Falling off a roof electric-chair heart-attack old age old age O Bomb
They'd rather die by anything but you Death's finger is free-lance
Not up to man whether you boom or not Death has long since distributed its
categorical blue I sing thee Bomb Death's extravagance Death's jubilee
Gem of Death's supremest blue The flyer will crash his death will differ
with the climber who'll fall to die by cobra is not to die by bad pork
Some die by swamp some by sea and some by the bushy-haired man in the night
O there are deaths like witches of Arc Scarey deaths like Boris Karloff
No-feeling deaths like birth-death sadless deaths like old pain Bowery
Abandoned deaths like Capital Punishment stately deaths like senators
And unthinkable deaths like Harpo Marx girls on Vogue covers my own
I do not know just how horrible Bombdeath is I can only imagine
Yet no other death I know has so laughable a preview I scope
a city New York City streaming starkeyed subway shelter
Scores and scores A fumble of humanity High heels bend
Hats whelming away Youth forgetting their combs
Ladies not knowing what to do with their shopping bags
Unperturbed gum machines Yet dangerous 3rd rail
Ritz Brothers from the Bronx caught in the A train
The smiling Schenley poster will always smile
Impish death Satyr Bomb Bombdeath
Turtles exploding over Istanbul
The jaguar's flying foot
soon to sink in arctic snow
Penguins plunged against the Sphinx
The top of the Empire state
arrowed in a broccoli field in Sicily
Eiffel shaped like a C in Magnolia Gardens
St. Sophia peeling over Sudan
O athletic Death Sportive Bomb
the temples of ancient times
their grand ruin ceased
Electrons Protons Neutrons
gathering Hersperean hair
walking the dolorous gulf of Arcady
joining marble helmsmen
entering the final ampitheater
with a hymnody feeling of all Troys
heralding cypressean torches
racing plumes and banners
and yet knowing Homer with a step of grace
Lo the visiting team of Present
the home team of Past
Lyre and tube together joined
Hark the hotdog soda olive grape
gala galaxy robed and uniformed
commissary O the happy stands
Ethereal root and cheer and boo
The billioned all-time attendance
The Zeusian pandemonium

Figure 3

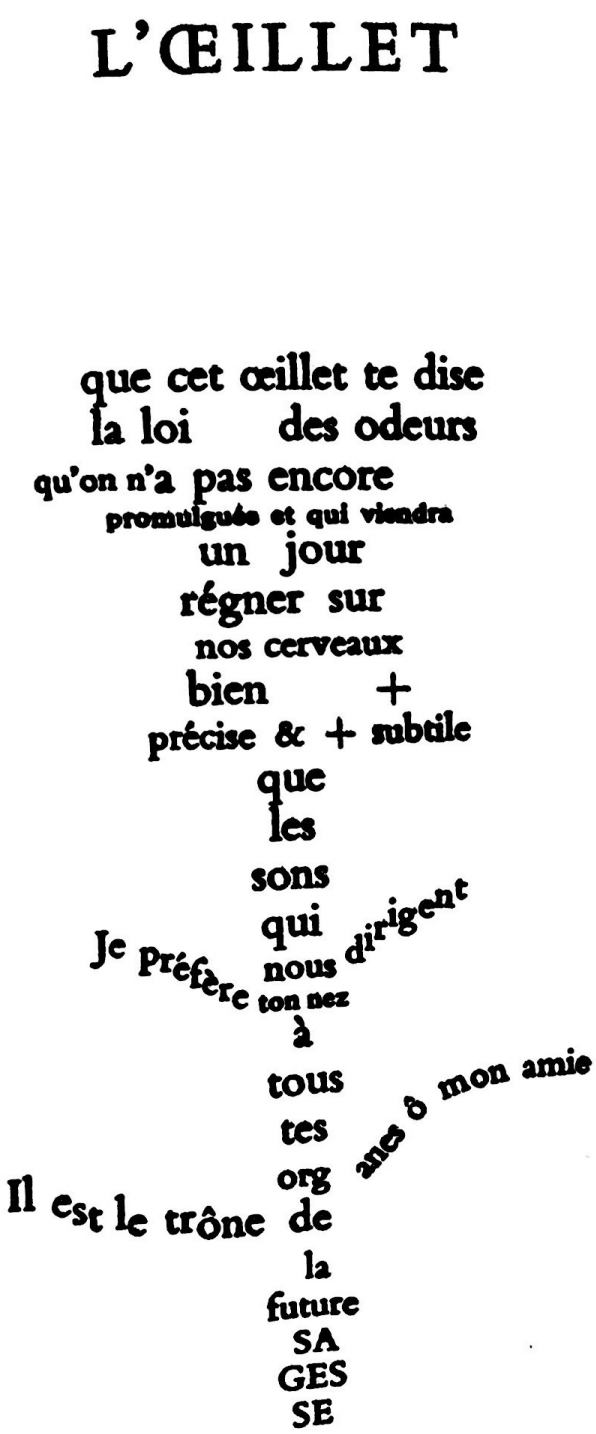
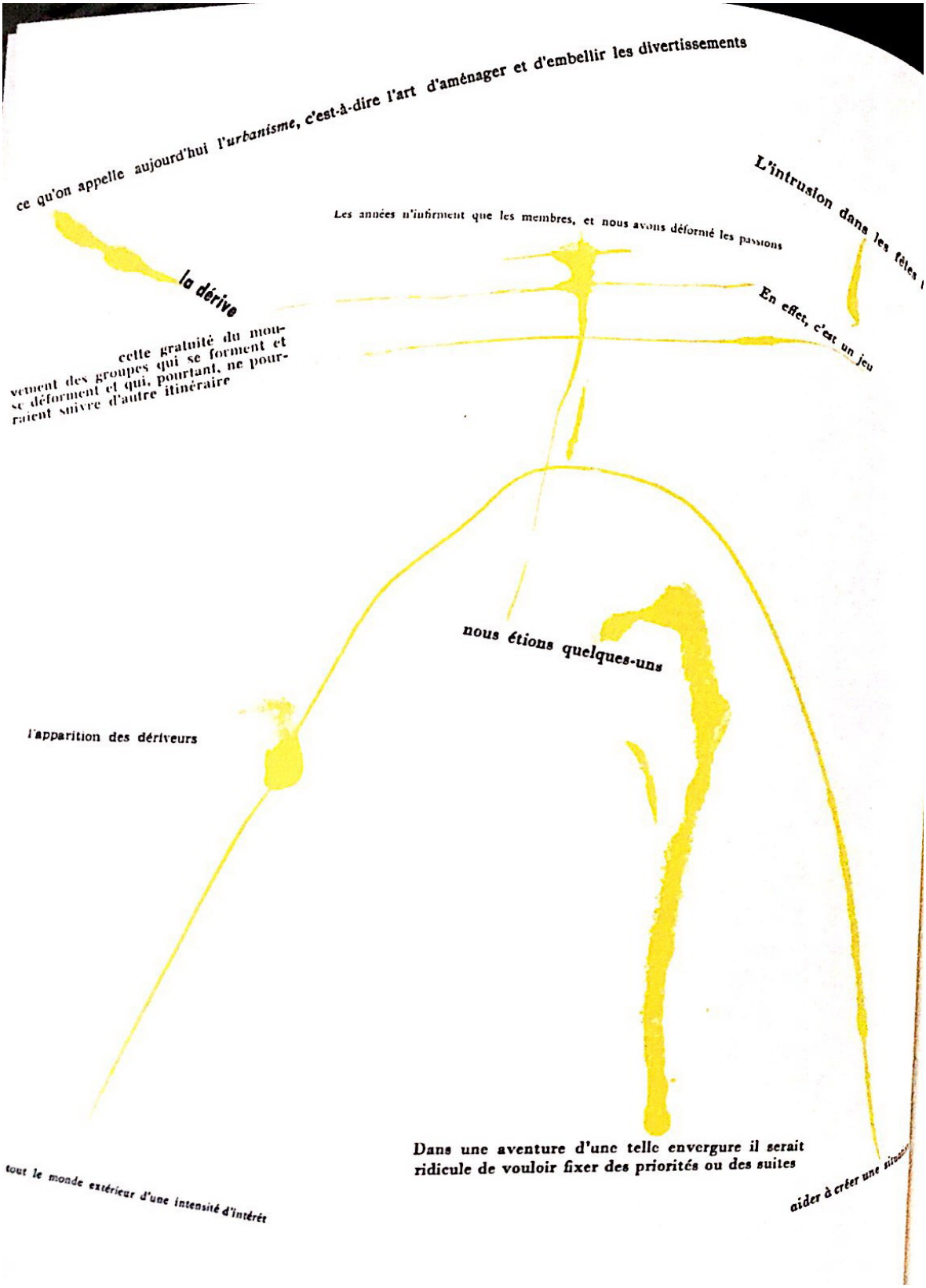

L'ŒILLET
que cet œillet te dise
la loi des odeurs
qu'on n'a pas encore
promulguée et qui viendra
un jour
régner sur
nos cerveaux
bien +
précise & + subtile
que
les
sons
qui
Je Préfère nous dirigent
ton nez
à
tous
tes
orgues ô mon amie
Il est le trône de
la
future
SA
GES
SE

Figure 4


ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui l'*urbanisme*, c'est-à-dire l'art d'aménager et d'embellir les divertissements
Les années n'infirment que les membres, et nous avons déformé les passions
L'intrusion dans les fêtes
la dérive
En effet, c'est un jeu
cette gratuité du mouvement des groupes qui se forment et se déforment et qui, pourtant, ne pourraient suivre d'autre itinéraire
nous étions quelques-uns
l'apparition des dériveurs
Dans une aventure d'une telle envergure il serait ridicule de vouloir fixer des priorités ou des suites
tout le monde extérieur d'une intensité d'intérêt
aider à créer une

Appendix B

DRINKING

This is the feared moment Light
falters because it's been on so long

and music slips into a briefcase or
satchel hungry for breakfast My face

flushed with its wit and apprehension
begins to pale as the waitress claims

my glass And I look at friends haltingly
And I look at strangers The dawn alone

drains the eye The dumb heart finds
no neighbor to kill its rising fever (CP 57-58)

POETRY

The only way to be quiet
is to be quick, so I scare
you clumsily, or surprise
you with a stab. A praying
mantis knows time more
intimately than I and is
more casual. Crickets use
time for accompaniment to
innocent fidgeting. A zebra
races counterclockwise.

All this I desire. To
deepen you by my quickness
and delight as if you
were logical and proven,
but still be quiet as if
I were used to you; as if
you would never leave me
and were the inexorable
product of my own time. (CP 49)

POEM

Let's take a walk, you
and I in spite of the
weather if it rains hard
on our toes

we'll stroll like poodles
and be washed down a
gigantic scenic gutter
that will be

exciting voyages are not
all like this just put
your toes together then
maybe blood

will get meaning and a trick
become slight in our keeping

before we sail the open sea it’s
possible ---

And the landscape will do
us some strange favor when
we look back at each other
anxiously (CP 41-42)