

LEOPARD

and

**'AS OBVIOUS AS AN EAR':
FRANK O'HARA'S SOUND**

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Humanities

2016

Janet Rogerson

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

CONTENTS

Abbreviations of Works by Frank O'Hara	5
Abstracts	6
Declaration	7
Copyright Statement	7
Acknowledgements	8

LEOPARD

I

...	11
Ghost	12
Leopard in the Snow	13
On Nothing	14
Eureka Again	15
The Dictator's Double	16
Home	17
Summer	18
When I Met	19
The Translator	20
'A world without quotes, what a world that would be'	21
The Baby	22
First Voyage	23
The Dowry	24
Unbelonging	25
The Black Texts	26
Elegy for Bad Men	27
Tulips in May	28
Old Man Haiku	29
Impossible Forest	30
The day the sea froze	31
After the Still Life	32
Patience	33
Elegy for the girl in last night's dream	34
Knowing	36
Daisies	37
An Undesirable Garden	38
And Second	39
The House of Culture	40

II

Momma	42
Portrait of E.P.	43
Notes on Mary Torrance ('Mary is Mary')	44
Over the sea to Eagle Street	45
Poem	46
A brief infatuation with the works of Emile Zola	47
No Room at the Père Lachaise	48
After Church	50
The year of my birth	51
Mark Strand	52
The Queen of the Monkeys	53
Silent Orchard	54
A, B, C & Z	55
Sabayil	56
Bird Ride	57

III

Strawberries	59
The Year of the Same	60
Them	61
The Egg	62
A Field for You	63
The Rolling Boy	65
Skyborn	66
The kiss	67
Chapter 4: Reproduction	68
The sun, the trees, the park and me	69
Fall	70
Over	71
Under	72
Him	73
Want	74
The Lake	75
Thank you for loving me baby	76
The day Matilda caught the ball	77
Watching <i>Jaws</i> with Louis	78
Tusks	79
The Train Turns Corners	80
Frank O'Hara leaves the Museum of Modern Art	81

'AS OBVIOUS AS AN EAR': FRANK O'HARA'S SOUND

Introduction:	'As odd sounds are lovable'	83
Chapter One:	'More than the ear can hold'	88
	'They're playing Rachmaninoff's Third next'	88
	'A whole career to have a line like that'	92
	'A few deaf lines'	95
	'Perfection of ear'	98
Chapter Two:	'Too Much Grass'	101
	The chatty poet	101
	Fifty years of O'Hara criticism	102
	How O'Hara silenced the critics	112
	Frank O'Hara today	115
Chapter Three:	'The wind sounded exactly like Stravinsky'	119
	Surface sound	119
Chapter Four:	'You won't be bored and you won't be lazy'	134
	The sonic imagination	134
	Sonic dialogues	141
	'Better than the movies'	148
	'Playing the typewriter'	154
Chapter Five:	'Holding his audience'	157
	'Everything is in the poems'	157
	'I thought I had a lot to say'	159
	'Walking is a dialogue'	161
	The ugliest poem	165
	'Invisible italics'	168
	The story of a sound	173
Conclusion:	'My poems speak on the silver of your eyes'	179
Bibliography:		186
Word Count:	58351	

ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY FRANK O'HARA

- AC* *Art Chronicles 1954-1966*, ed. by Donald Allen (New York: George Braziller, 1975).
- CP* *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Donald Allen, 9th edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
- EW* *Early Writing*, ed. by Donald Allen (San Francisco: Grey Fox, 1977).
- LP* *Lunch Poems*, (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1964).
- LPA* *Lunch Poems*, ed. by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 50th-anniversary edn (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2014).
- ME* *Meditations in an Emergency*, 2nd edn (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
- PR* *Poems Retrieved*, ed. by Donald Allen, 8th edn (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 2001).
- SS* *Standing Still and Walking in New York*, ed. by Donald Allen, 13th edn (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1975).
- VP* *Frank O'Hara: Voice of the Poet*, [CD] (Random House Audio Voices, 2004).

ABSTRACTS

Leopard

A poem is an event that begins and ends on the page; when a poem works it works alone and is not dependent on the performance of its neighbours. The goal with *Leopard* was to create individual poems whose scope is eclectic and ambitious rather than to fashion a coherent collection. This attitude is not a popular one in twenty-first century poetry, where themed collections and identity poetry are both desired and celebrated. But I believe imagination is the true currency of poetry and coherence is over-rated. The poems cross a variety of forms and styles, to invent and tell stories, to untame the imagination. My poems are disparate and there is little point forcing arbitrary connections and themes onto them. *Leopard* is influenced by music, film, art, words and by other poets. The poems are influenced by Frank O'Hara, not in style, but in the way O'Hara reminds me that poems can begin anywhere, the poet is nothing if not in control, and writing poems is an exciting thing to do. I imagine some of the poems would please the old ladies in Ealing comedies, these 'doiley' poems are flimsy and full of carefully positioned holes; they stand next to surreal poems which I see being read by a guy in a diner in a David Lynch movie, he'll be crying and laughing—at the same time probably—and not necessarily because the poems are sad or funny; others might be valued by characters who know things about poems and can appreciate what they do, know who or what they are referring to and hopefully find something beyond their lines. Like the spots on a leopard, each poem stands alone, but if a unity is to be found, I hope it is through sound and accessibility. I care how my poems sound because poetry for me is primarily an oral art form. I think some of the poems sound good, others I never read to an audience because not every poem can escape its white space, though it can still serve a valuable enough purpose on the page. I hope my poems are accessible and I hope the sound of a few of them, at least, will stay with the reader, but most of all I hope the poems will not bore; the worst adjective to attach to a poem is boring.

'As obvious as an ear': Frank O'Hara's sound

This thesis explores the poems of Frank O'Hara in relation to sound. O'Hara's status as a poet, though legendary, is built on the casual nature of his poetic and not on claims about technical expertise. O'Hara's much-quoted statement in 'Personism: A Manifesto', in which he rejects 'elaborately sounded structures' has resulted in critics taking O'Hara at his word and largely avoiding the sonic properties of his poems. But a poem and its sound are inseparable and to overlook sound in the critical discourse on O'Hara is a considerable omission. The study of sound in poetry typically involves the examination of embedded sound effects which have been employed by the poet to manipulate the readers' experience when reading or listening to a poem. O'Hara does embed sound to some degree in a haphazard way, but what is more noteworthy about O'Hara's poetic is the way sound inhabits the surface of his poems. My intention is to turn up the volume on this neglected area of O'Hara's poetic and tune in to the sonic world he invites the reader to inhabit, the world of *surface sound*.

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification from this or any other university or other institute of learning.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

- i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.
- ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.
- iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the "Intellectual Property") and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables ("Reproductions"), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.
- iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=487>), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library's regulations (see <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/library/aboutus/regulations>) and in The University's policy on Presentation of Theses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank John McAuliffe and Douglas Field for creative and academic guidance and for their patient and good-natured supervision. John for helping steer the poems into their final form; Doug for helping me finish what seemed at times unfinishable and for giving so much support in the final months. I also thank my third panel supervisor, Eithne Quinn, for her insightful suggestions about my research. Thank you also to Julie Fiwka and Joanne Marsh from the Graduate School for their help and efficiency.

I am grateful to the University of Manchester's School of Arts, Histories and Cultures for the award of Home Fees Bursary.

Thanks are also due to fellow students in the Centre for New Writing—Shirley Nicholson, Valerie O'Riordan, Alicia Rouverol, Eleanor Ward, Rosemary Kay, Usma Malik, Charlotte Haines, Rebecca Hurst and Kathryn Dixon—for their friendship and generous feedback.

I am indebted to the editor of *The Rialto*, Michael Mackmin, the first person to publish a poem of mine, who has given ongoing encouragement and support over the last several years. I am grateful to *The Rialto* and to the editors of the following journals and anthologies who have published poems from *Leopard: The Literateur* ('The Queen of the Monkeys', 'Old Man Haiku' and 'After Church'); *The Dark Horse* ('Watching Jaws with Louis'); *The North* ('Daisies' and 'Under'); *Under the Radar* ('The Baby'); *The Interpreter's House* ('Summer'); *The Moth* ('Silent Orchard'); *Tears in the Fence* ('The Black Texts'); *Obsessed with Pipework* ('The Translator', 'Mark Strand', 'Him', 'The Lake' and 'The day the sea froze'); *The Rialto* ('Knowing', 'An Undesirable Garden', 'Over the sea to Eagle Street', 'Them', 'Strawberries', 'The day Matilda caught the ball', 'Momma', 'Over', 'Chapter 4: Reproduction' and 'The Dowry'); 'The Dowry', was also published in the anthology, *Hallelujah for 50ft Women*, Bloodaxe Books, edited by Raving Beauties. 'Skyborn' was published in the anthology, *Heavenly Bodies*, and 'Want' was published in the anthology, *My Dear Watson: The Very Elements of Poetry*, both from Beautiful Dragons Press, edited by Rebecca Bilkau.

Ideas from 'As obvious as an ear': Frank O'Hara's sound' were presented at the British and Irish Contemporary Poetry Conference, Manchester in 2013, and at the Poetry School's PhD Festival, London in 2014.

Love and appreciation to my children, Tilda, Ethan, Louis and Ava for not holding the sacrifices they have made because of the PhD against me. And to end strong: love and gratitude to my husband, Paul Bellamy, for being here for me and for reading and having opinions on everything I write.

LEOPARD

for Paul

I

Ghost

I was outside in the square dull of garden
when I realised I couldn't draw a ghost.

The page waited patiently like the future
and my eye held what was supposed to fill it.

The narrow path which didn't deserve its name
was an appropriate stage and bedding plants,

urged to grow unimaginatively, watched me choke.
The scattering of bluebells, not even a full

family, said, *Be like us wild under the privets.*
They had no idea what a forest was

as they smirked down at manufactured soil.
In my hand there *was* a ghost and my arms

built the castle which would have chilled
anyone who saw it. I can see it.

The things that didn't materialise queue still,
the ghost up front waits in my fingers,

I save every first page for him.

Leopard in the Snow

Under the microscope
 snowflakes are symmetrical,
 but in the Himalayas snowflakes
 are for biting,
 are evidence of holes,
 are swarms of hot flies,
 are reminders of spots,
 are raiders, dirty
 white things attacking
 the timid night.

One paw
 in front of the other,
 not looking at anything,
 but smiling a little, as if to say:

You know my eyes remind you of someone.

That was the first time I ever really considered the word catwalk.

It seems, the subject once again had turned to snow—
 the existence of snow—he could argue all night
 that snow did not exist and after a few vodkas
 would have us all convinced.

Why is it possible to look everything up?

Some people don't look up at all,
 like the woman in white goods who said to her friend:
 and he said if it's not clear,
 when you get home you can check our website,
 and I said I would because I didn't like to tell him
 I don't even have a computer.

They laughed.

So, why *are* snowflakes symmetrical?

Miriam Rossi professor of chemistry at Vassar College knows:
 Snowflakes are symmetrical because they reflect
 the internal order of the water molecules
 as they arrange themselves in the solid state.

Oh Miriam, you have travelled the world and just look
 where you have ended up, you didn't expect that did you?

On Nothing

Some days having woken into a small part of me
I think I'm outright on nothing and it takes some time
to become a whole one. But when I know who I am
I set off through the door noticing only my feet
and there's a deepness and simplicity and a bicycle
propulsion that makes perfect sense then and again.
I'm cool arctic at first and clutch underfoot while a white
bear walks alongside and could eat me if he wanted
but he doesn't. He's going his way and I'm going mine;
we feel good about ourselves and he's after some fish
and I'm after nothing. It gets completely blackness
like the bottom of the sea, here is the blackest
place I've ever been, I blink and the lights go on
which makes the fish freak, because they are the lights
and I am the light, I move on and they're gone. My arms
swing too much, everyone tells me, and I'm a wheel
on a cart crushing the grass. I want to live
in this grass and die in this grass, and it's not now
but centuries ago just after a plague and there's a sense
of relief, a tightening of muscles, a return to full
strength. It was a mighty climb but it feels fantastic,
the air up here is warm, a new warm, a holy warm
that starts under my skin. There's a rope tied
from this mountain to that one and I feel invincible;
it's a thin walking rope with shoulders to balance
my fingers and thoughts reach the distance.
There's a birdness about me in this skin stranger
than feathers, but better, and I know I can't fly.

Eureka Again

The sun was so sharp it was impossible to hear.
I was in a bright box, that in blinks

became a cage of shadows
when I realised the meaning of life—

more than that actually.
Of course it was nothing

I hadn't learned before and forgotten.
It was nothing

ink and paper could catch
or my gravely beautiful voice.

The Dictator's Double

Some feel sorry for the man who looks like the late Dictator,
the way the crowds part and turn like folk dancers when he walks by.
Some follow him at a distance with trigger-happy eyes.
Some look at his hands, think them un-stately hands,
they curl their lips as he peels a banana.
Some stare at his wife, think her a woman incapable
of satisfying a Dictator, see her unenthusiastic face,
barely trying, under the weight and chink of his medals.
Some imagine the Dictator in his palace (which is gold),
they picture his shelf of severed heads,
they see the Dictator watching the workmen fix the shelf,
see him tilt his critical dictatorial head to align the bubble.
Some resent that he takes a leisurely stroll, see the bodies
of his victims under each sandaled step.
Some look at his ring and think it rather modest
for a ring paid for in blood. Blood ought to buy a more opulent
ring they complain, that much at least is owed to the dead.
Others look at his children, observe the way they segregate
their toys, privilege their favourites
and banish the weak and the old,
these are not the children of a double.
They begin to look for signs of guilt in the double's smile,
of humanity in his frown, they suspect they see both in both.
They begin to doubt this so-called double.
In great numbers they storm the Dictator's burial ground, heaving
stones, scraping dirt, hacking at the coffin lid with rocks.
They grasp bones and teeth and ribbons; they drag the impostor's
skeleton through the streets, march on the city square,
chanting as one, *The Dictator is alive, long live the Dictator.*

Home

Home, home, home, it was home I was wanting, and it was HOME I came to, brothers.
—Anthony Burgess

I woke tomorrow in *their* future
walked through the different-now town.
The light was shades darker, the sun
farther away, the space I stood in narrower.
I wanted to go home
but each street had a new wall.
A billboard gloated, "The Future is Bricks!"
and the probably leader held one like a curiosity.
A group of builders were angry
they couldn't get their bricks
past another wall to build *their* wall.
And I couldn't get home.
There was a wall on my street
and a slogan, "Keep Out"
my mind said, no, and I climbed, fell
over to the other side, looked back
at a slogan, "Do Not Leave".
I opened the door to my house: bricks
I went to the back door: more bricks
I broke a window and slipped through
to a different-now home
heard the bookshelves crying
then my brothers' and sisters' muffled voices
each talking at odds, to themselves.
I leaned my face against the bricks
and I imagine they leaned theirs.

Summer

Two girls sit on the porch
 barefoot in the darkening heat; tropical flowers
 clamber up the wooden beams of the house,
 purple and orange like their dresses.
 Neither of the girls has a face,
 one has the earth for a head,
 the other's head has exploded.
 You never saw lovelier creatures than these,
 they could be twins in happiness.
 The black with spots night sky has feelings
 for one of the girls and the flaky red dirt
 loves the other.

The night says, *Don't be afraid,*
I'm not a stranger, open your mouth and I'll pour
myself in; the dirt says, *Come, lie down*
I will be gentle, roll over and cover yourself in me.
 The girls giggle then whisper to each other,
 the one with the earth for a head
 says to the night, *Ask me next week,*
 the one with the exploding head says to the dirt,
I have to be in by nine o'clock.
 The girls disappear behind
 the screen door. The night and the dirt
 light cigarettes.

When I Met

Today I met myself coming back
flamenco branches bent for drama
and we hugged awkwardly,
we knew how we were.

I said, *I wouldn't go back that way
there's a problem on the road,*
we nodded as if I understood
and traffic slow-moved through us.

I said, *here's a great line,* and
we wrote it down. *Seriously,*
I said, *things have been quiet,*
to which I replied, *each day
is a death, do you want nothing
to be written on the tombstones?*
I know, said I, *we have a yard
full of blank ones already,* we
shook our head.

*I hear you still listen to that song
every day. Yes, different versions*
I reply, a little defensively. *It's fine,*
I take my face tenderly, *you!* We
didn't really have much to talk about.
So how is everyone? Good, pretty good.
I'd better go. I'll walk back with you.

The Translator

did not like what he read
he'd never smelled a word before, dear God
he could hardly stand it. How can such things exist,
he wondered. He skipped ahead to a passage about flowers
and plunged in, the flowers smelled good but he needed more:
he searched for roses and stumbled upon a section that took his legs
from under him. His throat dry, he flicked through to find a drink,
the sea before him was calm and salty
there was no clean water anywhere. He knew wine was not the answer
but he took a drink, to blur the lines, but the purple
stain only made the words uglier.

He turned once again to page one.
He breathed through his mouth. He cried. He tried to understand.
He tried to detach himself. He tried to pretend. He tried to make it a game.
This is fun, he said as his fingers grew dirty and his eyes
would not forgive him. He could not trick himself easily.
He feared he would think of the number on the last page,
a number that was years away, perhaps older than him,
he desired to look and he must not look. He trawled through the text
on blistered feet, his joints swelled, his skin grew coarse, his false smile
became real. I love this, I want more, he told himself, and he did want more,
he wanted more.

'A world without quotes, what a world that would be'*(Anonymous)*

The left hand quoted the Latin.
The baby quoted the rattle.
The piano quoted its keys.
The camera quoted the light.
The tractor quoted the fields.
The duck quoted the pond.
The dog quoted his fleas.
The virus quoted the cells.
The T S Eliot quoted himself.
The plagiarized quoted themselves.
The rapper quoted his hat.
The runner quoted the track.
The painting quoted the hammer.
The broker quoted the dollar.
The story quoted The End.
The change quoted the difference.
The speech marks quoted a presence.
The erection quoted the penis.
The ellipsis quoted an absence.
The inattentive quoted the paraphrase.
The doctor quoted his mortality.
The bizarrely quoted the surreally.
The cleverly quoted the *oh really*.
The celebrity quoted the tabloids.
The end quoted the beginning.
The myth quoted the mash.
The secret quoted its shush.
The quoted quoted
the unquoted.

The Baby

won't leave. Our happy home built frail when she came;
within hours, downstairs moved sideways, upstairs
moved down, and the floors and ceilings changed
their seasons. Now, in a corner of the cellar
we hear her celebrate the carnival hour. She bangs
out a warning if we high-whisper. Our year is
cracked, and we are all afraid of her.

We read the same line silently, faces closed
on unfathomable books. We mutter over the urn
of nobody's ashes, salt prayers for a shattered reply;
Baby turned our soundtrack
down low; made our thoughts
crooked and we are tired as escalators.
We are winter people now.

First Voyage*(for Academia)*

The ship was an out of tune music box,
its song warped by the sea.
The crew, like us, were fools
who walked on deck on the waves with an extra step.

There were two of each of us
and in the hold we discovered why.
Later over science we realised
we would never be enough.

Everything seemed familiar
which was not impossible.
Flowers rose up from the water
and licked us as we walked by.

Our feet told us there was a crack in the hull
and the insects had started to cry.
The night grew, became too big to hold,
and our illusions were getting suspicious:

we noticed a couple of waves
were missing
and the scaffold had not been taken
down from the stars.

We opened the chest to check the books
read their perfect blankness.
We would think it all better,
then write it another way.

The Dowry

Look at my daughters,
count them if you wish.
Look at their shoulders
taut and cool as grape skin.
The lovely way they sit,
in control of the Plaza;
there is power in stillness.
Look inside their heads,
do you like it in there?
What do you see? You must
be mistaken—look again.
Look at their brooches
set with jewels from the mid-afternoon:
the fly, the ant, the last drop
of dew from the Alderman's lips.
Look at the gold strung teeth
smiling across their throats.
Have you finished counting?
Well, count them again.

Unbelonging

The girl in the sad dress
is lonelier than the loneliest thing,
lonely like a mountain,
lonely as only a born thing can be,
won't ever belong again.

From nothing at all to too much:
cherry trees spend their petals,
the bankrupt rain is blue,
her quick breaths are pocket change
the narcissus has foreclosed.

Lash-less eyes can't see
which way to go.
Unrelocatable
like a forest or lost tooth.
The sea will miss her too,

will carry her
to the border
of the desert's broken home.
The immigrant wild things—
just like her—want no asylum.

They'll convene again at dawn
cry with her dreaming
of their lost home, grand-
scheming to get back
there.

The Black Texts

After they had adjusted their ears, they fell to their knees. It was some moments before they were able to rise. Later they tried to describe the way the silence felt, they told how it was as if a physical thing or a drug had taken them, first their minds, then their legs. This was the place that held her, that still held her, as each one of them held the image of her. One man said he felt the words—all her imprisoned words—the power of them. They wouldn't talk about the darkness; they were changed by it. Then there were the books, black-backed, unlined, documents that would take decades of analysis. Written in the dark, dozens of them: stacked neatly against the wall, they called them the Black Texts. And beautiful her, still holding the pen; a heap of bones and an ordinary biro, empty.

Elegy for Bad Men

They were in a cathedral or a disused warehouse,
tall candles cast shapes that lit upon her body
approximately thirty times, climbed
high walls, turned grey to black and back again.

Woman—unbelievably woman—he turned her to fire.
Lured her to an isolated place, a bed from someone else's life
with mossy grass, climbing plants on all posts and blooms
like lights or the signs on a drugstore or *7-eleven*.

And in the very same bed, moving swiftly across
the border and surrounded by our protectors,
flashing and galloping through Knoxville, Jackson,
Montgomery or El Paso and heading back home.

Then it was night and the night smelled
nice (there isn't a better word), night hit her twice
in the face, the taste of night like oh something missed
for four thousand two hundred and sixty-four days. Night.

He was thirsty, his hand reached for an empty
space, he needed a beer—his hand rounded upon a
blunt instrument or two-hundred dollars in cash—
it was cold and wet and he raised it to his lips.

Then it was time, he was hungry or perhaps he declined: fried
chicken, t-bone steak, mashed potato, refried beans, grits,
double cheeseburger, fries, four eggs sunny-side up,
watermelon, lemon pie, chocolate milk and a toothpick.

He didn't know her, or he loved her. She said all the right things,
you are a big man, a strong man—said she wouldn't tell
anyone—you are a good man, a beautiful man.
She was crying now. And he said: I'm sorry, God forgive me.

In a secluded location or a wooded area
there are flowers with heads big as dinner plates or faces,
the rhythm of flowers and an unknown scent,
flowers with no names and no sign of a struggle.

Tulips in May

It looks like 3am on a Saturday night out there
they started off well groomed gorgeous
stood at the bar holding their vodkas—
it was a lifetime ago, April, look at them
leaning on each other, they remind me
of an expression I overheard in Blackpool
completely and utterly fucking shitfaced.

The yellow ones are practically unconscious
limbs like the Vitruvian man; the orange ones
have their shirts buttoned up all wrong
and are talking nonsense; the pink ones
have their arms around each other saying
I love you I love you I love you
and the purple ones are crying.

The red and white ones
they still look okay.

Old Man Haiku

Old man
where are you going
with those flowers?

Impossible Forest

(for Paul)

We found ourselves here again having
followed the road past long-eared lambs

the forest is bright with acid leaves
dark world dripping and I'm thinking

about mud; a twig with antennae has a stone
on its back and the moss has obliterated

a large area and follows us down the path
growing over our boots; its touch, heart-

break close makes me want to cry;
I say, *it's beautiful but everything*

*has already been said, and you reply, it has
but for you everything is still left to say.*

The day the sea froze

some teenagers drove their car
out, skidding over the ice
manoeuvring around mini-
waves and ripples; they stopped
at the first big wave,
and one of them climbed on,
he was surfing, bent knees
arms outstretched, balancing.

A couple asked if I would take
their picture; they stood under
the crest of a wave, their faces
turned half towards each other
eyes rolled upwards in surprise.
Then a dramatic one:
cowering in fright as if
it were about to engulf them.

After the Still Life

The grapes were gone
and all that remained
was a mathematical diagram;
a map of the tube stations;
a string of lights unlit;
a constellation;
a double helix:
autumn's sharp garden;
winter's apocalypse;
spring's introduction;
summer's photo-negative;
a plate of scratches;
a plate of fish bones;
a plate of over;
a crown of thorns;
a spiders' quorum;
an oriental horizon;
an event horizon;
a tumbleweed on the horizon:
a carcass in the desert;
the veins of a dead man;
an action painting;
a page from a leaky pen;
a page from a science book;
a page from a dot-to-dot book;
what the baby wrote in the book;
a tangle of bramble;
the arteries in cheese;
the tributaries of marble;
cracked mud on the river bed;
the first marks of language;
the first steps to literature;
the first thought of wine;
a swirl of barbed wire;
a platter of death;
the bloodless aftermath.

Patience

The trees have been here with me for some time
enough for more trees and partial trees
to grow on top of them and more again.
Vines, those affectionate creatures, hold me
and I'll hold you tighter, with so much love
to give, the most enthusiastic
of all the plants. Soft moss, there's nothing
left to say: know your genius, lie here with me
in cool bedness. Strong feet, curled toes
hold tight to the soil. Is that rain?
Bark like leather. Alive and falling.
Clusters of leaves, clusters of fine leaves,
clusters of five leaves, your sweet hands
send a message to me, to that place in me,
and the squirrel's tiny feet scurry across
so light, so little, so barely there,
here, more.

Elegy for the girl in last night's dream

The tallest tree
 the deepest ravine
 a long rope
 a swing.

She jumped on and laughed, said to her friend, *I'm going after him.*

Never forget the way light
 through trees
 is more than shadows,
 living shapes
 changing the face of things.

We will blame the hat.

'A swing is a mathematical concept
 the rings inside a tree too, and the way the leaves
 fall or don't fall', (*The Physics of Light*).

She's a pendulum
 up up up
 and down.
 You are excited too
 turning delicious
 it's quite possible you even smile and breathe ahhh from the holiness of sleep.

Then
 the hat

Why why why did she bring the hat to this summer dream?
 Don't judge or condemn her, she's cool,
 she likes hats, how quirky they make her look, how pretty.
 She didn't know.

The strangest thing is when.
 The hat is fine at first, it travels with her right to the very top
 but the next
 time, coming
 down
 her too-soft hair
 rejects it.

Continued/...

Instinct: such a
 powerful thing,
 must save the hat, but
 you need
 two
 hands
 to hold a rope
 swing.

Straight away she knows, her eyes like Hollywood,
 the quick clouds, like Godard, also know.

Her friend,
 slow
 to catch on, is still
 smiling.

A neighbourly tree slows her down slightly
 she shoots through
 its leaves
 taking just a few;
 listen to the rustle,
 the whistle

and then a car
 (in the middle of the woods?)
 bro / ke
 her fall

•

Then guess what? She gets up,
 she's not sure if she *is* dead
 it all happened so sudden.
 Then you see it
 in her eyes,
 she does know and you know
 and there are leaves in her hair.

Knowing

He stared out dead, dressed in mahogany,
 cold and dead his life laid out before him, lived.
 It would be months before his birth,
 he'd make the best of it, make plans, lists!
 He drummed his fingers, they didn't move.
 He despised sheep: the wool, the disparate horns,
 the baa; he wouldn't waste time counting them.
 He would make friends with stillness.

His thoughts drifted to other corpses he'd known:
 James Dean, JFK, Tom, all broken, not good-
 looking corpses like he was, he smiled, kind of.
 He understood now, it was so obvious, he laughed
 at the old him, at everyone else, and the sentiments,
if only I'd known before, and but I know now,
 came to him simultaneously. Knowing would make
 next time different. There was a terrible but familiar smell.

Every day he had driven past the tree, a willow
 tree, gnarled, asymmetrical, not so bad in summer
 but a disaster in winter. He saw now it was like a painting:
 desirably ugly against a backdrop of 24-hour
 petrol station, and it was naked every time,
 why hadn't he ever noticed? He knew now he was in love
 with that tree, his beautiful, kind, neglected ... he didn't
 even have a photograph of her. He felt a stirring.

Singing always helped, *I'm dead, I'm dead*, he couldn't
 remember the rest. He'd never been happier, *here's
 to beginnings* he imagined himself saying, over
 and over. The glasses chinking, drinking, dancing badly,
*here's to beginnings, I love you all, you do know that
 don't you, I really do.* It was raining and he wasn't sure
 how mahogany would fare in the wet, though as a tree,
 it should be alright. After that, there was nothing to remember.

Daisies

In the corner of the cellar:
daisies, growing up through stone,
twenty or so scheming flowers
make noise and dream of becoming
chains. This house used to be in a valley,
the slopes sang themselves flat
the choir moved away
and the school under chalk dust forgot how.

The grown-ups work at the mill
spinning caffeine and walking
cup in hand to the beat of their shivers.
The kids build ladders into space
sometimes, or play football
or swim in the river their fins proud.
They swim quick to keep the news out
play nice to silence what can happen.

Daisies are a terrible flower,
they think too much,
want more than green,
and dream of tyranny.
The ones in our cellar have evolved:
nails, their bright heads
don't care about the sun
or their old friend, the grass.

An Undesirable Garden

The cement mixer is here,
one hand on its head
the other on its tummy.
Our gardening books are thumbled grey.
We mither over colours, the shape of petals,
he insists upon a bed of brown tulips,
stone-bells in the shade garden
before the dell, and sandflowers
over there for damp summers.

We are in love of course
and our books know it.
His grandmother always said
you can't make a garden without love.
That was his father's mother, the one
who didn't take her coat off, ever,
and at baby's funeral, at home-time
hot-faced and buttoned up, said
thanks very much, I've enjoyed it.

But let me explain, we can't, *we won't*
have any of the buzzing things in our garden.
We will not make one more
space that contains them.
We will sculpt instead of plant,
paint bright and not water,
our petals will be hard,
our grass sharp, and only
the unscented will be welcome here.

And Second

First I'd like to talk about the view from the hole: at the farthest point you can see the sea, the colour is deep like one colour has been painted onto another, you'd imagine the distance would make it black but it doesn't, it's the colour of something you have never seen before, which has a punctuating effect, making you stop for a moment in honour of it. Your eyes move upwards and the sky is filled with understanding and birds going away. It is getting hard to stand on the rubble without shoes, with shattered stone and fragments of glass pressing against your feet, adding their own story to the one already filtering through here. You see the city in the distance. It is still light here but over there evening has begun to touch the palace and the high-rises, early lights are being turned on there and there, an evolving constellation; you might remember being there as a child, at the market, or through dreaming eyes at your small window. The same eyes bring you closer to home: the next village; the trees—your extended family—from this vantage point are new, the drama of familiar trees, their branches hanging like pieces of night or shredded cloth and the stones under your feet are now cool.

The House of Culture

(Dubrovka theatre siege, Moscow, 2002)

Act I

One night there was a play
and a thousand back-stages,
stories that brought together
x, y, and z. She was lovely in her dress,
she sat exfoliated, turned her lips
red, was excited by her own face.
The snow and rain were dressing
and undressing Russia.
Her perfume took him,
it took him right to her: the girl
and the House of Culture. What next?
Brown eyes fixed on a curtain.

Act II

There was a moment when heads
tilted in a blending of believing
and unbelieving. Watching with two
minds, then a snap. Oh. It's real. No.
It was quick from then, time went
quick and slow, as if the actors
fell off the stage and the curtain
could never close until they got
back up. It seemed so important
they did, then the audience would
know what happened. No one
knew what kind of fear it was.

Act III

At 5am the searchlights went out.
Those that woke dreamt the curtain
had closed, but the weirdest thing:
it was a veil, the actors took their bows
behind a veil, vaguer and vaguer.
We lost them and we lost ourselves.
Someone a long way off was saying
something, deep down it was, we
didn't know what it was. We couldn't
hear it, only feel it, somehow, in the
distance. We watched the world walking
away and we didn't want to follow.

II

Momma

Momma flies through our dark always twenty years younger
wearing floral print dresses she didn't wear. Momma takes good care,
lays bricks with thick cement, decorates the top with broken glass.
Momma makes us love her, *we love you Momma*, we have white flowers,
to drown in your bucket. The lines around Momma's eyes are dying
to tell us something, Momma is angry, get baby to clean the floor,
throw down some bleach, or Momma will slip
rocks in our pockets, we won't find them for years.
Momma don't make us chase the bus. Momma we can't go to church in our dreams.
When we can't sleep and we are turning,
it's Momma we think of: the inside of her wardrobe; how she lops
the heads off roses but loves to oil their thorns. And Momma,
the way you cut our heads out of photographs and remount them,
Momma couldn't care less for perspective.
We are floating, all of us, together in this album
our big and tiny heads bobbing, trapped but smiling behind clear plastic.
but Momma threw our bodies away. Momma,
what did you do with the rest of us? Momma, what happened to
Daddy? But let's think a happy ending: Momma's at peace now, inside
herself, and sometimes if we are lucky a tear breaks through.
Make yourself scarce, Momma's coming. Whose name is she calling?

Portrait of E.P.

Suspiciously absent bad man
eyes lowered, ignoring—
you have camouflaged yourself.
The lines on your forehead, tracks
to Alaska, your ice-crack mouth
black over heart of grey beard.
Your thinned shirt, scraped open
too far, obviously inappropriate.
The shock of your carved cruel
face like crow's feet mid-take off.
Like Art: stupid old beautiful old
bad man; my father.

Notes on Mary Torrance ('Mary is Mary')

Career spanning four decades, seventy-four essays, eleven collections. Formal poems; decline in moral values. Hated free verse in *Poetry* '86, 'The devil Whitman ruined it for everyone' and in *Paris Review* '92, 'The New York Pre-School, why no one is counting'. Her book, *Beat, Stick, 'Howl': Barefoot / No Feet / Ginsberg's Con Trick*, was pulped—for legal reasons—after publication. Senator's daughter from Connecticut, first sonnet at five, voice like Katharine Hepburn. Vocal in criticism of feminism: 'women ought to defer to men—believe it but can't do it'.

Overt hostility to other poets, though popular, eccentric, cherished for what David Lehman describes as her 'comedy value ... unique, intolerable, objectionable, always doing something worth talking about, rarely her poems'. Interview in '85 asked about New Formalists replied 'for the love of Nixon, what's new about them?'. Affiliations extreme right wing politics in US, yelled *FORNICATOR* at Clinton during ceremonial dinner, dinner that according to official records no invitation to.

Taught briefly at Princeton, left in mysterious circumstances, some say dismissed for striking student, others for building fire in grounds burning priceless archives. Evidence gathered in Avant-Garde journal suggest both true, X who didn't wish to be named quoted as saying 'incidents tip of iceberg, all very afraid of her'. Controversy follows her—

at a conference in 2003, during reading by post-modern poet John Ashbery, shouted, 'I don't know what in God's name that was but it was *not* a poem', escorted reluctantly away, later during wine reception 'allegedly' stuck out foot, tripped the elderly Mr Ashbery. Asked would he give Torrance benefit of doubt incident was accident, Ashbery quoted as saying 'sure, Mary is Mary and situations occur about and around and happenings to Mary and no one can persuade them otherwise—and yes the ankle is a hacienda mounted on the couch growing colder purpler while the white dog shuns it. Thank you'.

Since 2011, writing villanelle sequences, has 361, described at best as 'inconsistent in quality' and at worst 'certain to bring form into total disrepute if not result in complete extinction'. Villanelles to be gathered in substantial volume entitled, *Nineteen times Nineteen*; publisher could not be reached to confirm date of publication.

Over the sea to Eagle Street

(The Whitmanites, Bolton, founded 1885)

Come, stroke his hair, drink from the loving cup,
the bird's still heart flies over the waves to him.
We shall take off our hats for him; we shall wear lilacs for him,
our rough master.

Minnie, come join us, read for us. We will not mourn him.
We are born again differently, the words have ended
and we have lost our ears, our eyes,
we are not ourselves, please forgive us.

The weather is inside the house today, the mill town is calm.
The damp spot on the ceiling is opening its eye
and the candle drips a beard. The carafe's surface trembles,
garden birds rattle *Drum-Taps*, and the grass whispers itself.
Minnie, come join us, gentlemen, the space between her feet
and the floor, take note. His hair is soft. I dreamt a hand reached
around my back and seized my heart.
He is gone.

Poem

The garden is deafening today,
iPod here and talking there, the hosepipe
filling the paddling pool, the low drone
blah blah of Jeff next door, the paws
in soil of his excitable borrowed dog,
the ball repetitive on the tennis racket,
and then...

*This is one of a series of poems
that I wrote in my lunch hour which
City Lights is going to publish next year.*

Next year, next year, going to publish
next year. A little girl cross-training
on the trampoline, the bounce then lash
of her skipping rope, me breathing,
the trees whose names I don't know,
gossiping again, each leaf its own voice:
just listen to the scrape of her cheap
pen, the silly creak of her thoughts.

A brief infatuation with the works of Emile Zola

The clock tower strikes twelve twenty-one
 come on gout-swollen despoilers we have
 fresh petticoats to float on. Lift your cassocks
 Monsignors, stir the Seine and divide
 between slop-pails and earthenware crocks.

Here's Juliette, (newly engaged
 to her cousin), with Fifi,
 Pauline or Claudette.

Here come—*Jesus*
 Christ—

the theatrical ladies,
 Isabella or Christine,
 not forgetting the waif Louise.
 Velveteen and black
 teeth, stench and perfume,
 tiny golden curls, the pox. Tip
 the sugar-basin and taste it,
 gulping and sipping. Veal,
 boiled beef, roast mutton. Take
 off your woollen cap Papa,
 the truffles!

From hovels and garrets, assignations and escapades,
 who cares what happens at thirty paces. God-forsaken
 courtesans with clay pipes pour out more absinthe.

In the holy name of Naturalism
 let's test the patience of our readership.
 Fifi, sweetness, undress come sit on my lap.

No Room at the Père Lachaise

Adélaïde dressed in grey stone
 was the first to arrive; little girl
 the only one. Hard to believe
 they left her there
 alone.

I'm not sure anyone knows
 what put her under the trees,
 the pox I expect.
 I wish I'd been there that day, in lovely
 rotting Paris.

I've been to a lot, but not
 like that, five years old & the Père Lachaise
 all hers, lying in a temporary bed;
 they thought of her at night, & no one
 came, the rain hit the ground & a single

tomb. When I was there wow
 he was beautiful in shades,
 the sun makes kissing hotter,
 in love with him & the tombs,
 a million of them or more; statues

weeping across them,
 tombs massive like rooms,
 their doors guarded by stone Parisians,
 sculptures with a nationality;
 I didn't know Adélaïde was there

somewhere out back: a frag-
 ment of bone, a remain.
 Did *you* know they could do that?
 Repossession. I didn't, guess I thought
 it was permanent, once there

you'd stay forever, because
 who would have the nerve
 would dare disturb the dead?
 It's odd to think in the year 1804
 just thirteen friends joined her,

Continued/...

unlucky for them, (& the bankers);
then Molière came & the VIPs
& then you know, the rest is...
& now instead of flowers: kids
leave joints for Morrison

like the dead can get stoned,
like the dead aren't wasted
enough, & respectfully
down on their knees
leave stone kisses xxx

After Church

We had just returned from church that Sunday
when the Dog appeared.
At the end of the road you squinted and asked,
what's that by the gate?
The Dog was leaning on the wall and watched us
as we walked up the path.
We opened the door and a rabble of butterflies
flew out, the Dog slipped in.
It had a sort of smile and we decided it could stay.
We put down some water
but it couldn't drink, it leaned towards the bowl,
opened its mouth and a slack
purple tongue fell out. We stroked its fur bones
and it sunk onto the tiles.
Without a tongue the Dog would struggle, we tipped
water through its ribs
into its black stomach. The Dog gasped over the house,
staring down at the floor,
it was looking for something. It would move through
each room eyes on the boards.
At the kitchen it stared at the spot its tongue had fallen
expecting it to be there,
that it had simply overlooked it the hundred other times.
The Dog slept by our bed
each morning it would leave behind a hunk of flesh and fur.
We used a dustpan and brush
to sweep then drop it out of the window for the blackbirds
who, like black sapphires
gathered on the fence as if it were the neck of a woman,
each day more and more.
We suspected the Dog was dying and got into bed with it
held hands through its ribcage.
We would keep vigil, it was the least we could do.

The year of my birth

In the year I was born a man sat in a room in his shorts, on the other side of the page a dog lifted its head in something gentler than surprise, both rooms had a large radiator, the kind like a cage. In the first room the man looked warm enough, but his eyes were dark and medicated, his hair was bigger on one side, it seemed he had just got out of bed, slouched in and sat down. The dog in the other room was waiting for his master, whose easel held a canvas, still wet. A huge window was wide open, more open than we generally allow today; through it the chimneys had the haphazard look of a child's building project, and the smoke from them hinted at further rooms—similar perhaps to the ones under discussion here—though heated by a traditional heat source. The man in room one sat in a bucket-style armchair, his hands gripping each side, reminiscent of the electric chair, his body was, I'd say, hairier than average, but not so much hair as to be cited as a distinguishing feature, a standard lamp lit the room, and the man stared ahead he had no book or newspaper, and it seemed unlikely that music was playing. Over the page, the dog was now asleep and in one of the houses through the window something unforgettable occurred.

Mark Strand

Through these new glasses I don't understand the world,
the laptop looks like a 42" TV screen
and the words are big bullies.
Around the bright rectangle blur rooms of the past
where all furniture counted as one unimportant thing.
Edges didn't occur in the same way:
I see myself from the tunnel of now
eyes half-closed, half smiling.

I try to read and nuzzle Mark Strand's *Selected*,
an old brown thing I love. I think about its previous owner
an American and wonder what they have done today
or how they might be dead. Their name is there
but I can't read it and think how an American name
can actually be anything at all,
Cigru Raibiff, but that can't be it, can it?
They held my book in their hands.

There's an inscription: *Received in the Kris Kringle
Gift Exchange 1993*. I've never worked anywhere
that contained a person capable
of giving Mark Strand as a present.
But why didn't they keep it?
Mark's on the back looking handsome with enormous
shoulders that won't even fit on the photograph
my arms go long to hold it
and the things he wrote inside are beautiful.

The Queen of the Monkeys

was married to my father—
big house heart sick and lost—
poor mother shovelled love in the yard,
she lived downstairs with the help.
The queen of the monkeys was
my mother now, she told me it all,
taught me if you can't have him, just
pretend you find him, like in a dream
and he's yours, simple. Just imagine,
cruelty becoming so wonderful.
She said I always wanted a daughter
and you'll do, you're pretty / no you are /
no *you* are. Father says in jest: a family
is like an engine: loud, dirty and too
complicated for girls, that's why *you*
are good at dusting. Nanny shouts through
the thick door, the children are hungry,
can they have a metaphor?
Father, incensed, bellows, please remove
the forcible entry tools from the hall.
Then to me, *slip* the ice into the drink don't
detonate it. Your stepmother is coming,
On the rug! I slip onto the rug.
Don't!

Silent Orchard

The trees lining the street in front of the council buildings had troubled the townsfolk for weeks. A meeting was called, Wednesday at siesta time, and the famous writer Tacito Huerta had broken his thirty-year reclusion to attend. It was hot but the people gathered in great numbers outside the heavy doors. The talk, as always, was of the oranges. The sun pressed down on the townsfolk, made their hats and covered shoulders heavy. The white heat had stripped the colour from the scene making it look like a photo negative, the maggots had stripped the colour from the oranges. Even blinking burned. Tacito Huerta waited anonymously with the others for the doors to open. In spite of the heat, every man or woman present was reminded periodically of rain as the tiny writhing creatures fell from the trees onto their hats and shoulders. It was the sound that pained them most. A collective shudder ran through the crowd. Even those pressed against the burning walls of the council buildings were affected, empathising as they did with their fellow citizens who, for reasons of their own, had arrived too late and had to stand out in the open. Spirits were like dirt, caught between feet and espadrilles. A foolish man made a joke about a biblical plague. The crowd stared at the doors. Tacito Huerta thought of his latest novel, it would be spell-binding. The crowd had not yet noticed him. The crowd were conscious of their mouths and spoke through tight lips. The oranges grew heavier.

A, B, C & Z

(from the mythology of Colombia)

It began when a man named A found himself
 alone with Nature, he felt uninteresting
 and small so he held onto his words.
 He stroked trees, caressed stones into sharpness
 and made a figure of himself from bark.
 He made a figure of her from his dreams.
 For months he lived with the replicas
 who could not love because they did not live
 in water and blood. He stared at the river
 and knew what to do. He threw his friends in.
 The surface rippled and two people
 grew, the light falling onto the water
 made eyes and lips and sound and the drowned
 moved towards A and into flesh.

When man creates a thing in his image
 he can't help but smooth out his roughness
 and B and C were the smoothest of everything
 he'd seen or heard or touched or thought.
 They were perfect and he was God.
 He was God and he made them immortal.
 They were not perfect and he was God.
 He was God and his rule was fidelity.
 B and C made home in each other's arms
 their desire enriched the landscape, where ecstasy
 left their bodies in the form of bright birds
 who sang flowers into existence who sang Z into life
 with a body and a face, like theirs, only different.
 Different and different and B wanted him,
 wanted all of him and took him. C watched
 and broke into pieces, the pieces flew
 back together so they could give up
 all except one sharp one
 which he used.

B found C lying in redness
 she loved him and held him and cried onto him.
 Her tears fell and when the salt ran
 out they tore her eyes
 and hit the ground as green stones. The stones
 and blood became a river that took C's body
 away from B who howled and moaned
 jaguars into existence. When A heard he could
 not bear the sound and lashed out at the cries
 beating them into silent butterflies, millions of them.
 He lifted C and B, the blood and stones and threw
 them as far as he could. C landed and a small
 emerald mountain grew. B landed, her arms saying no
 and a huge emerald mountain grew.
 The blood river closed around them and A
 would not look their way again.

Sabayil

When the sea took our castle we carried on.
 Many cursed the sun but by day it scorched
 through the surface and saved us. In the evening
 servants crouched over the hearths
 and between stones sparked small fires
 that went in and out; we were sorry for their hands.
 My other had been left behind, but I met you,
 and the sea merged us.

Each night I swam myself to sleep but would wake
 sharply, the water mountain looking to drown me again;
 sea plants skimmed my face, sturgeon graced my arms,
 and I felt like I was made of water.

Tonight we woke in communion,
 our breath adjusted from land to underneath
 as the lid of the dream closed.
 I looked into your eyes for the thousandth time,

and was surprised to find them blue.

I am water. Are we still dreaming?

You stroke and breathe me. I separate,
 combine and become you,
 go into you and out, fall around
 and close behind you, parts of me are vaulting
 then returning, joining the rest of me.

I understand now the push of you.
 Then my other breaks the surface of me.

We are three. I remember the skin of him,
 hold the feel, the friend, the think of him.
 Discover how much I've missed him.
 I surround and touch both of them,
 the old and the new of them.

Bird Ride

When you are driving a car, you are the car
 and the car is you
 and the open window is the world coming in.
 A dark bird blurs quick towards us, I duck.
 Later I'll look up the origin of the word 'duck!'.
 I'm mixing you and I as if my experience
 is universal, or at least yours too, though it never is.
 The bird is in.
 Flapping and feathers, over-reacting.
 Hitting the roof. Scraping, flicking its wings, flipping
 their sharp pages, looking something up urgently, a word
 in a dictionary. Jack White's on, but he's not one
 with this, *there's all kinds of red-headed women
 that [he] ain't supposed to kiss*. It's time to turn
 the music off. *Chill out in the back*,
 and it does for a minute, it sits down and it's a big bird,
 shiny black, beak bright as margarine, slick through the rear
 view, then the seat belt sensor tells it off, and it's off again
Jesus! At the lights, I lean back and fasten it, just to keep
 the car happy. The bird's alright again, looking
 out of the window now, taking it all in, beak open,
 its tiny hard tongue. *Where you heading sister?*
 I've changed my route without noticing and the bird
 and I are heading out of the city. My bird and me.
 It's never seen clouds from a car before.
 It's never seen other birds from a car before.
 It's never seen the wind from a car before.
 I've never seen a bird in a car before.
 Outside, others are curious, sometimes they
 land on the bonnet (bonnet, the Englishness of it)
 they've never seen a woman with a bird before.

III

Strawberries

Today would have been a better day
to see the boy on the bicycle,
with the sun up there and the grass vivid,
but who cares about sunny days
when an unexpected
letter can still make you cry.

The day I saw the boy was slate midday
and he was riding along in the city,
a crate of strawberries balanced
on the back of his bike. I pulled up behind him
at the lights and he turned around—

it was Brittany, France, a country road,
dusty of course, as he checked the contents
of his basket. He touched them carefully,
making sure they were still beautiful, he smiled
and looked happier than it's possible
for strawberries to make you look in our world,
he gazed at their wet-redness and inside-outness.

I drove around the boy who loved strawberries
down steel roads, past ash buildings,
made my way to the place I was going
and he rode his bike
through the rest of my life.

The Year of the Same

This time later in the year
underneath the surface
was the beginning again;
another climb to undoing.

We have misremembered
their names; all we can do
is wait for them to re-appear,
and do a headcount.

They make no noise; refuse
to identify themselves
but fiercely loyal to their colours
they follow brightness

like a gaudy religion, born again
after forgetting the old one,
into the nectar dazzle of a fresh
congregation.

Them

(for them)

i

My girl's not mine, hers, insanely heart sharp,
heart shaped face, kissy, kind through tunnel
of missing teeth, deep dark hugs, wants a job
colouring pictures of god, *don't* play the blink-
ing game with her, she laughs like a thousand
frogs.

ii

And blue, clinging you, close very close
finds his place behind my fringe, can I can I
can I, eight kiss boy, eternally his turn, can it
not be banned? keeper of the secret, so hard
the words, to remember, you're getting it though,
okay?

iii

I'm hungry, I'm hungry, what flavour? it was
by an accident, it doesn't hurt, I didn't, it wasn't
me, blue-eyed injustice, too big hand in mine,
soft smell of summer head, duck feather head,
heart, startled *sorry*, here's a tenner for the
damage.

iv

Not mine too, another girl, oh her eyes roll
love love love her lovely rolling eyes, dark
they are, big knowing, grown-up joking, what's
for snack? she says that's not music it's just
shouting, our words are spinning, you sweet are
spinning.

The Egg

Nestled in an oregano bush in a suburban garden was a blue spotted egg. Someone had wished it there. The garden belonged to a man who walked in tune to a tune in his head, a Bluegrass-Blues-Jazz combo, his walk was a bobble and a mumble, you know how that goes, especially effective barefoot and lovely on cold grass, even better when the tune, by the simple turn of a dial charges right into the room, his room, any room, this room. Tempting? But back to the egg, something was shuffling, fumbling, pushing. His library was full of paperback books their spines like the beautiful face of a one-hundred year old woman, her chops wrapped around a deliciously fat cigarette, their pages were a similar hue to her skin too. The man mulled over the things in his books, like palaeontology, pterodactyls, cats with wings and the Area 51 alien autopsy, but wing-ed things specifically. Did I mention he was Italian? The egg was the manifestation of all that stuff and when whatever it was broke through he'd know exactly (within a millimetre) what he was supposed to do.

A Field for You

I've made a field
for you to stand in;
it's a warm day
so you won't need
a coat. You're tired
eyes down
in a pale way
that makes me feel
solicitous. I've left
a pillow on the grass.

There's no one else
and you are walking
away; your shape
exactly like you
makes me think of you.
Then without turning back
you walk towards me.

Your skin is the finest
colour, I don't remember
the name of it, I think it
begins with you.
You are close enough
to step
through, if a thought
didn't stop you;
I know the thought
and half-agree.

There's stubble:
at this resolution
weapons ready
but not really
sure
the lovely way
of the doomed;
conscripted but brave.

Continued/...

Looking at them
is like saying the word
'love' over and over
until the word falls
to its knees
and just gives up
then rallies again
like all the best
words do and crying
says: *I'm faithful
and I'm sorry
I'm only a word
you still know me.*

There isn't a better
face for looking at;
the feel and rough
heat of it...
You'll be needing
a drink, there *is* one
I hope you see it
and I hope it's still cold.

When the body is tired
there's a simple
sweetness that only wants
one thing; your pillow
is over there but I think
you're tired enough
not to need it.
You are in a field
because the grass
makes a good bed.
Close your eyes
I'm here.

The Rolling Boy

The boy could put his legs around his head and did so at every opportunity. Sometimes just one and he would hop along on the other for comedic purposes. He liked to watch TV with both legs over his shoulders; it was odd to watch him so engrossed in his favourite shows, staring somewhat idiotically, the way children do. One day as he began to untangle himself he found he was stuck, it was painful to move his limbs, he became frightened. His parents tried to prise his legs from behind his head but his screams made them fearful; his father scooped him up and carried him to the car, the seatbelt wouldn't stretch. This wasn't safe. *Take it easy*, his mother urged her husband, who behind the wheel had a bad reputation; the boy rolled around the backseat. At the hospital the porter attempted to put the boy in a wheelchair, he didn't fit, *How about we roll you along the corridor*, he said kindly, the boy's eyes grew round. The doctor had an un-medical smirk when she said, *What seems to be the problem?* The nurses, of course, had seen it all before.

Skyborn

The foal held fast, then fell from small room
into the wall-less deep, there was no slowdown,
it was quicker and quicker and the longer
she fell the brighter she felt.

An endless falling without destination.

Then, after a minute of years.

Stop. A soft stop and her wet head pushed
through the membrane and she heaved
herself trembling and swaying, the broken
skin clung then fell away and she watched it
go down, then up, then across, until
it disappeared over
the curve of night.

She was standing now: on bone-thin legs
her soft sky-feet pressed
down on air; she shook her mane,
and breathed in blackness, her eyes
met the stars and the plain of night.
Light years travelled along her veins
and she saw the future:

her land-hooves

firm on bright ground, the vision
was transient, but she knew,
and that was enough for now,
she could forget, gallop
the Blacklands, grow strong.

The kiss

began in an area behind the two people
and Paris stretched up elegantly around them.
It approached through two others
a small girl and boy told to kiss by their parents
who'd been friends for a long time, the little
ones did as they were asked for what would
become a treasured photograph. The kiss
could be felt in the arms of a dancing couple
in a cruel city, at a mongrel time, when kissing—
by them—was prohibited. It moved along a vertical
line then a horizontal line pulling into a station
and stopped for the longest time among overgrown
brambles. It came during a war, in the form
of a please god goodbye and a thank you hello.
Then through two mirrors where a woman
watched it happen on a curved avenue of her selves.
This was the kiss that made its way towards them.
It was anticipated and practiced on the arms
of the teenaged both of them. Then it slept for a while,
woke on the lips of two others still asleep
who knew as little about it as the statue
by the famous sculptor, who carved the kiss
over the space of a whole hot month of June
then returned to the city saw the very same
kiss through his train window on another train
travelling fast away in the opposite direction.
Have you heard about the jellyfish whose
sting is so powerful it can be felt in the water
around it? This kiss was like that. It was a kiss
that began slowly, like a scene from an old movie
by a careful director who imagined the millions
of men who'd do it again and again on his starlet,
the water surrounding them and their arms around
her and she'd be converted to them even though
she could have anyone. This kiss travelled towards
them and the camera blurred in to the space
between them where it was about to happen
then zoomed inside.

Chapter 4: Reproduction

Savio, Christina, St Thomas, Imelda and Genevieve knelt in front of the boxes wondering the best way. Without speaking each slid one towards her and broke it open for an afternoon of scissors. Pages 87 to 93 were to be cut. *Close to the bone*, not jagged, not crooked, leaving no text, or the slightest trace of anything for the girls to fixate upon. The work was to be done quickly with no dwelling and no reading. The blades were long but not long enough to do the job in one, the second cut called for precision, a careful hand and half-closed eyes. Though no instruction was given, each would watch over the others.

Summer was almost over, they had been blessed, but on this day in early September the sky was a cloud of bats and the rain was finishing its sermon, waiting to see how the book-cutting was going before committing. The women's hands, four right and one left grew stiff, they welcomed this, everything was a sign or a test, even the smallest suffering, and they loved more than anything to tolerate discomfort. At 5 o'clock Christina cut the last book. Savio glided out of the room and returned with two bowls, five pens and five wooden sticks to spread the glue. Page 86 was to be glued to page 94. But first, the third, fourth and fifth paragraphs on page 86, the first on page 94, and the image beneath it were to be blackened out.

It was late evening when the women pressed the final pages together. Their fingers were grubby and sticky as they gathered the pile of cut paper. St Thomas was ashamed to see her filthy prints on one of the books and looked up to see if the others had noticed. They had missed dinner and cherished their hunger. The rain had gone or was never there, in any case it was dry as they headed out to the gardens where the groundsman had left on the path a dustbin and a box of matches.

The sun, the trees, the park and me

I

This room has legs and is made of glass
 to look out is to be level with the trees' first forks
 the moment before they knew
 they would never leave home.
 The sun stares through defiant branches
 who, not fully grown, still have dreams.

What can be said of the sun when everyone knows it?
 Two things: it watches the trees and at night it listens.
 Benches in the park are empty of people I've never met
 and children I can't imagine are not playing.
 Voices from nowhere echo over the clear walls,
 inflating, of all things, the significance of coffee.

II

Asleep under the window
 it is summer and open
 I hear the loud church
 beyond the path with a roof of branches
 and three squirrels above my head.
 A grey ghost squirrel wants to fall in
 in the dream it lands on my bed,
 and also in the dream it doesn't.
 When a tree falls it pulls the ground
 up with it to make a wall.

III

The loud church warns of erogenous zones,
 knots and buttons we must not touch, though
 it is exciting for us and the tree when we do.
 The night following the touch the tree falls
 grows dry and stripped like a fossil,
 or inch deep in moss.

The pattern of trees is to grow straight
 then realise how awful their life will be
 in the same place and start to split,
 to escape their selves,
 twist elaborately with branches heading
 off in desperate directions.
 Their forms reveal who feels the most.
 I'm sorry for the trees and me.

Fall

On the first of September greedy
raindrops fall in twos and threes
this is not how rain should be
rain is an excitable crowd
rain is a democracy
not an egotistical oligarchy.

The summer is half-remembered
yes it was wonderful, I think.
The treasured cold waits beside me
leaves begin to loosen their grip
and I do too, I long for them
pretty and dead at my feet.

Over

The ground slides to one side
 and the houses hold on tight
 a football rolls away then back

I'm a moving target blasting
 sunspots while a dog somersaults
 and inside everything is tumbling

what if it rains will I get wet twice?
 Green and blue and green and blue
 and green and blue and an acrobat

cat. My hands stay sensible, I'm
 an only angel or a sacred nobody
 the air around me is a kind of hymn

I'm always typing in my head this
 is what I pray, save me from the splin-
 tered light, or something, I'm newborn

I walk in cars, I'm kissing us
 I'm not the right way up. I think I see
 the lighthouse and there are no rocks

this thing is better than sin sweet singing
 sucking weeping breathing swing-
 ing.

Under

Walking home late
she approaches the right way
the long way but decides to take
the short way the wrong way.
Someone bored a hole through
the earth then tiled it well lit
glowing from each end. She's out
of it a bit but sees the siren light
at the far side and isn't going to
come out to the cops and their
stinky van who'll want to know
why she's walking through
here alone love and they'll see
her hallucinating eyes slip
down her face. She'll sit here
a while, wait for the dark
to make it safe.

Him

My family always laughed about that photograph:
the bride and groom, their mothers and fathers, and him,
his smile set wide to make him inconspicuous.

*Who the hell was he, they would say,
we still don't know to this day, they thought it hilarious,
stood there bold as brass saying cheese.*

No one wondered how he came to be wearing
the wedding party's corsage in his 1970s' lapel
at my parents' wedding waiting for me to be born.

Want

(In 1849 Rebecca Smith was hanged for the murder of eight of her children. Afraid they 'might come to want' she poisoned them while breastfeeding)

Tip a small moon—hush rhyme of the sky moon—
 white powder. *One.* Like sugar, like salt, like snow.
 Up there's where heaven is. *Two.* Like milk,
 strong toothless hold, hungry you. *Three.*
 Blanket heavy as day old bread. Drink away
 your hunger. *Four.* Take my fullness take all
 you want. I'll boil his milk, full moon on the river,
 he'll come home drunk wanting me. *Five.*
 Long night I'll feed you, small mouths
 pulling and pulling, mornings drowning in milk.
Six. This dress, tightening fire on skin,
 soaked hard into winter. *Seven.*

Don't cry.

Come home each night and drink. *Eight.*

The Lake

We set off walking around the lake
its surface told us, *you are welcome*.
The children began to run, and dogs
pricked their ears in important work.
Soon the children were on the other
side and I was here, they looked small
like other people's children,
I was sure I didn't know them.
The lake was condescending, lapped
onto the path and under its breath said:
*I go all the way around and you have
to keep up*. A woman from another
decade asked, *are those your children?*

Thank you for loving me baby

Back when the cherry tree was a little girl
and we'd never met the giraffe,
a long time ago when you didn't love me
I saw something in the trees that wasn't a bird
and tried to catch it, shook the branches
dislodged leaves two months early
they were livid, and it *was* wrong to ruin
the summer for them. I'm careful now,
now that you do love me, to hurt nothing,
the house is full of sweet spiders,
their lovely legs, tentative and sometimes
messy—with all their various problems—
who think we can't see them if they don't move
and the hectic moths forbidden
to eat our clothes, one made its holes
in the shape of five petals and a stamen,
is that what it's called, the middle of the flower?
It sounds wrong, just wait—
I'll climb through the window—
it *is* stamen, and other parts of the flower are:
anthers, sepal and style,
I can look those words up too if you like
or should I make spaghetti for you lovely?
Anyway, thank you.

The day Matilda caught the ball

The crowd stared into a yes of blue
applause made wings out of hands
and the birds cleared a space.

The universe and them,
us and her, and even the ball
were beginning to think it possible.

The other weeks had been different
then, no one came outside to look
as the ball fell towards Matilda

as she reached out and blinked
caught some of it; as drops hit the ground
onlookers had already taken their eyes home.

But this week
with impractical arms and sun-wrinkled nose
unlikely and everything slowed down

even the wind tried to help her
breath turned to breathing, counted
then stopped.

Precious Matilda
curved miniature fingers
and caught the *whole* ball.

Watching *Jaws* with Louis

That's disgusting [couple kissing]. Why are they swimming in the dark? Why is he lying down on the sand? Is he asleep? Is he dead? Are we looking through the shark's eyes? Is it a real shark? Is that real blood? Why is the policeman lying in the sand? Are they crabs? Is that a hand? Why is he smoking? How can this be a PG? Why don't they close the beach? Is that a boy or a girl? \$10000 to catch a shark, is that all? Why are they dressed like that? Who drew that on the sign? Did the shark get the dog? Why don't they close the beach? Will they get the reward? How do they know there isn't more than one shark? Why does the granddad take the kids in the water? What's a sheep? Is this Australia? Why don't they close the beach? Is that our shark book? Do sharks die when they stop moving? Why are they laughing? Are they drunk? Why didn't they close the beach? Why are they throwing blood into the water? Is it real blood? Why are they going farther out to sea? Do sharks go to sleep? Can sharks blink? Can sharks close their eyes? Is that the same shark? Why don't they just shoot it? What kind of gun is it? They should use an AK47 or an RPG. Why do the barrels keep falling off the boat? Is that poison? Why are they singing instead of catching the shark? Why are they drinking instead of catching the shark? Are they drunk? Why are they letting it get away? Why did he break the radio? Is that a real shark? Wouldn't he be dead by now? Have *you* seen a shark? Have you seen a piranha? Have you seen a barracuda? Who would win out of a shark and a whale? What about a crocodile? Is there a *Jaws 2*? Is there a *Jaws 3*? Is there a *Jaws 4*?

Tusks

In Zanzibar on an unknown date
an unknown photographer took
a photograph of tusks. Tusks,
some of them taller than a man,
curved hopelessly, a pile of tusks,
like maggots or a school
of sleeping octopi. Layer upon
layer, twenty feet high
or thereabouts, and the depth,
the depth too was impressive
piled there in a corner, so many of them.
Stamped tusks, like commodities
or manufactured things,
tusks stamped Zanzibar.

Seventeen men were photographed
with the tusks, two of the men white,
the rest black. One of the white men
was dressed all in white, bright white,
much whiter than the tusks on which
he sat. It's hard to read
the men's expressions,
they must have been pleased
with their tusks, so many of them,
so valuable.
They don't smile though, none of
the men are smiling for this unknown
photographer on this unknown date.

I can't find a word to describe the look
on the men's faces, the faces of men
sitting on tusks. I don't think
there is a word,
not even a rare word or a new word.
Or perhaps it's the look
that won't yield, a rare look
that refuses to be named.

The Train Turns Corners

We gasp into the tunnel
open our eyes to the dark
we can taste the hills.

When we emerge
I see the warm wide streets of your body
the narrow streets.

Inside and outside collide
we see through both windows and that spins us
the landscape and we are lovers
the mountains stroke us, the farmers' fields
the trees bow and tip their leaves.

Next minute we are hurtling through a forest
through the carriage feel the rough ground,
breaking twigs; our ears are cracking.

Then a movie
Jack Lemmon—as some poor schmuck—
gets mistaken for someone rich
starts living the high life
with an obsequious butler.

Then through the other window
it's me! I'm in it, I'm the girl
the girl with windswept eyelashes,
Oh Jack, my mouth says against the glass.

Side by side our thighs touching
and the sides of our feet and this is better
than the exquisite sex the landscape is enjoying
through both windows of the train.
Heartbeats come thickly.

Frank O'Hara leaves the Museum of Modern Art

Like a painting's space, infinite happenings and neverendings,
or the seventh side of a cube. The museum says, don't go,
stay in us. Outside is inside and the revolving doors are ecstatic
to have him for their moment, yet ever so sad to let him go
they give and take and come and go like a pulse, and refuse to cry.
The city greets him with eyes and ears and arms and a drink.
The surface of glass reflects back on itself and back on itself
again, women and men on the street are obviously convexed.
The slippery glass says, stay a little while longer, see
all these people we hold them for you and through us, behind
us is everyone, it reflects back on itself and back again
it reflects back on itself and in, and now it's everyone except him.
The street holds him now and the city holds the street. The city
says, go anywhere you like because the clock says it's fine. I'm
all yours and you mine. That's what the city says as Frank O'Hara
steps out through the doors of the Museum of Modern Art.

'AS OBVIOUS AS AN EAR': FRANK O'HARA'S SOUND

INTRODUCTION

'AS ODD SOUNDS ARE LOVABLE'

A poet's story can be summarised simply: when a poet dies they leave behind poems; critics tell us how to read the poems and invite us to see them with wiser eyes; the poems are remembered or forgotten. Frank O'Hara lived for only forty years and left behind over seven-hundred poems. In the first book about the poet, *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters*, (1977) Marjorie Perloff lists the four main components of his poetic as she saw them: *Imagery; Proper Names; Syntactic Ambiguity; The Engaged Self: Personism in Action*.¹ I intend to explore a fifth, neglected, component of O'Hara's poetic: Sound.

By way of introduction, I provide definitions of sound and sound in poetry and state my case for why O'Hara's sound warrants closer attention. The aim of Chapter One is to establish, through examples from O'Hara's critical writings, his views on the subject, and the qualities he admired in other poets' sound. I also explore biographical material including O'Hara's musical training, his work in the Navy, and his education, factors which I argue had a pronounced influence on the development of his sound. In Chapter Two I examine O'Hara's reputation from the time of his death in 1966 to the present day and consider how this has had an impact on the way critics have read his work. In surveying the landscape of O'Hara studies over the past fifty years, and identifying notable references to sound, I offer an explanation as to why the subject has largely been overlooked. Chapter Three proposes a new way to think about O'Hara's poems by utilising the term *surface sound*—a term influenced by the word 'surface', which was used in relation to the art of the abstract expressionists and was also a label appropriated by critics to describe the non-symbolic style of O'Hara's and other writers' work of the period. Chapter Four focuses on three areas: the *sonic imagination*, a second term that functions as an alternative to Eliot's 'auditory imagination', a theory which is not appropriate for poems like O'Hara's; a significant area of O'Hara's poetic is concerned with voice, which I examine using a third term, *sonic dialogues*; finally in this chapter, I investigate how film influenced O'Hara's sound. The purpose of Chapters Three and Four is to introduce a new vocabulary that facilitates a fresh way to read and hear the

¹ Marjorie Perloff, *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters*, 3rd edn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 124-135.

poems and one which I will use in Chapter Five to provide close readings of several key works.

Throughout, I consider texts outside poetics to assist in the exploration of O'Hara's sound, including W. Murray Schafer's, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, (1994) who argues that an excess of acoustic information diminishes our power to listen and distinguish the nuances of sounds, and so systematically takes the reader through a variety of sounds to make a case for the power of listening to the environment;² Seth S. Horowitz's *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*, (2012) discusses the way 'sound and hearing have shaped the evolution, development, and day-to-day function of the mind';³ and Brandon LaBelle's *Acoustic Territories: Sound Cultures and Everyday Life*, (2010) details theories on the acoustic soundscape that offer a reading of auditory life with intriguing parallels to the way O'Hara recreates the urban experience in his poems, an experience that echoes, reinterprets and directs the acoustic territory in which he lived.⁴ An aspect of my analysis is the link between O'Hara's sound and his environment, which poetry theory does little to illuminate. LaBelle's, Schafer's and Horowitz's theories supplement my ideas and help forge a theoretical inroad for an investigation of O'Hara's sound.

The most basic definition of sound is, 'something you hear'; a more precise definition is, 'Vibrations that travel through the air or another medium and can be heard when they reach a person's ... ear'.⁵ Sound in poetry, however, cannot be summarised so succinctly and there are numerous ways to define it, though typically the sound of a poem is the result of deliberate choices made by the poet, choices tied closely to meaning. Definitions of sound in poetry are framed through subject-specific vocabulary, with the words metre, rhyme, assonance, consonance and alliteration among the most significant descriptors for how sound occurs and is measured; I use the term *embedded sound* to describe these effects which poets weave through the lines of their poems. What follows are several quotations from poets on the way they characterise sound in their poems. Poetry, Basil Bunting writes:

² R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, (Vermont: Destiny Books, 1994).

³ Seth S. Horowitz, *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. x.

⁴ Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories / Sound Culture and Everyday Life*, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2010).

⁵ Definitions of sound from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Oxford English Dictionary <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/sound_1> [accessed 22 April 2016]; <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/sound>> [accessed 22 April 2016].

...deals in sound – long sounds and short sounds, heavy beats and light beats, the tone relations of vowels, the relations of consonants to one another which are like instrumental colour in music.⁶

The poet Mary Oliver opens a discussion on sound with, 'To make a poem, we must make sounds. Not random sounds, but chosen sounds'; Charles Wright describes poetry as, 'language that sounds better and means more...'; Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill attests, 'Poetry is to a large degree sound. The sound patterns emerge first, then the words, then the meaning, in that order'.⁷ Robert Frost writes:

the object in writing poetry is to make all poems sound as different as possible from each other, and the resources for that of vowels, consonants, punctuation, syntax, words, sentences, metre are not enough. We need the help of context – meaning – subject matter.⁸

The above definitions are not contentious, and we might agree or disagree, for example, on the importance of any one of the items from Frost's list. But none of the descriptions match Frank O'Hara's sound. As I explore the auditory qualities of O'Hara's work I propose to keep in mind the simple non-poetic definition of sound, that is, 'something you hear', and use it to expand upon the definitions of sound in poetry. In doing so I attempt to reveal an aspect of O'Hara's poetic that has until now received little attention.

The distinction between *sound effects* and *sound* is a crucial one; the two are not synonymous, though they are usually treated as such in teaching and criticism. Books on poetry technique focus solely on the standard effects as listed above and do not interrogate the sound of poems that do not contain them; if a poet's sound is discussed it is primarily with regard to sound effects or broad generalisations on the kind of sound they have. Sound effects, therefore, are the main vehicle of poetry criticism in relation to sound. But a poet's sound can be more than sound effects.

In his book *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*, Seth S Horowitz writes, 'The way sounds are made and heard (or not), the effects sounds have on your mind, your emotions, your attention, your memories, your moods, are so vast as to be almost beyond description'.⁹ In poetry, the desire to describe the indescribable is always a challenge, and a substantial subject-

⁶ Basil Bunting, 'The Poet's Point of View', (1966), in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. by W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis, (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Book Ltd, 2000), pp. 80-82 (p. 80).

⁷ Mary Oliver, *The Poetry Handbook*, (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc. 1994), p. 19; Charles Wright in *The Bloodaxe Book of Poetry Quotations* ed. by Dennis O'Driscoll, (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2006), p. 15; Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill in the same volume, p. 148.

⁸ Robert Frost, 'The Figure a Poem Makes', in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. by W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis, (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2000), pp. 44-46 (p. 44).

⁹ Horowitz, p. x.

specific technical vocabulary has been developed in pursuit of this goal. The title of this introduction is a line from O'Hara's poem 'An Airplane Whistle (After Heine)', (1960) and the idea that 'odd sounds' can be 'lovable' is a curious one, but one I believe forms the basis of O'Hara's sound: that is, all sound can be represented and heard, not just the carefully engineered sound effects of crafted verse.¹⁰ Schafer in his study of the acoustic environment, *The Soundscape*, proposes:

Today all sounds belong to a continuous field of possibilities lying within the comprehensive dominion of music. Behold the new orchestra: the sonic universe! And the musicians: anyone and anything that sounds!¹¹

With this statement in mind, I shall explore what the reader hears when they read O'Hara, and ask, what is it possible to hear in the poems of a poet *not* known for his use of sound effects.

My conviction is that *all* poets work within the medium of sound regardless of how attentive they are consciously towards creating sound effects, or of how, with hindsight, they choose to rationalise it (poets might state that rhyme, metre or repetition is part of their overall poetic or they might state they avoid sound effects altogether). Of course, some poets' sound is less distinct, coherent or identifiable than others, but all poems have a sound. Sound in poetry is not a formal decision like the decision to use rhyme or metre. These poetic devices impact upon a poem's sound, but remove a metrical pattern or rhyme scheme, and the sound—though altered—remains. Sound, therefore, is an inseparable part of poem-making and as much a part of the finished poem as the words contained within the poem. In short, you cannot separate sound from a poem.

Sound is an extension of the poet because their unique influences shape the auditory dynamic of their poems. These influences have multiple origins: their location (for O'Hara, New York); their poetic and artistic preferences, (for O'Hara, an abundance of diverse literary and artistic interests); the music they listen to or play, (for O'Hara, again an eclectic array of influences, along with his own musical expertise), and lifestyle, (less easy to quantify, but O'Hara's lifestyle was a significant factor and manifested itself in the conversational quality of his poems). A formal poet's sound is informed by stylistic choices like the use of blank verse, rhyme or assonance; the more pronounced the sound the more likely it is that manoeuvres with language such as metrics, rhyme or assonance have been employed. But all these manoeuvres or abstentions are

¹⁰ 'An Airplane Whistle (After Heine)', (1960), *CP*, p. 360.

¹¹ Schafer, p. 5.

subordinate to something more important: what the reader *hears* when they read a poem. Formal poets may use every weapon in their metrical arsenal but if they lack skill or if the poem is uninteresting the reader may hear nothing. Conversely, a poet may use no devices at all, but the poems may be filled with a multitude of auditory possibilities.

The sound of poetry is what the reader hears when they read or listen. Contemporary poems are primarily received from the page, with the printed word as the first point of contact, and though we may on occasion hear poetry read aloud, for most readers this is not the norm. We, therefore, read silently and never hear the actual words spoken. But poems read silently are, nevertheless, heard by the reader. John Frederick Nims and David Mason in their book *Western Wind*, (2000) explain:

A poem comes to us first as speech, on sound waves that register as barometric changes against the drums and gauges of the ear ... We hear poems even when we seem to be taking them silently from the page. [they describe an experiment where] Tiny wires attached to the speech areas of the throat have picked up electrical currents—[which is] evidence that the muscles were being stimulated during silent reading.¹²

In O'Hara's poem, 'Southern Villages, A Sestina', (1953) he writes, 'she learned to read first with her lips / then suddenly the world was full of ears'.¹³ Our minds listen as we read a poem and what we hear depends on which words the poet uses; Steven Pinker describes words as 'little stretches of sound'.¹⁴ Words also simultaneously generate images, so we read with 'listening eyes'.¹⁵ These listening eyes translate references to sound; if you read the word 'thunder' you simultaneously, for a split second, register its sound. Nims also refers to the way poets manipulate vowel and consonant sounds to create a language and message beyond the actual text. But if a poem does not manipulate vowel or consonant sounds, or incorporate metrics or other effects, there are no patterns to measure and nothing to observe or account for. So in poems with minimal effects, critics avoid interrogating their sound, which has happened with O'Hara. My purpose, therefore, is to establish the characteristics of O'Hara's sound outside the remit of embedded effects, and to do so I have created an appropriate critical vocabulary. But first, in the next chapter, I outline what O'Hara himself had to say on the subject of sound.

¹² John, Frederick Nims and David Mason, *Western Wind*, 4th edn (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000), p. 152.

¹³ 'Southern Villages, A Sestina', (1953), *PR*, pp. 120-121 (p. 121).

¹⁴ Steven Pinker, *The Sense of Style*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2014), p. 81.

¹⁵ Michael Meyer, *Poetry: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998), p. 157.

CHAPTER ONE

'MORE THAN THE EAR CAN HOLD'

'They're playing Rachmaninoff's Third next'

O'Hara's short essay 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959) is a key resource for critics who wish to establish the poet's formal concerns and gain insight into his practice.¹ In the 1993 biography of O'Hara, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara*, Brad Gooch recounts how Donald Allen had asked for a statement on poetics from O'Hara for an anthology; he had failed to deliver, and as Allen travelled across town to collect the document, 'O'Hara poured himself a bourbon and water and began to type out the manifesto'.² His roommate Joe LeSueur asked if he should turn the radio down so O'Hara could write, 'No, turn it up', he replied, 'They're playing Rachmaninoff's Third next', LeSueur joked, 'But you might end up writing another poem to Rachmaninoff', 'If only I could be so lucky' was O'Hara's response.³ Despite the lack of importance O'Hara placed on writing about his poetic and the casual circumstances under which the so-called manifesto was produced, an enormous amount of attention has been placed on this document by critics, who look to it to support and illuminate their own theories.⁴

O'Hara makes a direct reference in 'Personism' to his views on sound:

I don't believe in god, so I don't have to make elaborately sounded structures. I hate Vachel Lindsay, always have; I don't even like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff.⁵

These two sentences have been pivotal to how O'Hara's work has been analysed and warrant closer analysis. This unusual statement which likens formal poetics to divinity at once suggests sound effects are of no consequence to O'Hara in the composition of his work. O'Hara's statement is specific: he disapproves of the *deliberate* (and formal) manipulation of sound; he also does not value those poets, like Vachel Lindsay, who create 'elaborately sounded structures';

¹ 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959), *CP*, pp. 498-499. The title of this Chapter, 'More than the ear can hold' is a quotation from O'Hara's 'Radio', (1955), *CP*, p. 234.

² Brad Gooch, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1993), p. 339.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ultimately Donald Allen did not accept 'Personism: A Manifesto' for the anthology and O'Hara instead wrote a short three paragraph piece, 'Statement for the New American Poetry', which the poet described in 'Statement for Paterson Society' as '...even more mistaken, pompous, and quite untrue ... But it is also, like the manifesto, a diary of a particular day and the depressed mood of that day', *SS*, pp. 113-114 (p. 113).

⁵ 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959), *CP*, pp. 498-499 (p. 498).

Lindsay's poems do have 'elaborately sounded structures', and recordings of him reading them are delivered in a dramatic sing-song manner; readers may recall his poem 'Congo', (1914) being chanted in Peter Weir's 1989 film *Dead Poets Society*:⁶

THEN I had religion, THEN I had a vision.
I could not turn from their revel in derision.
[More deliberate. Solemnly chanted.]
THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST WITH A GOLDEN TRACK.

This excerpt is from a source which describes Lindsay's poems as 'intended to be read aloud or chanted', and as can be seen, contained within the square brackets are instructions on precisely how to go about that.⁷ The poem's problematic content aside, it is easy to see, given the essence of O'Hara's own infinitely looser style, that he would object to these heavily rhymed and rhythmic lines. O'Hara, in addition, negates the importance of rhythm and assonance (rhythm, we can take to mean patterned metrical structures; and assonance, the deliberate repetition of vowel sounds to produce sonic effects).

My interpretation of the two sentences is a straightforward and uncontroversial one, but O'Hara's remarks have nevertheless led to the widespread rejection of him as a poet with technical expertise. One reviewer summarises the general consensus on O'Hara with '...some things about certain O'Hara poems are not very good, usually technical aspects'.⁸ The belief that he is 'not very good' has, in turn, resulted in his poems being discussed with minimal attention to their sonic properties (because sonic properties are invariably regarded as the result of elaborate manoeuvres with sound effects). The lack of interest in this area of O'Hara's poetic is a considerable oversight given one of the intrinsic qualities of poetry is sound; the 2009 publication, *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, argues: '...however central the sound dimension is to any and all poetry, no other poetic feature is currently as neglected'.⁹ This neglect coincides with the decline of both metrics and the use of deliberate sound effects, together with the rise in popularity of free verse. Sound effects, however, are only one part of the story of a poet's sound. As previously stated, sound and sound effects are not synonymous, and O'Hara does not say in 'Personism' that *sound*

⁶ *Dead Poets Society*, dir. by Peter Weir (Touchstone Pictures, 1989).

⁷ Vachel Lindsay's 'Congo and Other Poems' <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/lindsay/lindsay.html#congo>> [accessed 4 April 2016].

⁸ Benjamin Sloan, 'Form and Utterance', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 72-76 (p. 76).

⁸ 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959), *CP*, pp. 498-499 (p. 498).

⁹ 'Introduction', *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 1.

in poetry is unimportant. Nor does his rejection of 'elaborately sounded structures' translate to an absence of sound in his poems; indeed there are many examples of sophisticated and innovative sound.

O'Hara's comments in 'Personism', nonetheless, have been taken by critics as the poet's rejection of both sound and form. Helen Vendler, for example, observed of O'Hara's long poems: 'Beside these poems, even Ginsberg looks formal. The theoretical question O'Hara forces on us is a radical one: Why should poetry be confined in a limited or closed form?'.¹⁰ O'Hara's own comments on the subject reveal a singular slant:

As for measure and other technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you.¹¹

Though not a complete rejection of form, O'Hara situates form or the tightness of a poem's lines and structure outside the remit of standard modes of 'measure' and 'technical apparatus'. For O'Hara the reader's experience—their desire to read, hear, appreciate the shape and enjoy the poem are paramount. As such, O'Hara's reputation as a poet who totally disregards form is debatable but in any case technical ability is not the issue:

You just go on your nerve. If someone's chasing you down the street with a knife you just run, you don't turn around and shout, "Give it up! I was a track star for Mineola Prep".¹²

The idea of 'elaborately sounded structures' goes against O'Hara's stance on poetry, because first, 'you go on your nerve'; which concerns instinct, and second, either the poem works or it does not, and to incorporate 'elaborately sounded structures' is no guarantee that poets can 'outrun' a bad poem simply by flashing their technical credentials. Alan Feldman points out that 'No good O'Hara poem—indeed, no work of art—can be without some sort of form but O'Hara seeks to create forms that are as close as possible to the "formlessness" of experience'.¹³ The conviction that O'Hara disregards form—he rejects traditional forms but not form intrinsically—has resulted in a similar disregard by critics who have largely avoided the *study* of form and by default its close relative, sound.

¹⁰ Helen Vendler, 'The Virtues of the Alterable', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 234-252 (p. 235).

¹¹ 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959), *CP*, pp. 498-499 (p. 498).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Alan Feldman, *Frank O'Hara*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 37.

Stephen Burt, in a short essay on 'Personism', (2005) highlights the problems of manifestos: 'You can start up more arguments, more discussions, through manifestos and claims about movements ... but you can usually do more good in the long run by listening closely to individual poems'.¹⁴ With these words in mind, I have directed some attention to 'Personism' to illuminate the critical mechanisms generated by interpretations of the manifesto, but for my own analysis in Chapter Five I take its first line, 'Everything is in the poems', as the most effective position from which to launch a discussion of O'Hara's sound.

I turn now to O'Hara's stance on criticism. In O'Hara's 'Statement for Paterson Society', (1961) he responds to a request to outline ideas on his poetic by focusing on the disadvantages of defining poetics at all, he writes:

...if ... I wrote you about my convictions concerning form, measure, sound, yardage, placement and ear—well, if I went into that thoroughly enough nobody would ever want to read the poems I've already written, they would be so thoroughly described, and I would have to do everything the opposite in the future to avoid my own boredom...¹⁵

O'Hara's musings are often inconsistent and his writings about his poetic, while not substantial, are substantial enough to see a pattern; the poems are the focus, not how they were made, or how they are received by the critics, indeed he mistrusts the value of criticism: 'critical prose makes too much grass grow, and I don't want to help hide my own poems, much less kill them'.¹⁶ What is also clear is the importance he placed on the ear. In the above quotation, O'Hara lists 'sound' and 'ear' separately: sound follows form and measure and comes before 'yardage, placement and ear'. Yardage is a curious word, which demeans measurement. For O'Hara the word ear better describes what he strives to achieve in his poems and the way his words are received by the reader. Sound for O'Hara here is a formal term, a shortened version of sound effects. Ear is the last item on the list but I believe for O'Hara the ear is the most significant meeting point between poem and reader, the point at which all the other terms culminate. There is also an intimacy in the physicality of the ear as opposed to the more abstracted word sound.¹⁷ O'Hara's statement in 'Personism', that 'the poem is ... between two persons instead of two pages',

¹⁴ Stephen Burt, 'Okay I'll Call You / Yes Call Me: Frank O'Hara's "Personism"' (2005) <<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/okay-ill-call-you=yes-call-me-frank-oharas-personism>> (accessed 21 November 2014).

¹⁵ 'Statement for Paterson Society', (1961), *CP*, pp. 510-511 (p. 510).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ In my discussion, I will use the word sound as a generic term to describe what O'Hara refers to as 'ear' (what the reader hears) and I will use the words sound effects or embedded sound, when discussing formal sound effects or structures.

stresses this intimacy and the value of the heard experience of the poem over the written text.¹⁸

'A whole career to have a line like that'

Critics have framed discussions of O'Hara's poems around his statements in 'Personism' and other writings about his poetic, but what does O'Hara's criticism of other poets reveal about his attitude to sound? O'Hara admired formal poems, Auden's for example, whose poetic was based upon sounded structures. His admiration was such that at one of O'Hara's readings, instead of reading his own poems he read entirely from Auden's work.¹⁹ The language of O'Hara's poetry criticism also reveals that although *sound effects* were not valued, the way the reader hears and is invited into a poem were of great interest to him. He describes Auden's 'In Praise of Limestone':

...he's going along and then he says, "Green places inviting you to sit."
That's worth a whole career to have a line like that. A career any place.
Whether it's in an editorial in the *Times* or wherever it may be.²⁰

With its direct invitation to the reader to enter into the action of the poem, it is easy to see why it appealed to O'Hara.

In a review of Gregory Corso's, 'This is America', (1955) O'Hara close-reads the poem and describes how 'The first stanza is lyrical and delicate in its perfection of ear...'. This reference is one of a number of examples from his critical writings and poems where O'Hara uses the word 'ear' to describe both the poet's and the reader's relationship to the poem and as a synonym for its sound.²¹ The 'perfection of ear' is a striking turn of phrase, which illustrates how the auditory impact of a poem was a central concern for O'Hara, he goes on to write:

Corso is also the only poet who, to my taste, has adopted successfully the rhythms and figures of speech of the jazz musician's world without embarrassment and with a light, musical certainty in its employment.²²

This review also indicates where O'Hara's sensibilities lie in his reference to jazz, and the similarity to his own improvisatory practice with sound. Amira Baraka

¹⁸ 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959), *CP*, pp. 498-499 (p. 499).

¹⁹ 'Edward Lucie-Smith: An Interview with Frank O'Hara', (1965), *SS*, pp. 3-26 (p. 24). In this interview O'Hara said: 'We all, I think, got stuck on Auden and MacNeice in a way. That is, they're just so good that it's absolutely swamped ... They really captured us and, as a matter of fact — like last year, for instance — I was giving a few readings. And finally I was so tired of reading my own work and everything. I read all Auden's things and some MacNeice and, *The Orators*, which I read the whole of the book because it's been out of print for some time and Auden has repudiated some of the poems and everything, and as a work, however, it goes streaming along like the most marvellous thing imaginable. And I think it was also the most satisfying reading I ever gave of anything. You know, much better than my own work'.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²¹ 'Gregory Corso', *SS*, pp. 82-86 (p. 83).

²² *Ibid.*

writes of O'Hara's feelings about jazz: 'Like language and city sounds ... Frank was always looking for inspiration. The music inspired him ... It is about singular and collective spontaneity, and composition, both formal and *mise-en-scène*'.²³ As in his own writing, O'Hara recognises how Corso creates a poetic world from another sound-based world and notes how the poet adopts the 'rhythms and figures of speech' of jazz, an auditory art form, and successfully re-enacts them on the page.

Elsewhere in O'Hara's writings his respect for, and value of, sound in poetry is evident, illustrated in his comments below about the work of e. e. cummings:

To take the simplest aspect of design in poetry, and the most external there is the look or format, which strikes both ear and eye. This element is very clearly and easily apprehended. When you think of e.e. cummings, in whose work design is very important, you think immediately of his identifying characteristics, and what you are thinking of is design: the small case letters in his name, small case letters throughout the poems, elaborate use of parenthesis and typographical arrangements. Reading the poems aloud, the ear hears the line by line and stanza by stanza arrangement, if not the distinction between capital and small letters. In the latter connection, it is interesting to note how many contemporary poets emphasize the visual rather than spoken organisation of the poem.²⁴

In this lengthy quotation, O'Hara reveals how he was a *listening* poet and critic who read poems aloud to access their effects. The poem on the page for O'Hara, 'strikes both ear and eye'. O'Hara sees every aspect in relation to its sound, even the visual properties, such as the use of capital and small letters that he points out cannot be distinguished by the ear. O'Hara, again and again, singles out the ear for attention, gives it priority over the eye, even in a discussion about cummings, a poet noted for his striking *visual* style. In the final section of the quotation, the 'spoken organisation' is the sound of the poem and again O'Hara elevates this above the visual.

O'Hara's criticism rarely references the original intention of the poet, instead, he focuses on how the poem is received by the reader. Crucially, O'Hara prioritises the *reader's* ear—not the poet's—and refers to how the poem might be heard rather than the effects employed to create it. Analysis of O'Hara has been clouded by the idea of intention; if he avoided technical manoeuvres—and his hasty method of composition suggests he did—then critics have seen little point

²³ Michael Magee, 'Tribes of New York: Frank O'Hara, Amiri Baraka, and the Poetics of the Five Spot', *Contemporary Literature*, 42 (2001), this quotation is taken from a letter from Baraka to Magee on 3 January 1999, 694-726 (p. 721).

²⁴ 'Design Etc', *SS*, pp. 33-37 (p. 33).

in pursuing the poems along these lines.²⁵ O'Hara's criticism starts from the perspective of the reader and how they receive the poem and does not consider the poet's intention and as such echoes his own poetic in relation to sound. O'Hara's poems are reader-centred.

With regard to sound, the tools at critics' disposal are reading tools concerned with measuring and counting, whether it be metrics or sonic patterns. All the critic can hope to do is seek out and uncover patterns or the absence of patterns. This method is unproductive for O'Hara's poems because he is unconcerned with making patterns but is instead interested in the *idea* of sound and how to create or suggest sound. O'Hara does not deliberately embed sound effects to reinforce meaning. To do so involves the sophisticated manipulation of vowels and consonants, although sound effects do occur by 'accident', which is the result of exposure to words and their sounds, and the way the brain always works on its host's behalf to produce effects automatically and appropriately. The belief in the power of the unconscious is often mistakenly taken as an excuse to abandon craft, but it is the opposite because the unconscious works best if it has material to work with. Kenneth Koch in a review of O'Hara describes the way he wrote:

It is a method of composition to surprise a confusion of riches—but the riches have to be there. Without them, poems written this way can seem like surprise raids on empty buildings. Along with his brilliant intellect and his wide-ranging knowledge of music, dance, art, history, and philosophy, Frank O'Hara had an ability to fantasize himself to be almost anybody, anything, anytime, anywhere...²⁶

As mentioned in the Introduction, O'Hara stated when writing he did not 'have to make elaborately sounded structures', nevertheless, he was a skilful natural technician who understood, but chose to disregard, poetic sound devices. In an early poem, 'A Suite of Vowels', (c1947) each section is a commentary on sound effects; in part 1, 'Popular Song', every line represents a different vowel sound: 'Coo woo soo boo!'; part 2, 'Variation on a Stanza by Shelley' begins: 'Iloo iloo allah ow i illuff'; part 3, 'Variation on a Sonnet of Wordsworth', begins, 'Um oh oo-i, ach iss oo-i'; O'Hara's light-hearted parody of the sound effects of his forbears demonstrates how he was not only familiar but fully practiced on the 'keyboard of sound'.²⁷ In an interview in 1965 he said:

²⁵ Joe LeSueur, *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. xvi, LeSueur speaking of how O'Hara always found time to write says: 'Not that he needed much time, because he usually got what he was after in one draft'.

²⁶ Kenneth Koch, 'All the Imagination Can Hold', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 34.

²⁷ 'A Suite of Vowels', (c1947), *EW*, pp. 55-56; Nims, p. 159.

It is amazing that Creeley puts as many vowels in as Levertov, and the amazing thing is that where they've pared down the diction so that the experience presumably will come through as strongly as possible, it's the experience of their paring it down that comes through more strongly and not the experience that is the subject, you know. In some cases, not in all.²⁸

Such attention to the sonic activity of other poets is evidence of a sophisticated ear for the technicalities of poetry, but though O'Hara can recognise the effects with vowels in Creeley and Levertov's poems, he is unimpressed by them, because the very act of manipulating the vowel sounds becomes more of a statement than the poem itself. In his criticism, O'Hara celebrated the qualities he admired in the art and poetry of others, and these are the same qualities he valued and incorporated into his own work. O'Hara's keen ear, his influences, from the sounds and rhythms of the city to his music preferences, education and experience, left an indelible mark upon his poems.

'A few deaf lines'

O'Hara's nonchalant attitude to publication and his failure in some instances to even retain copies of his work also illustrate that he valued the oral quality of his poems and that to read and have them heard by an audience, no matter how small, was often enough for him.²⁹ Following his death, original versions of poems were uncovered from numerous sources, and after the *Collected Poems*, (1971) was published two further books were compiled, *Early Writing*, (1977) and *Poems Retrieved*, (1977) the latter volume being made up solely of rediscovered poems.³⁰ Furthermore, O'Hara has a reputation for not editing his work, confirmed by the poet himself, 'I don't believe in reworking — too much. And what really makes me happy is when something just falls into place as if it were a conversation or something'.³¹ These comments, however, are misleading, O'Hara clearly was able to write spontaneously and his work often required little revision but there are also examples of lengthy and careful editing.³² In the review of Cummings above O'Hara notes that he reads poems aloud to access their sonic properties; poetry was originally an oral art form and O'Hara embodies this idea, there are numerous commentaries on how he read

²⁸ 'Edward Lucie-Smith: An Interview with Frank O'Hara', (1965), *SS*, pp. 3-26 (p. 23).

²⁹ LeSueur, p. xxv. LeSueur says: 'Frank may have written in a casual, offhand way, but he also took his work seriously and had a high regard for it ... and that was why he was so indifferent to being published'.

³⁰ *CP*, pp. vi-vii; *EW*; *PR*.

³¹ 'Edward Lucie-Smith: An Interview with Frank O'Hara', (1965), *SS*, pp. 3-26 (p. 21).

³² In the anniversary edition of *Lunch Poems*, the prolonged correspondence between O'Hara and editor Lawrence Ferlinghetti demonstrates that O'Hara did look closely at his poems before submitting for publication. His casual attitude to editing was reserved it seems for work he did not publish, work that he would share with friends.

poems spontaneously at social occasions.³³ Poets read their work out loud to hear how it sounds and only read in public the work that sounds good (though O'Hara was freer than most poets and read newly-composed work). In David Bergman's *The Poetry of Disturbance*, he writes how 'Top poets like Wallace Stevens and Auden mumbled their poems. In other words, it was to be made clear to the audience that this wasn't show business but Serious Business'.³⁴ O'Hara's attitude to poetry was not quite that of 'serious business', in that he often failed to keep copies of his work, but he read publicly to share his poems, and wanted them to be heard by others—even though he did not particularly like formal readings—and it was this shared experience that O'Hara was serious about.³⁵ He lacked confidence in his ability to read engagingly and at an event where he read selections from other poets' work 'apologized for his "flat voice" [saying] "I don't read poetry well, this is just an expedience"'.³⁶ Even so, to read in public gives poets an awareness of the relationship and responsibility they have to their audience, and as O'Hara stated, the poem is always 'between two persons', not pages.³⁷ Poets who read aloud have more direct auditory access to what the reader/listener hears and this vocalisation is itself an effective editing strategy, even if only to gauge whether a poem works or not.

In a letter to John Ashbery in 1957 O'Hara wrote: '...Sometimes when I don't have the chance to spill the beans into a few deaf lines I think I'm losing my mind'.³⁸ O'Hara, in the language choices he makes, reveals an unusual relationship with sound and hearing. O'Hara's letter to Ashbery is difficult to interpret: what are 'deaf lines'? There are a number of possible answers: perhaps 'deaf lines' are simply unsuccessful lines in that they are 'tone-deaf', a colloquial way to say tuneless; alternatively O'Hara 'spills the beans' into his poems that contain 'deaf lines' *until* they are read. Schafer writes of the 'misfortune of having to present data [on sound] on silent pages', this idea is relevant to poetry too and the difficulty of translating the sound of a poem into

³³ LeSueur, p. 196. One of many such occurrences is Joe LeSueur's account of his first hearing 'The Day Lady Died', (1959): 'So we made drinks, Patsy, Mike, Frank, and I, and we sat on the large screened-in porch ... Mike put on a Billie Holiday record and ... Frank said he'd written a poem about Billie Holiday that afternoon and took it out of his pocket and read it'.

³⁴ David Bergman, *The Poetry of Disturbance, The Discomforts of Postwar American Poetry*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 53.

³⁵ Gooch, pp. 322-333. Gooch points out that O'Hara 'disliked public readings', and refers to a reading in 1960 that went sour due to heckling from Jack Kerouac, (who wanted to take the stage himself), Gregory Corso and others, O'Hara left mid-heckle, and said afterwards to the audience 'I just don't feel like reading ... This may seem uninteresting but it's no more uninteresting than Jack Kerouac's wanting to read'.

³⁶ Gooch, p. 216.

³⁷ 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959), *CP*, pp. 498-499 (p. 499).

³⁸ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, p. 18.

language.³⁹ The words 'deaf lines' do not give up their meaning readily. A literal translation of 'deaf lines' would be lines that cannot hear, which also makes sense as an interpretation because of course, only the reader can hear. A line of poetry has no sound; it is the reader who coaxes the sound from the poem. The line only contains the potential for sound; what happens on the page can only ever be realised in the ear of the reader. In 'A Trip to the Zoo', (1960) O'Hara writes about friends coming over for dinner and refers to the excitement of the shared experience of the poem:

"...it'll be such fun
to tell you about my little
theory I have
about reading out loud
verse
verse?
it's quite exciting
are there other people really coming?"...
but it is necessary
to listen
as one is listened to...⁴⁰

An unheard poem, therefore, has no sound, regardless of how meticulously the poet has counted beats or whatever else they may have done in an attempt to engage the reader's ear. This theory would explain O'Hara's inclination to read so many of his poems immediately after they had been written to anyone who would listen as if to activate their sound.

The title of this thesis, 'As obvious as an ear' is one of many references O'Hara makes to the organ.⁴¹ And throughout O'Hara's poems and critical work, the 'ear' is significant. In 'A Letter to Bunny', (1950) he writes, 'When anyone reads this but you it begins / to be lost. My voice is sucked into a thousand / ears...', clearly, O'Hara writes to be heard as much as read.⁴² O'Hara here places importance on his own voice, both a poetic voice and an actual voice, to reinforce the idea his poems speak and are heard. It is useful, at this point, to define voice in poetry; *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, explains:

To stress voice in discussions of poetry may be simply a reminder of the large extent to which poetry depends on sound. The qualities of vocal sounds enter directly into the aesthetic experience of performance, of

³⁹ Schafer, p. 8.

⁴⁰ 'A Trip to the Zoo', (1960), *PR*, p. 205.

⁴¹ 'To the Film Industry in Crisis', (1955), *CP*, pp. 232-233 (p. 232).

⁴² 'A Letter to Bunny', (1950), *CP*, p. 23.

poetry readings, but no less do those sounds resonate in the "inner ear" of a fully attentive silent reading.⁴³

Voice is, therefore, intrinsic to the sound of a poem whether heard or read, and I shall explore this further in Chapter Four.

The importance of sound in O'Hara's criticism has also been noted by those under scrutiny *by* him. Edwin Denby describes one of O'Hara's reviews of his (Denby's) own books:

Frank was so wonderful about the book and wrote a review in *Poetry* and had the marvellous gift of saying nice things. He would make compliments and then quote lines from the poems and in some instinctive way he managed to prepare the ear for what was interesting about the quotations.⁴⁴

Again, O'Hara is concerned with the reader's ear and how he might heighten their experience of the poem's sound through his criticism; he also described Denby as someone 'who sees and hears more clearly than anyone I have ever known', and clearly respected these qualities in a poet.⁴⁵ But the key word in this quotation is 'instinctive'; poets with a trained ear develop an instinctive expertise with sound in both their poetry and criticism. In the next section, I investigate how O'Hara developed his instinctive ear.

'Perfection of ear'

I have discussed how O'Hara was attuned to the sound of poetry in other poets' work and shown that his comment in 'Personism' about being uninterested in 'elaborately sounded structures' did not mean he lacked the ability to create them, or that he did not value sound. I turn now to a number of influences in O'Hara's past that cultivated his ear for sound in poetry. First, O'Hara studied the piano from a young age, this was more than the usual childhood lessons; he describes the moment at age seventeen when he informed his unimpressed parents he intended to study music and become a pianist and composer 'like Rachmaninoff', and after some argument his mother said to his father of his music lessons, 'when it all began ... we just wanted him to have some general culture. I didn't want him to become an addict!', to which O'Hara responded: 'I pulled my trump. "Then why have you made me practice every day since I was seven years old?"'.⁴⁶ O'Hara got his wish and at Harvard majored in music

⁴³ Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, ed. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 3rd edn (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 1366.

⁴⁴ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, p. 170.

⁴⁵ 'Introduction to Edwin Denby's *Dancers Buildings and People in the Streets*', *SS*, pp. 182-184 (p. 182).

⁴⁶ 'Autobiographical Fragments', *SS*, pp. 29-32 (p. 31).

before eventually transferring to English. But even after he abandoned formal study, his love of music continued and is referenced throughout his poems. In the introduction to the *Collected Poems*, John Ashbery writes:

Frank ... listened constantly to music, not only to composers of the recent past as diverse as Rachmaninoff and Schönberg ... but to contemporary avant-garde composers such as Cage and Feldman.⁴⁷

Ashbery also refers to a concert they attended of John Cage's 'Music of Changes' which featured:

a piano work lasting over an hour and consisting ... entirely of isolated autonomous tone-clusters struck seemingly at random all over the keyboard ... what mattered was that chance elements could combine to produce so beautiful and cogent a work. It was a further, perhaps for us ultimate proof not so much of "Anything goes" but "Anything can come out".⁴⁸

O'Hara's appreciation of 'random' sounds and 'chance elements' along with the conviction that such sounds could be incorporated into a poem would become a significant part of his poetic. For O'Hara the sounds of life, noise and voices represent an authentic sound, free from technical dishonesty where specialised razzle-dazzle speaks louder than the poem itself.

A second biographical detail relevant to the development of O'Hara's sound was his wartime work in the Navy for Sound Navigation and Range (SONAR). Before his work at SONAR began O'Hara thought carefully about what the position would involve and in a letter to his family, wrote: 'The training should improve my pitch and teach me about the physics of sound and therefore music'.⁴⁹ Claire Seiler, in her paper, 'Francis O'Hara, War Poet', describes what his role at SONAR involved:

The act of listening defined O'Hara's service ... when he enlisted in the Navy, his musical background fitted him for the job of Sound Navigation and Recording (SONAR) operator. SONAR is the study and monitoring of underwater sounds to navigate or to detect seagoing vessels ... the operator tracks sonic patterns, pitches, and deviations from standard tones and frequencies. SONAR thus turns the outwardly passive stance of listening into an aggressive, purposeful activity.⁵⁰

Ultimately, the work was a disappointment and as Gooch points out in his biography: 'By the time O'Hara was mimicking his sonar instructor's voice in "Lament and Chastisement," the irony of confusing ear training with honing in on torpedo targets was fixed in his mind'.⁵¹ Nevertheless, this 'aggressive'

⁴⁷ 'Introduction', *CP*, p. ix.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Gooch, p. 66.

⁵⁰ Claire Seiler, 'Francis O'Hara, War Poet', *Contemporary Literature*, 54 (2013), 810-833 (p. 819).

⁵¹ Gooch, p. 68.

listening would become a key component in O'Hara's poetry. In an artistic collaboration with Larry Rivers called 'Stones', O'Hara wrote: 'the silent egg thinks / and the toaster's electrical ear waits'.⁵² Here, the curious incorporation of the ear, silence and listening are suggestive of O'Hara's own waiting and listening as a SONAR operator.

In addition to music and SONAR training, O'Hara studied poetry. In *Early Writing*, (1977) schedules of O'Hara's classes at Harvard list a broad spectrum of English Literature and poetry composition classes.⁵³ His early poems also reveal how he experimented with a variety of forms and metrics and as Perloff suggests: 'However "unformed" his later poetry may look, we should bear in mind he tried his hand at sonnets, songs, ballads, eclogues, litanies, and dirges'.⁵⁴ In addition to his structured education within academia, O'Hara was 'one of the best read and most learned poets of his time'.⁵⁵

The three ingredients: music, SONAR and the study of poetic form—all deeply associated with sound—contributed to the development of a highly sophisticated ear for both writing and reading poetry. O'Hara, furnished with practical skills, well-read and experienced, wrote spontaneously without a thought for technique or sound, but his background in the study of sound in all its manifestations would act as raw material and ultimately reveal itself uniquely in his poems, 'all grist for the mill', as O'Hara himself expressed it in a rare cliché.⁵⁶ Clearly, from his reviews of others, O'Hara was a listening poet, he was also attuned to his environment, to New York city, to the nuances of language, conversation, music and the sounds of individual words, but he was no casual listener. He was a highly skilled classical musician with a Harvard education, who had been trained by the military to listen aggressively. This ear training over many years would have a pronounced impact on the sound of O'Hara's poems.

So far, I have focussed on Frank O'Hara's views on sound and criticism; now I turn to the lively discourse that has been generated since the poet began publishing poems in the 1950s up to the present day. In Chapter Two, I outline the main concerns that have driven O'Hara studies over the last five decades and also determine what manner of attention sound has received.

⁵² Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, p. 105.

⁵³ 'Francis Russell O'Hara, A.B. 1950 Course Description, Harvard College', *EW*, pp. 149-151.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Ron Padgett, 'Six Memories of Frank O'Hara', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bollinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 132-133 (p. 132).

CHAPTER TWO

'TOO MUCH GRASS'

The chatty poet

In a review in 1957, O'Hara's work was described as 'the poetry of flat, dead-pan colloquialism', and a way of writing about him began to emerge where critics consistently employed several specific adjectives to describe his poems: 'chatty', 'casual', 'informal', 'trivial', 'conversational', words that are the antithesis of poetic language.¹ One reviewer describes his work as having the '...puppyish charm of occasional good impromptus'.² Frank O'Hara's poetry was not taken seriously.

O'Hara's popularity nevertheless increased with the non-academic reader and critic alike. A comment which typifies much of the thought on O'Hara's poetic modus operandi was made by musician Tom Verlaine, who when asked in an interview about his own musical sound and sound in poetry said:

Dylan Thomas has great sound but the sense ... a lot of it is psycho-sense or something and Lewis Carroll also sounds good in many places and his sense is really great ... and all the Frank O'hara [sic] types seem to have very little sound stuff going ... it's so chatty or something, although it's kinda [sic] smiley-likeable in the informality- lack-o-big-statement, which functions as a comment as well i [sic] guess. Actually Emily D (Emily Dickinson). has great sound and sense.³

In Verlaine's mindful though non-academic assessment, the key word is 'informality', and the implication is that the words 'informal' and 'sound' are mutually exclusive. The conviction that sound does not occur in an informal poem is incorrect, but it results in poems which avoid embedded effects being excluded from discussions on sound. Verlaine also asserts sound in poetry is intrinsically linked to sense, and he cites the example of Lewis Carroll, whose famous poem, 'The Jabberwocky', (1871) derives its sense from sonic techniques such as onomatopoeia and portmanteau and as such includes invented words. Here readers are faced with a poem which should not make sense because the language is unfamiliar but it does make sense and the

¹ Kenneth Rexroth, 'Two Voices Against the Chorus', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 3.

² Francis Hope, 'Suffer and Observe', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 13.

³ Tom Verlaine interviewed by Sadi Ranson-Polizzotti on *Tant Mieux / so much the better*, (2005) <<http://tantmieux.squarespace.com/tant-mieux-interviews-/2005/3/6/tom-verlaine-part-one-of-the-interview-with-srp.html>> (accessed 4 April 2013).

narrative can be followed easily, through the principle of sound and sense. No such claims are made for O'Hara's poems who Verlaine remarks, 'have very little sound stuff going [on]'.

But sound happens in every poem, formal or otherwise. Although sound in poetry is important, the sound of O'Hara's poems has received limited scrutiny, and his reputation as a poet is not augmented by claims he had expertise in sound. Critics are more enthusiastic about the visual qualities of O'Hara's poems, but even his skill with imagery is not attributed to craft; Helen Vendler writes, his poems remind us 'of the rapid unfinished sketches done by an artist to keep his hand in ... if there were a movie equivalent to a sketch, some of these poems would be better called verbal-movies'.⁴ This description has negative connotations: the word 'verbal' is prosaic and suggests a lack of impressive manoeuvres with sound, and with the word 'movies' Vendler dismisses O'Hara's action painter style of poetic composition and compares it to a lower art form.⁵ Another reviewer likens O'Hara to the movies, 'the rhythms are easy and conversational, the tone suave and playful. They have the kind of attitude which one admires in the comedies Hollywood turned out in the thirties'.⁶ Here again, we see O'Hara's poetic demeaned by comparison to a frivolous movie genre, the Hollywood comedies, which likewise are demeaned by the words 'turned out'. Incidentally, the film references that grace O'Hara's poems celebrate all film genres, movie stars, the characters they play and their dialogue.

Fifty years of O'Hara criticism

Despite O'Hara's reputation as 'chatty poet', a diverse and lively academic discourse has accumulated. What follows is an outline of O'Hara studies over the last five decades together with any notable references to sound. When O'Hara died in an accident in 1966, aged forty, his work had received limited attention. He was celebrated in New York by fellow writers and artists and was beginning to achieve critical recognition, but with only a few reviews of his work was not an established poet in the wider sense. Academic interest in O'Hara gained momentum in the decades after his death, and today there are over a dozen

⁴ Helen Vendler, 'The Virtues of the Alterable', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 234-252 (p. 234).

⁵ This was not a view that was held by O'Hara, who had great respect for the movies, and of course Vendler's comment was written in 1972 when film studies was not as firmly established as a discipline as literary studies was. My comment that the movies are a 'lower art form' is based on my belief that at that time Vendler intended to suggest this.

⁶ Gilbert Sorrentino, 'The New Note', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 15-16 (p. 15).

books devoted solely to the poet that include biography, memoir and critical texts, and numerous volumes that include a chapter, section or essay about him.⁷

What emerged from these texts was that critics found it challenging to write about the mechanics of O'Hara's poems; one reviewer, typical of a number of responses, wrote: 'As for technique, there is nothing to take...'.⁸ The difficulty was how to critique poems that are charming, quirky, conversational and reject symbolism; O'Hara's poems refuse to give up their secrets under the thumb-screws of a critical vocabulary more suited, perhaps, to a Robert Frost poem. And the conviction that O'Hara's strength as a poet is unrelated to craft was supported by the much-documented evidence of how he composed his poems, quickly and without editing.⁹ He did not intend to create technically adroit poems, and indeed did not appear to value this aspect of poetic practice; though a reference in one of his poems to 'our intuitive craft' suggests he was aware of the mechanism and skill at work in his writing.¹⁰ O'Hara stated he did not want to make 'control ... the subject matter of the poem', but in poems that forego the idea of control can there be any benefit in an analysis that searches *for* control?¹¹ A reviewer of the *Collected Poems* wrote, the poems 'sacrifice formal finish—whatever the inconvenience to the reader or the poem—for the rich waywardness of words and things'.¹² Waywardness implies control is impossible because how do you control poems that are '...loose and baggy (if amiable) monsters'?¹³ This way of thinking led critics to write about O'Hara's work based primarily on content and theme.

The earliest academic paper on O'Hara, (1969) was written by Richard Howard, who was the first of many critics to quote his 'I don't have to make elaborately sounded structures...' line. Howard's paper begins with the poet's death and takes a broad view of his work, one notable line is, '...for O'Hara a critical statement is always an *appropriation*, which is why I feel justified in quoting so

⁷ When assessing the critical contribution, I have included only books that take O'Hara as their sole subject and only papers published in academic journals, not chapters or essays from books not specifically about O'Hara. All counts are based on my own research over the course of this study.

⁸ Gilbert Sorrentino, 'The New Note', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 15-16 (p. 16).

⁹ LeSueur, p. xvi.

¹⁰ 'A Terrestrial Cuckoo', (1951), *CP*, pp. 62-63 (p. 62).

¹¹ 'Edward Lucie-Smith: An Interview with Frank O'Hara', (1965), *SS*, pp. 3-26 (p. 23).

¹² Herbert A. Leibowitz, 'A Pan Piping on the City Streets', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. By Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 24-28 (pp. 24-25).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

much of his criticism in application to his own poetry'.¹⁴ And so began half a century of criticism that would be influenced by the light-hearted statements from O'Hara's various manifestos. A wave of dedicated O'Hara criticism began in earnest in the 1970s, with eight academic papers and three books. In one of these papers, 'New Thresholds, Old Anatomies: Contemporary Poetry and the Limits of Exegesis', (1974) Perloff notes how New Criticism and traditional methods of criticism were inappropriate for poets like O'Hara, and literary theories of the time were not equal in sophistication to the poetic works themselves:

...New Criticism with its sophisticated apparatus for the elucidation of metaliteral meanings cannot cope with the intentionally "literal" poetry of the present. This does not mean, however, that we should revert to the opposite extreme by simply accepting anything that calls itself New Poetry as the New Gospel, by assuming that if a poet announces he intends to do something, then surely he is doing it.¹⁵

But the difficulty for critics in discussing the 'literal' has meant the scenario Perloff describes has happened in O'Hara studies. She goes on to point out:

Style, for O'Hara, is ... a matter of suppressing all the connectives that impeded the natural flow of life, that freeze its momentum. Hence there can be no fixed meters, no counting of syllables, no regularity of cadence, no sound repetitions at set intervals. Just as the syntax must be as indeterminate as possible, so no two lines must have the same length or form. Thus the verse forms themselves enact the poet's basic distrust of stability, his commitment to change.¹⁶

Though arguably little can be gained from the analysis of metrical or sound patterns in O'Hara's poems, to deny his expertise, formal or otherwise, means critics narrow the scope of discussion and appreciation of their effects. Perloff points out how alternative critical vehicles were available and used in other fields, but poetry was yet to catch on. This observation was made in 1974 but little changed in subsequent decades.

Perloff's influential 1977 publication, *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters* was focused on the poet's connections to art, but the book covers, in brief, a great deal of ground and would act as a springboard for critics who have explored in subsequent decades areas such as independent film, classic Hollywood cinema, the avant-garde, sexuality, politics, friendship, and New York City. Perloff makes several references to sound. In response to the quotation about sound from

¹⁴ Richard Howard, 'Frank O'Hara: "Since Once We Are Always Will Be in This Life Come What May"', in *To be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 105-124 (p. 111).

¹⁵ Marjorie G. Perloff, 'New Thresholds, Old Anatomies: Contemporary Poetry and the Limits of Exegesis', *The Iowa Review*, 5 (1974), 83-99 (p.88).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

'Personism', she writes, O'Hara '...as we shall see, cared very much indeed for elaborately sounded structures', but she gives only limited consideration to why he did care, or how this care manifested itself in the poems.¹⁷ For example, in a discussion of O'Hara's 'Rhapsody', Perloff notes, 'despite the air of casual talk, the poem displays careful sound patterning', she then marks up a line with repeated *i* sounds; she refers to 'repeated *i* and *o* sounds' in 'Morning'; and how 'repetitive internal sound patterning ... create[s] an aura of intense animation' in 'Music'.¹⁸ Of course, the subject of the book meant references to sound warranted only a cursory glance. But in any case, readings of O'Hara's poems for sound patterns in general, are flimsy and tend to trail off unsatisfactorily, as if the critic had started something they cannot effectively finish. There can be little closure in such analysis because O'Hara's next stanza invariably foregoes sound effects altogether and leaves the critic in a room they have wandered into, looking around vaguely, unsure about what they originally went in for.

Perloff also highlights a letter to Mike Goldberg, in which O'Hara describes a time when he was isolated from New York and had an experience akin to writer's block: 'There were a couple of weeks of foul depression, gnashing teeth, pacing and boredom when I felt that I would never, NEVER ... be able to play the typewriter again'. After his emergence from this period of depression, O'Hara writes, 'I now stagger from bed, stride to the desk, and begin my scales each morning...'.¹⁹ The metaphor stresses the parallels between music and poetry, and Perloff asserts, 'Playing the typewriter' instead of writing in longhand inevitably leads the poet to emphasize visual prosody'.²⁰ I question this interpretation and think the morning scales and playing the 'instrument' point to the *importance* of sound and not, as Perloff states, the importance of visual prosody. In 1978 Alan Feldman's book, *Frank O'Hara* was published, its scope of enquiry included 'language, structure, ... theme, intention and moral significance'; though an insightful book, with several brief mentions of sound, given the close proximity to Perloff's publication, it would be less influential.²¹ Finally, in this decade, Alexander Smith's, *Frank O'Hara: A Comprehensive Bibliography*, (1979) was published.²²

Of the academic papers published in the 1970s several focussed on language, these include one on O'Hara's style as a product of 'gay language' and another

¹⁷ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29; p. 56; p. 124.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²¹ Alan Feldman, p. 10.

²² Alexander Smith, Jr., *Frank O'Hara: A Comprehensive Bibliography*, (New York: Garland, 1979).

on the vernacular qualities of his work; I discuss the latter in the following chapter.²³ And also a paper by Merle Brown which acknowledges O'Hara's 'keen poetic ear', entitled, 'Poetic Listening', (1978) which argues:²⁴

...poetry is difficult of access ... because it is listened to as it is spoken, heard critically as it is expressed, read as it is being written: it comes to the reader as twice-told. The poet always listens to himself as part of the expressive act that is his poem, and that listening becomes an essential part of the completed poem.²⁵

Here Brown refers to the poet's practice, but the same holds true for the reader, who also reads *and* listens. Some poems are silent, indeed many of O'Hara's are silent, but his best work invites the reader to listen, to hear and to participate.²⁶ The more readers are invited to hear, the richer the experience becomes. Brown goes on to claim O'Hara's:

...best poems are poetic acts, even though not intentional. He opens himself up to those unforeseeable, unplanned, unintended forces of his inner and surrounding life as no deliberate, crafty, intentional writer could do ... the strength and value of his poetry, is that he listens to what is going on, to the anguish and the defensiveness, without defences, as a man as stripped at heart as Blake was. Obviously, O'Hara in contrast to Blake, is frivolous. But he knew it and he knew why, and as a result, his poetry is not frivolous.²⁷

Brown acknowledges O'Hara's 'poetic listening', but accompanies the recognition with reference to the poet's lack of craft and intention. 'Obviously', he writes, O'Hara is 'frivolous', but his poems are not. I would suggest, however, such ability is at least an equivalent of craft and for poems to be as celebrated as O'Hara's are, some form of expertise must be in play. O'Hara's craft is not obvious like Dylan Thomas's; it is subtle, barely recognisable, or even invisible to many critics and readers. But O'Hara's 'chatty', 'informal' style captures the reader's attention because he is also a listening poet and he translates his listening into poems the reader can hear. In Brown's estimation, O'Hara's results, though often admirable, are accidental.

The 1970s was a full decade for O'Hara criticism, but after the initial interest following his death, the 1980s saw a decline in scrutiny, with only three

²³ Bruce Boone, 'Gay Language as Political Praxis: The Poetry of Frank O'Hara', *Social Text*, 1 (1979), 59-92; Justin Replogle, 'Vernacular Poetry: Frost to Frank O'Hara', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24 (1978), 137-153; Merle Brown, 'Poetic Listening', *Literary Hermeneutics*, 10 (1978), 125-139.

²⁴ Merle Brown, 'Poetic Listening', *Literary Hermeneutics*, 10 (1978), 125-139 (p. 135).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²⁶ Critics have questioned the quality of Donald Allen's *Collected Poems*, a volume over five-hundred pages in length: Helen Vendler in 'The Virtues of the Alterable', (1972) said: 'we need a massively reduced version, showing O'Hara at his best', p. 5. Justin Replogle in 'Vernacular Poetry: Frost to Frank O'Hara', (1978) believed: 'Many selections in there probably wouldn't be if he [O'Hara] had put it together himself. Some of the casual notes and scraps may hurt his reputation for a while', p. 149.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

noteworthy papers and a book of tributes edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur.²⁸ In the 1983 paper entitled 'Frank O'Hara's Poetics of Speech: The Example of 'Biotherm'', Mutlu Konuk Blasing, discusses the poem 'Biotherm' and writes a sentence that begins: 'The alimentary imagery, metaphors, and "sound effects"...'.²⁹ I want to focus for a moment on the quotation marks around "sound effects"; the use of punctuation in this way—known as shudder quotes—is indicative of the attitude of critics towards the study of sound in O'Hara's poems. The quotes at once distance their author from the notion that sound effects might be considered as valuable as imagery, and they also represent a denial that what O'Hara does with sound might be worthy of serious study.

O'Hara's critical and popular status rose in the 1990s. Three books were published: Russell Ferguson's book on the artworks inspired by the poet, *In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art*; the first biography of the poet, Brad Gooch's *City Poet the Life and Times of Frank O'Hara*, (1993) which explicates the poems by linking them to biographical events at the time of their composition; and a retrospective, Jim Elledge's, *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, (1990) a collection of reviews and essays which is a useful indicator of the temperature of O'Hara studies, and the concerns and critical responses going back to 1957. Though it contains several positive reviews, on the whole, they entertainingly illustrate how O'Hara was not considered a serious or technically adept poet; one reviewer writes, '...his long invertebrate verse lines can be amiable and gay, like streamers of crepe paper fluttering before an electric fan'.³⁰ In addition to these books, there were eleven academic papers. In 1997, Caleb Crain, in his paper "'Fired" Self', (1997) made a similar comment to Perloff's in 1974 in reference to the difficulty of analysing O'Hara's poems:

O'Hara succeeds because his seductive persona sweeps the reader along, but once the poet himself has departed, the poem left behind may seem as unglossable as a drawerful of ticket stubs and restaurant receipts, mementos of an ended love affair. The poems' elements do not seem amenable to analysis and a new synthesis in the classroom ... Literary criticism must, however, find some way to talk about the slick new pleasure O'Hara gave his readers.³¹

Crain identifies two issues: the way O'Hara inhabits his poems—if we read the work without the poet's 'seductive persona' this reading would be poorer than

²⁸ Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, eds., *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, (Bolinis: Big Sky Books, 1988).

²⁹ Mutlu Konuk Blasing, 'Frank O'Hara's Poetics of Speech: the Example of 'Biotherm'', *Contemporary Literature*, 23.1 (1982) 52-64 (p. 55).

³⁰ Marius Bewley, 'Lines', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 17.

³¹ Caleb Crain, 'Frank O'Hara's "Fired" Self', *American Literary History*, 9 (1997), 287-308 (p. 287).

the experience we have with the knowledge of *who* is speaking. And second, he alludes to the problem faced by critics: the poems are not 'amenable to analysis', but Crain sees this as an opportunity for critics to find new ways to talk about them.

Mark Goble's "'Our Country's Black and White Past": Film and the Figures of History in Frank O'Hara', (1999) concerns 'sexuality, nationhood, and history in mass media culture' and contains a short section which analyses the sound of his poem 'Pearl Harbor', (1955).³² Goble argues, 'The structure of the poem as an artefact of sound is our first clue that O'Hara's version of Pearl Harbor is a warped and complicated filmic and historical event'.³³ He singles out this poem with its 'high degree of sonic assonance', to support his thesis about O'Hara's rendering of the historic attack, and how it veers from the norm of his poetic with a traditional and out-of-character attention to sound.³⁴ The 1990s also saw the reprint of Perloff's 1977 volume, *Poet Among Painters*. In the preface to the reprint of this book, (1998) Perloff points out:

In 1977, the age demanded a *raison d'être* for O'Hara's casual, improvisatory, nonmetrical and generally nonstanzaic "I do this, I do that" pieces, pieces that hardly seemed to qualify as *poems* at all.³⁵

The implication here is that attitudes have changed, and O'Hara's reputation is sealed. Perloff acknowledges a welcome interest but concludes 'we must now be careful not to turn this mercurial and highly individual poet into a mere representative of fifties' queer sensibility or Cold War politics'.³⁶ This curiously protective language, as I shall demonstrate in the next section, is indicative of the way critics, in various ways, channel the discourse on O'Hara.

With the onset of the twenty-first century, interest in O'Hara gained momentum, and in the first decade, there was an upsurge in criticism with the publication of approaching twenty academic papers. O'Hara's friend and ex-partner, Joe LeSueur's book, *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara*, (2003) provides informative biographical material on the composition of the poems.³⁷ Also, two academic texts take a theoretical and purposeful slant: Hazel Smith's, *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara*, (2000) and Lytle Shaw's, *Frank*

³² Goble, Mark, "'Our Country's Black and White Past": Film and the Figures of History in Frank O'Hara', *American Literature*, 71 (1999), 57-92 (p. 58).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁵ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, p. xiii.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

³⁷ Joe LeSueur, *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie, (2006); both volumes focus in different ways on sexuality.³⁸

Midway through the present decade, two critical books: *Frank O'Hara and the Poetics of Saying "I"*, (2010) and *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, (2010) have been published.³⁹ The latter volume, a collection of fifteen essays, includes two that consider sound; David Herd writes about the step and how it becomes O'Hara's measure—I revisit this essay in Chapter Five; and Josh Robinson discusses breath and laughter and their relationship to voice, along with brief discussion of syllable counts, rhythm, and vowel sounds.⁴⁰ In the first half of the decade, six academic papers were published and numerous journalistic articles that examine O'Hara in reference to the publication of the fiftieth anniversary of both *Lunch Poems* and the poet's death.

With regard to sound, I want to focus on two studies in some detail. Claire Seiler's, 2010 paper, 'Francis O'Hara, War Poet', makes a case for O'Hara as a war poet and examines his unpublished first manuscript, 'A Byzantine Place', (1951) which she argues is 'deeply informed by war'.⁴¹ This convincing paper goes into some detail about sound, specifically with regard to the silences within the poems, which she refers to as 'sonic suspensions':

Pause, stillness, listening, quiet—while this lexicon of sonic suspension hardly aligns with ready impressions of O'Hara's poetics, it contributes to several of the major innovations in late twentieth-century literary theory and to recent work, in humanities and related social sciences disciplines, on war and the effects of war.⁴²

Seiler marks out the war poems as distinct in their sound from O'Hara's later work, and in her analysis considers both sound and content. She writes:

O'Hara's early status as a war poet inheres less powerfully in biography or topicality than it does in the charged silences, unplanned sounds, suspenseful quiets, and acts of listening that suffuse "A Byzantine Place".⁴³

³⁸ Hazel Smith, *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000); Lytle Shaw, *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006).

³⁹ Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery, eds., *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2010), of the fifteen essays in this collection only David Herd's 'Stepping Out with Frank O'Hara' and Josh Robinson's 'A Gasp of Laughter at Desire': Frank O'Hara's Poetics of Breath' consider the sound of O'Hara's poems; Micah Mattix, *Frank O'Hara and the Poetics of Saying "I"* (Plymouth: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-85; pp. 144-159 (pp. 150–151).

⁴¹ Seiler, p. 810; Seiler points out that forty-seven of the fifty poems were published across Donald Allen's three volumes, *CP*, *PR* and *EP*, p. 814.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 811.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The expression of sound in this early work differs to that in his later city poems, and this sequence of fifty poems, Seiler concludes, contains only two references to New York. Seiler describes the sound of this sequence as follows:

Paradoxically, O'Hara's midcentury poems figure war, a most cacophonous state, through immersion in sudden pauses, hushed "nows," and eerie stills. I group this collection of formal and thematic effects under the term "sonic suspension," and it is in that sound world of hushes and pauses that I ultimately locate O'Hara's poetics of war.⁴⁴

The cacophony of war is curiously inverted by O'Hara and as Seiler points out can be attributed to his occupation in the Navy, as SONAR operator, an occupation of listening. Because of this, Seiler deduces O'Hara's 'ear is implicated in ... war' but as 'musician and SONAR operator, Francis O'Hara was attuned to sound at its most beautiful and its most threatening. His first volume, in turn, reshapes the very idea of what war poetry sounds like'.⁴⁵ The result, as in much of O'Hara's work, is an unusual sound that does not rely on embedded effects but recreates the experience of war by alternative means. Seiler, insightfully identifies that:

O'Hara's war poetry does not look or sound much like its best-known and most immediate precedent, the trench poetry of World War I. It sounds unexpected, and especially in the poems of "A Byzantine Place," it is attuned to sound.⁴⁶

This brilliant observation puts O'Hara's war poems in direct and original contrast to the most significant war poetry of our time, including work by Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, and reinforces the idea of O'Hara as an innovator with sound. A final point to note on Seiler's paper is her discussion of O'Hara's, 'A Quiet Poem', (1950) which she describes as a SONAR poem, and argues:

Given that O'Hara would write so many poems titled "Poem," the sonic modifier "Quiet" is noteworthy. Here the title of the poem underlines how hard O'Hara works to keep "A Quiet Poem" quiet.⁴⁷

Seiler, quoting the poem in full, goes into some detail to describe the technical mastery whereby O'Hara manipulates sound and silence through imagery, diction, syntax, slant rhyme, synaesthesia, music and punctuation:

The cloud is then so subtly dragged
away by the silver flying machine

that the thought of it alone echoes
unbelievably; the sound of the motor falls...

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 822.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 818.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 824.

And the noise of the poem, Seiler explains 'occurs only in the mind'.⁴⁸ I shall discuss the idea of how sound can occur in the reader's mind in more detail in the following chapter in relation to my term the sonic imagination. The silence of O'Hara's war poems contrasts to his later work, which largely avoid silence (or use silence to manipulate sound) and is actually characterised by a variety of sounds and dialogues.

A second article to discuss sound is a short online piece in celebration of the anniversary of *Lunch Poems*, (2014) where Callie Siskel questions the idea of O'Hara's reputation as casual poet. She focuses on the lengthy editorial communications between O'Hara and Lawrence Ferlinghetti—over five years—as the publisher attempted to move the collection (and the poet) towards a publication date.⁴⁹ Siskel argues when O'Hara composed the blurb for the book, he described two distinct versions of himself: the one we all recognise, 'who strolls and types', and an alter ego who 'withdraws and limns'. She reasons O'Hara's dismissive attitude to his work, as embodied in the 'I do this I do that' persona, was a foil and that he actually:⁵⁰

...created the reclusive, pensive O'Hara to draw even further attention to the one who types on the go. But it is also possible that he wanted to give us a deeper glimpse into the complexity of his craft. A closer look at *Lunch Poems*, for which O'Hara is still well-known 48 years after his death, reveals how the collection marked a turning point for the poet, inaugurating his signature voice, one whose conversational tone and ease of expressions obscure his masterful technique.⁵¹

Siskel suggests that rather than being a casual poet O'Hara can be credited with 'masterful technique', and goes on to briefly analyse the poems with a keen ear for sound. She argues: 'O'Hara found his own vernacular—his own way of playing music...' and discusses several poems with an ear for their embedded sound effects, she writes for example, in a discussion of 'Personal Poem':⁵²

It is possible that the names, which all contain double l's, were selected for their sonic effect. "Trill-," "All-," and "-ville" each resonate with the ale O'Hara begins by drinking. Lines that might otherwise jar the senses are therefore given a homophonous quality. What could have been merely a list is mediated through O'Hara's singular way of speaking—and thinking—so that it becomes a sound, an outlook, and an attitude.⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Callie Siskel, *'It's Cooking' The Work behind Frank O'Hara's seemingly light Lunch Poems, now 50 years old*, (The Poetry Foundation, 2014) <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/24084>> [accessed 14 July 2014]. The revised edition of *Lunch Poems*, contains new material including copies of correspondence between O'Hara and Ferlinghetti.

⁵⁰ O'Hara first named the poetic modus operandi which has come to define his style, 'I do this I do that' in the poem, 'Getting Up Ahead of Someone (Sun)', (1959), *CP*, p. 341.

⁵¹ Siskel, (unpaginated).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Siskel's analysis of embedded sound effects is unusual in itself. Few critics have been concerned with a sonic analysis of O'Hara's poems, and she also points out that 'not all critics appreciated these lines' referring to a 1966 review where Raymond Roseliep had described this poem as a 'wearisome cataloguing of personalia'.⁵⁴ No one would argue that these are *elaborately* sounded structures, but neither is a poem's sound arbitrary as it is inevitably based upon the poet's choices—whether inclusions or exclusions. The technical mastery behind the words: his vast knowledge, his listening, his musical aptitude, and as Siskel argues the extensive attention that went into *Lunch Poems* (a collection that underwent over five years' of editing) all suggest O'Hara was passionately concerned about the sound of his poems.

Since the onset of O'Hara criticism in the 1960s, areas of focus have been primarily theme and content based, and include: the poems' political references and reverberations, explorations of masculinity and sexuality, attitudes towards race, cultural and intellectual concerns such as the significance of art, music, cinema, war, France, the pastoral, postmodernism, the avant-garde, New York, O'Hara's personal life, his friends, acquaintances, collaborators and collaborations. There are a number of papers on voice and the conversational qualities of the poems (papers that are useful in relation to O'Hara's sound and which I shall engage with in subsequent chapters). In fifty years, however, there have been no papers devoted specifically to O'Hara's sound.

How O'Hara silenced the critics

With the exception of the papers mentioned, critics' dismissal of O'Hara's technical skill, along with their lack of attention to sound is directly linked to his quotation from 'Personism' (cited in the Introduction) and his attitude to criticism in general:

...I don't want to make up a lot of prose about something that is perfectly clear in the poems. If you cover someone with earth and grass grows, you don't know what they looked like any more. Critical prose makes too much grass grow, and I don't want to help hide my own poems, much less kill them.⁵⁵

O'Hara wanted his poems to speak for themselves and was reluctant to expand upon or define his poetic: 'I can't think of any more than one poem at a time, so I would end up with a "poetics" based on one of my poems which any other poem of mine would completely contradict', note the shudder quotes around the

⁵⁴ Raymond Roseliep, 'From Woodcarver to Wordcarver', in *Frank O'Hara: To be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 14.

⁵⁵ 'Statement for Paterson Society', (1961), *CP*, pp. 510-511 (p. 510).

very word "poetics".⁵⁶ These examples of O'Hara's views are powerfully written and persuasive. And I believe critics' reluctance to discuss O'Hara's technical skill is simply because he 'told' them—through his writings—not to direct their attention to this aspect of his work. This sounds implausible, but for example, in the first book to discuss O'Hara's poetic, (1977) Perloff states:

Throughout [the] book I have tried to keep in mind O'Hara's own strictures on literary criticism, so charmingly put forward in the little poem, "The Critic" (1951) ... [and] hope that if O'Hara were alive today, he would not consider me "the assassin of [his] orchards." I have tried, on the contrary, to respect his wish: "Do not / frighten me more than you / have to! I must live forever."⁵⁷

O'Hara's power (through a small amount of critical material and examples like the above poem) to make critics 'obey' his 'strictures' is curious. Why would an otherwise rigorous critic feel compelled to 'respect' a poet's wishes or allow O'Hara's often contradictory proclamations about his poetic influence the way they assess the work?

Several decades on, we see a similar reaction in the 2010 publication, *Frank O'Hara Now*, in an essay entitled, 'Close Writing', where Keston Sutherland, discusses the poem, 'For Grace, After a Party', (1954) and writes:

The poem exists, I continue to imagine, much as O'Hara claimed to hope that all his poetry might, between persons and comparatively untouched by the fixatives of critical industrial promotioneering, not to mention by criticism.⁵⁸

O'Hara again appears to have deterred a critic with his remarks in 'Personism', and the critic, mindful of the poet's 'scriptures', averts his critical gaze. Sutherland goes on to discuss another way to approach O'Hara's poems—a way that eschews the word criticism in favour of the euphemistic expression, 'moving closer', he asks of the poem: '...what should be done with it? What I hope this essay will do is move us a little closer to it'.⁵⁹ Critics are guarded when they analyse O'Hara's poems, the implication being they should not be subjected to the indignity of criticism or rigorous technical analysis, instead, they approach them humbly, apologetically, with a promise to do as little damage as possible.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

⁵⁸ Keston Sutherland, 'Close Writing' in *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2010), pp. 120-130 (p. 121).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

O'Hara told critics not to, and the reason they respond in the way Perloff and Sutherland have is because he is persuasive, and his confidence in his poetic ability is respected—few poets are so self-assured in their practice—and if he said he did not respect criticism, he is listened to.⁶⁰ He persuades me now, and with each sentence I write, I think O'Hara would disagree. I feel the pressure of his influence; his glamorous productivity; his cavalier attitude (the opposite attitude to that needed to undertake a Creative Writing PhD); his greatness (a greatness many acknowledge but cannot seem to explain); he persuades me to rethink how I write about his work, makes me question my objectives, and convinces me I should not diminish his poems in a reductive analysis. To use O'Hara's word, quoted by Perloff above, critics do not want to be the 'assassins' of the poet's lively, energetic, vibrant poems, with their earnest but mundane prose. A combination of all these factors meant critics are reluctant to tackle—or even recognise—the technicalities of O'Hara's work. Critics, in an attempt to overcome the obstacles O'Hara's work presents, have focussed on alternative ways to analyse and categorise the work: its originality, its formlessness and especially its content. Curiously, with regard to content, O'Hara's 'strictures' in 'Personism', namely, 'The recent propagandists for technique on the one hand, and for content on the other, had better watch out', have *not* been 'obeyed' by the critics.⁶¹ In Alan Feldman's 1979 book on O'Hara, he argues:

The problem for the critic in writing about O'Hara's work is to demonstrate its essential seriousness despite O'Hara's so-called "New York School" rejection of so many of the usually serious subjects and to convey an idea of this seriousness without being false to O'Hara's sense of playfulness, his spur-of-the-moment grace.⁶²

Similarly, thirty years later this idea was reiterated in the introduction of *Frank O'Hara Now*, (2010) '...the sociability of O'Hara's writing steers readers into a particular style of reading'.⁶³ This desire not to be 'false to' the poet's style—to remain true—and also to echo the tenor of his writing has been prevalent throughout five decades of O'Hara criticism.

The second reason for the neglect of sound in O'Hara studies is linked to intention. When we consider poets who deliberately set out to write poems with the 'elaborately sounded structures' O'Hara was so opposed to, a level of artifice is evident which demands attention. Craft announces itself. Critics examine the

⁶⁰ LeSueur, p. xxv. LeSueur refers to O'Hara's confidence, saying he 'took his work seriously and had a high regard for it. By that I mean he had enormous confidence...'

⁶¹ 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959), *CP*, pp. 498-499 (p. 499).

⁶² Alan Feldman, p. 43.

⁶³ Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery (eds.), 'Introduction' in *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2010), pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

work of formal poets and assess whether the poems successfully reinforce meaning. If sound is defined solely as a poetic device or add-on, brought to the reader through a poet's rigorous application of scansion, sound scales, fricatives and liquids, the subject lacks appeal; recall the shudder quotes around "sound effects" in Blasing's paper. The emphasis on craft over spontaneity and raw talent is less glamorous. In contrast, O'Hara's method of composition, his 'I do this I do that' modus operandi, his quick lunch hour compositions, for the contemporary audience and the contemporary academic critic has a stronger appeal. The discourse around O'Hara's expertise has parallels with blues singers who are praised for their 'natural' talent (shudder quotes again)—natural talent being a term which at once dismisses the craft, training and dedication to their art.

O'Hara's poetic practice is regarded as a creative or imaginative endeavour and does not compare to the academic application of metrics and sound scales. In poetry, imagination, spontaneity and invention are exciting; to count and measure are dull. O'Hara is many things, but never dull. To suggest he possesses technical expertise would compromise the myth of the poet's casual, prolific creation of barely edited poems, a myth with a strong hold in O'Hara studies. Crucially, though, there is no need to overturn this myth, even if we are to concede O'Hara paid limited attention to sound structures at composition. This does not mean there is nothing to say about his sound, on the contrary, there are at least forty-six thousand words to say on the subject.

But to effectively evaluate O'Hara's sound, the spotlight must be moved from the poet and turned onto the reader. From this side of the poetic dynamic, sound is what the reader hears when they read the poems and the pleasure derived from listening. Sound occurs in the reader's mind when reading and is not about the manoeuvres made by the poet at the poem's conception. Sound becomes an exciting possibility from this angle—and an impossibility too—because it hinges upon the imaginative reach of the reader, which is an unmeasurable component. But in poetry criticism, this inability to define has always been the case; the unknowable quantity of how a poem exerts its effects on the reader is invariably where its power lies.

Frank O'Hara today

Above, I outlined the critical landscape in the period after O'Hara's death up to the present day. I write this section in 2016, an important year (and decade) in the O'Hara chronology, being the fiftieth anniversary of his death, (1966) and

the fiftieth anniversary of *Lunch Poems*, published in 1964. O'Hara continues to be popular in non-academic and critical circles, and his reputation now goes beyond 'chatty poet'. Yet the discourse around O'Hara continues to lack gravity compared to other major poets, and it seems he continues to speak from the grave to critics: in a colloquium organised for the fiftieth anniversary of his death in July 2016, the call for abstracts stated:

We are especially keen for contributions that place and examine O'Hara's work and legacy in the contexts of his myriad friendships, connections and artistic interests. O'Hara was so much more than just a New York poet and we want the discussion of his life and work at this event to reflect this. So, although we are looking for informed and informative academic papers for the panel sessions, we would like these contributions to be pitched so as to encourage discussion and engagement with the audience (which will include members of the public as well as academics). In keeping with O'Hara's style and poetics, we are hoping for a colloquium that is open and generous, serious and witty, conversational in the best sense. This will be the best way of celebrating O'Hara's work and his legacy, 50 years on from the day before he died.⁶⁴

Here, again, we see how the organisers are keen to control the pitch of the academic discourse and have it echo the poet's own '...witty, conversational' pitch, and that the level and mode of exploration will be 'in keeping with O'Hara's style and poetics'. This is not a criticism, but an observation of how O'Hara studies since Perloff's earliest writings have been contained within specific parameters, that although disguised casually, have had a strong influence on the way the poet's work has been discussed.

Another example of the superficial discourse typical of articles on O'Hara is the 2015 New York Times book review of the anniversary volume which describes *Lunch Poems* as 'the little black dress of American poetry books', a veiled compliment that suggests indispensable yet frivolous.⁶⁵ Questions are being formulated, however, which will result in the technical qualities of the work receiving closer scrutiny. And more often now, a dual approach is evident—O'Hara is frivolous but also a poet with expertise—as can be seen in another recent review, which describes *Lunch Poems* as 'Wide-eyed, curious, off-the-cuff', but goes on to point out:

And yet, it's a mistake ... to believe O'Hara tossed off the poems in this collection, despite their stunning, offhand grace. How else do we account

⁶⁴ Call for papers for a colloquium entitled 'The Day Before O'Hara Died', held in London, 24 July 2016 <<https://www.kent.ac.uk/english/research/conferences/O'Hara-cfp-Final.pdf>> [accessed 30 May 2016].

⁶⁵ New York Times, Dwight Garner, *Cigarettes, Coffee, a Stop at the Liquor Store: Frank O'Hara's 'Lunch Poems' Turn 50* (New York: New York Times, 2014) <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/09/books/frank-oharas-lunch-poems-turn-50.html?_r=0> [accessed 17 August 2014].

for the formalism of pieces such as "Alma" and "On the Way to the San Remo," poems that are anything but improvised?⁶⁶

Critics are, after half a century, asking what has secured O'Hara's place in the poetry canon. Wayne Koestenbaum introduces an article on Frank O'Hara's excitement, (2011) with: 'The highest respect we can accord a work of art is to say nothing about it'.⁶⁷ Critics' silence on the subject of O'Hara's technique, on his sound, perhaps represents an unwitting form of respect for a technique that appears effortless.

The qualities in O'Hara's casual poems have consistently engaged readers and a lively critical discourse has evolved about *some* of these qualities. But now I want to add to the discourse by examining what O'Hara's poems suggest to, and ask of, the reader in relation to their sound, and document the aspects of his sound I believe are exciting. An examination of O'Hara's sound is long overdue. Attitudes towards O'Hara have changed, as has the vocabulary used to describe his work, for instance in the publisher's note to the 2014 anniversary edition of *Lunch Poems*, Lawrence Ferlinghetti writes: 'O'Hara's sound was so distinct from that of the Germans or the French or the Italians—and just as culturally diverse'.⁶⁸ This statement is a small, but significant point. O'Hara's distinctive sound, perhaps for the first time in fifty years is given priority over his style. In what follows, I do not suggest sound be elevated above other attributes of O'Hara's poetic, but I do wish to highlight how he was innovative with sound and how he addresses the reader directly through the ear of the imagination.⁶⁹

After O'Hara's death in 1966, hundreds of his poems were found, but ultimately much less material that documented his views on poetry. The critical work he did leave is much-quoted and a heavy burden placed upon it as the only evidence available which might illuminate how the poet felt about the art form. That O'Hara was, and is, a charismatic and persuasive figure can be seen in the way his poems are discussed today. My intention is to examine how O'Hara's sound contributes to the power of his poems, but this examination is complicated by the vocabulary of traditional poetry criticism. The difficulties

⁶⁶ Los Angeles Times, David L. Ulin, *Frank O'Hara's 'Lunch Poems' – at 50* (Los Angeles, 2015) <<http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-frank-ohara-lunch-poems-at-50-20140724-story.html>> [accessed 2 August 2014].

⁶⁷ Wayne Koestenbaum, *"Oh! Kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas!": Frank O'Hara's Excitement*, (2011) <<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/oh-kangaroos-sequins-chocolate-sodas-frank-oharas-excitement>> [accessed 21 November 2014].

⁶⁸ *LPA*, p. 71.

⁶⁹ Robert Frost used the term 'the imagination of the ear' in a letter 'To Jon Freeman, on "vocal; reality"; a reiteration of several critical theories', 5 November, 1925, in *Robert Frost on Writing*, ed. by Elaine Barry, (New Jersey: 1973, Rutgers University, 1973), pp. 78-82, (p. 80).

faced when reading O'Hara are the result of a combination of the ineffective critical vocabulary with which to analyse the poems, along with cautious attitudes towards the very idea of critiquing them—based on O'Hara's 'strictures'—and the assumption that he did not possess technical expertise at all. But from O'Hara's critical writings—with the exception of the quotation in 'Personism'—it is clear he *was* attentive to sound and his poems are evidence of this and also of a unique perspective. Counter-arguments, of course, are that critics avoided sound in relation to O'Hara precisely because there is nothing noteworthy to say on the subject; or his lack of attention resulted in poems with *badly* sounded structures; in Chapters Three, Four and Five, I demonstrate how this assessment is inaccurate.

The following chapters take the view that if 'elaborately sounded structures' refer only to formally executed poems there is room to consider sound that is neither elaborate or structured. The absence in the critical debates around O'Hara's sound is because critics link sound so closely to form. But this absence leaves an opportunity to ask questions. Not questions about form, or attempts to measure or coerce O'Hara's verse into the vocabulary of poetic sound studies, but more pertinent questions on how sound might be understood if we were to set aside the formal vocabulary that poets and critics use when composing and analysing, and to accept that O'Hara's poems may (or may not) have a distinct sound, but whatever that sound may be, to examine and illuminate it the old tools are inadequate. My intention ultimately is to establish what, in Ferlinghetti's words, is 'so distinct' about O'Hara's sound.

CHAPTER THREE

'THE WIND SOUNDED EXACTLY LIKE STRAVINSKY'

Surface Sound

Because O'Hara's sound is unconventional and the critical terminology in place to discuss it is inadequate, I have created an alternative vocabulary, including the terms, surface sound, the sonic imagination and sonic dialogues, which take into account the less traditional manifestations of sound in his poems. Surface sound fills a gap in the critical vocabulary available and covers sounds that are not embedded. The sounds that inhabit a poem on the surface in the form of references to things that simply make a sound: natural or mechanical sounds, imaginary or invented sounds, implied sounds (or silence), dialogues or references creating associative sounds, all features that invite the reader to experience sounds in their imagination. Surface sound is born from the use of the word surface, by O'Hara and other critics, to reference the way his poetic is characterised by an absence of symbolism. The word surface was initially used in relation to art, specifically abstract expressionism, a movement which O'Hara was invested in. The theory of surface in abstract expressionism is concerned with the way effects were achieved in a non-representational manner.

O'Hara's interest in art, which led to his employment at New York's Museum of Modern Art, is well-documented.¹ The connection to art, along with his friendships and collaborations with artists, were first chronicled in Perloff's *Poet Among Painters*, (1977). More recently in 2015, Andrew Epstein points out: 'No other American poet has ever been as deeply connected to major currents in visual art as Frank O'Hara'.² The poet wrote about a wide variety of visual art forms and in the 1991 publication *Art Chronicles 1954-1966*, George Braziller collected O'Hara's essays, reviews and interviews in a volume that reveals both his love of art and his postmodern sensibilities.³ His thoughts on art give an insight into what qualities impressed him and how these qualities are indicative

¹ 'Edward Lucie-Smith: An Interview with Frank O'Hara', (1965), *SS*, pp. 3-26 (p. 6). During this 1965 interview, when asked what excited him most about modern American Art, O'Hara said 'I would really just have to name a lot of artists. I don't find that one year I'm excited by abstract expressionism, the next year by pop art, and then this coming year by spatial sculpture or something. You know. It all is in the same environment which I live in'.

² Andrew Epstein, "'Street Musicians": Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, ed. by Mark Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) pp. 391-408 (p. 393).

³ AC.

of what he strove to achieve in his own work; they also provide some revelations about his sound.⁴

In a review of the painter Franz Kline, O'Hara notes: 'The forms are stark and simple, the gesture abrupt, rough, passionately unconcerned with finish. All the finesse so ardently acquired from the masters has been set aside for a naked confrontation with the canvas and the image'.⁵ Here we see a parallel in the way O'Hara learned his craft, his studies of poetic form at Harvard, his vast knowledge of the 'masters' and the way he set aside this knowledge for a 'naked confrontation', with, not the canvas but the page, through non-traditional appropriations of image and sound. O'Hara points out, Kline's:

...consciousness of the limits of the canvas was that of a high-diver to his pool, the aerialist to his net. The range of his perception of presences was extraordinary. Some come towards you, advancing as you are beckoned, some implacably turn away from your descent while others float, implacably waiting, or speed past in panoramic darkness.⁶

Replace the word canvas with poem and O'Hara could be referring to the limits of poetry: the way the poet experiences the world through the senses, the limitations of language, and how the poem as the epicentre for perceptions, presences and associations must always reach beyond the page.

In a review of Giorgio Cavallon O'Hara proposes:

Unlike most of the American painters involved in this movement, Cavallon went unerringly to the one quality in Mondrian which set him apart from De Stijl or any other school, the quality of the surface. This is the skin of the scaffold, the light from the buildings, the air above Trafalgar Square, the sound of the Boogie-Woogie, in Mondrian; and however reticently one may confess the meaning of his universal images to one's own eye, it is the extra, therefore the essential quality which sets Mondrian apart ... from the broad and tedious purity of much modernism.⁷

When O'Hara refers to the 'sound of the Boogie-Woogie, in Mondrian', he refers to sound as surface. He recognises in a Mondrian painting the *sound* of dance music. He describes a sound that cannot physically be present and allows the idea of a sound to merge with the imagination. O'Hara's line, 'The wind sounded exactly like Stravinsky' does a similar thing; Schafer points out that 'The wind ... possesses an infinite number of vocal variations ... [and] ... within [its]

⁴ When discussing O'Hara's references to surface in specific works of art, it is not my purpose to make a commentary on the art work in question. The artist's name, title or the nature of a particular work are of limited relevance, what I am concerned with is gaining an understanding of O'Hara's general attitude to art and surface in order to ascertain how these attitudes might affect his poems.

⁵ 'Franz Kline', *AC*, pp. 40-52 (p. 45).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷ 'Cavallon Paints a Picture', *AC*, pp. 91-105 (p. 101).

frequencies other sounds can be heard'.⁸ If familiar with Stravinsky's work the reader might hear the wind in a specific piece; if unfamiliar with Stravinsky the reader might hear their own version of the wind as a classical composition; if the reader does not recognise Stravinsky as classical music at all, (or even if they do), they might simply hear the wind whistle through the vowels and consonants or sonic properties of the very word 'Stravinsky' a quality known as phonaesthetics or 'the feeling of sound'.⁹ The wind and the idea that other sounds can be heard through the wind is a recurring motif in O'Hara's poems, for example in 'To Jane, and in Imitation to Coleridge', (1954) he writes:

When I stare and brood, and I often do
I walk again through mountain air
where terrible winds did suddenly soften
at invisible music there,¹⁰

Here O'Hara alludes to what goes unheard, the invisible, those sounds beyond the range of ordinary hearing, that occur only in the imagination but are given space in a poem to materialise. And in 'Goodbye to Great Spruce Head Island', (1955) he writes:

Behind the firs, black in the white and air,
wind fills itself with sun and flaps on the world's
hour of hearing, almost lavender hour, cold as a
canal pouring through the September of an orchard.
Fall, measured and prolonged as was the voice of Turandot,¹¹

In this poem, he merges a multitude of sensory stimuli—colour, heat, wind, movement, hearing, smell—that culminate in a comparison to a voice from Giacomo Puccini's opera *Turandot*. This blending of sensory stimuli is also a characteristic of O'Hara's art criticism and manifests itself through the interchangeability and fluidity in his choice of language, of the atypical adjectives and verbs he uses, and how the vocabulary of sound, of image, of speech, of touch, are all used to refer to visual art: '...some painters choose to coat the surface with an energizing color, others fling an initial statement into the abyss to violate the silence', he writes, and is perfectly at ease using the words, 'statement' and 'silence' to refer to a visual art form.¹² David Lehman describes how 'O'Hara wrote art criticism as if it were an extension of poetry by different means. Exuberant in praise and associative in logic'.¹³

⁸ 'Ode to Michael Goldberg ('S Birth and Other, Births)', (1958), *CP*, pp. 290-298 (p. 292); Schafer, p. 22.

⁹ Pinker, p. 22.

¹⁰ 'To Jane, and an Imitation of Coleridge', (1954), *CP*, pp. 182-185 (p. 182).

¹¹ 'Goodbye to Great Spruce Head Island', (1955), *CP*, p. 226.

¹² 'Cavallon Paints a Picture', *AC*, pp. 91-105 (p. 101).

¹³ David Lehman, *The Last Avant Garde*, (New York: First Anchor Books, 1999), pp. 175-76.

O'Hara refers to art in all its forms, whether painting, poetry or music, with a wide variety of interchangeable sensory and physical references; he compares opera singers, 'Bjoerling [sic] sounded like Caruso, but it turned out to be handsome';¹⁴ he writes about a painting, '*The Deep* is the coda to this triumph. It is a scornful technical masterpiece ... an abyss of glamor encroached upon by a flood of innocence'.¹⁵ In Gooch's biography of the poet, a friend of O'Hara's speaks of a conversation about Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony: 'I remember his explaining to me that it wasn't like a normal symphony but that it ended rather in a big sob'.¹⁶ In his own poems, he also fuses the senses: 'my life held precariously in the seeing / hands of others'.¹⁷ O'Hara's imagery is multi-layered, he invites the reader to see and hear, using concrete and abstract images with surface sound: 'Children toss and murmur / as a rumba blankets their trees and / beckons their stars closer'; 'Out of the corner of my eyes / a tear of revulsion sighs'; 'It is the murmur and the moonstruck ouch! / of love'.¹⁸

O'Hara's sensitivity to how art communicates through the senses is evident in his discussion of a series of paintings by Philip Guston: 'The surface of the painting may now take on the feel in your hand of the Indian clubs, of the hide of the horse, of the pain of another physical presence which has hurt you or is driving you mad'.¹⁹ O'Hara refers to the experience of the paintings in a physical way through the senses. Similarly, he deploys sound through intertextual references, to music, literature and cinema. Such references expand the scope of the poem; they permeate, translate or alter the mood of the poem. Or they simply reside on the surface of the poem like a footnote.²⁰ The interdisciplinary elements to O'Hara's work are intriguing; they are inter-textual in that, as many critics have noted, he references numerous art forms from fine art to cinema to music, but also his work is inter-*textural*, he is concerned with different textures, and how his language has a characteristic visual and tactile quality like the surface of a work of art that results from the way materials are used. O'Hara uses sound, image and inter-textual references to create a multifarious poetic.

In O'Hara's mock manifesto 'How to Proceed in the Arts', (1961) in a section entitled: 'Working on the Picture: *The Creative Act As It Should Flow Along*', he describes the act of painting: 'Colors appear. The sounds of everyday life, like a

¹⁴ 'Franz Kline', *AC*, pp. 40-52, (p. 52).

¹⁵ 'Jackson Pollock', *AC*, pp. 12-39, (p. 38).

¹⁶ Gooch, p. 47.

¹⁷ 'Poem', (1956), *CP*, p. 244.

¹⁸ 'Ann Arbor Variations', (1951) *CP*, pp. 64-66 (p. 66); 'In the Movies', (1964) *CP*, pp. 206-209 (p. 206); 'Tarquin', (1951), *CP*, pp. 49-50 (p. 49).

¹⁹ 'Growth and Guston', *AC*, pp. 134-141 (p. 139).

²⁰ Which can be ignored.

tomato being sliced, move into the large area of the white cloth'.²¹ O'Hara again demonstrates how sound is at the forefront of his sensibilities and how the sounds of everyday life infiltrate art in unconventional ways. These references are delivered matter-of-factly with no sense that the sound of a tomato being sliced in a painting is questionable. If O'Hara is willing to accept that everyday sounds form part of a painting (a visual art form) the potential for everyday sounds to be a part of a poem (an auditory art form) are far-reaching. In, *But Beautiful: A Book about Jazz*, Geoff Dyer demonstrates a similar attitude to O'Hara when he writes about photography:

Oil paintings leave even the Battle of Britain or Trafalgar strangely silent. Photography on the other hand, can be as sensitive to sound as it is to light. Good photographs are there to be listened to as well as looked at; the better the photograph, the more there is to hear. The best jazz photographs are those saturated in the sound of their subject. In Carol Reiff's photo of Chet Baker onstage at Birdland we hear not just the sound of the musicians as they are crowded into the small stage of the frame but the background chat and clinking glasses of the nightclub. Similarly, in Hinton's photo we hear the sound of Ben turning the pages of the paper, the rustle of cloth as Pee Wee crosses his legs.²²

That sound can be generated by a photograph, and received by someone who simply views it, is a curious phenomenon. Dyer's view about paintings is in opposition to O'Hara's who was clearly attuned to the possibility that a painting could be heard. But these ideas do suggest sound is not only 'something you hear' in *reality*, but that it can also work through the imagination and be suggested in a variety of ways by art.

Though surface and surface sound are terms outside poetry criticism, scholars have made numerous references to surface that have influenced the genesis of my term 'surface sound'. The word 'surface' has been used to describe O'Hara's poems' lack of symbolism, their imagery, content and meaning though not his sound. Hazel Smith, however, questions the validity of the idea of surface when analysing O'Hara's poems:

Objects and events hover between surface and symbol. They are not just surfaces which turn out to be symbols after all, rather, their status is undecidable. As such we might call them *surbols*. Much critical mileage has been made in the past of the idea that the O'Hara poem consists of surfaces which do not point beyond themselves ... However, this view of the surface as only a surface (perhaps necessary in early O'Hara criticism to distinguish him from more symbolic writers) now seems somewhat inadequate.²³

²¹ 'How to Proceed in the Arts', *AC*, pp. 92-98 (p. 96).

²² Geoff Dyer, *But Beautiful: A Book about Jazz*, (New York: Picador, 1996), p. ix.

²³ Smith, *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara*, p. 29.

Smith goes on to describe the way: 'in so many O'Hara poems, the poet moves beyond modernist angst and alienation, and a sense of ultimate loss, to a celebratory postmodernist embrace of surface, transience, sensation and the unknown'.²⁴ The difficulty in appropriating a term such as surface is outlined by Smith: '...surface is itself a slippery concept – it automatically suggests something underneath'.²⁵ With surface sound, my intention is to embrace the ambiguity Smith refers to because sound, too, is an ambiguous and 'slippery concept' in a poem. But the difficulties associated with defining O'Hara's surface are less pronounced in relation to sound; surface sound is non-symbolic sound. O'Hara's sounds are realised ultimately by the reader and as such are simply propositions. These propositions do, however, require a commitment of active engagement and can be easily missed by the passive reader, not because they fail to see the meaning but because they do not hear the sound; O'Hara refers to this in the poem 'Trying to figure out what you feel', (1960) where he writes, 'Only your keen ear / notes what sings deep inside'.²⁶ So while the definition of surface sound is unproblematic, evaluating its effectiveness can be more of a challenge.

In 'Notes on Second Avenue', (c1953) O'Hara himself makes a direct reference to surface in his comments about the poem:

As I look this over, it seems quite a batty way to give information about the poem, but *the verbal elements are not too interesting to discuss although they are intended consciously to keep the surface of the poem high and dry, not wet, reflective or self-conscious.* [italics mine] Perhaps the obscurity comes in here, in the relationship between the surface and the meaning, but I like it that way since the one is the other (you have to use words) and I hope the poems to *be* the subject, not just about it.²⁷

O'Hara's critical musings themselves can be slippery. Here he does not refer explicitly to sound, nevertheless, his reference in the italicised section can be applied to the way he deploys sound in his poems—an enterprise of surface and minimal strategy, together with the combination of often disparate elements that ultimately have no hidden depths. O'Hara's poems, though, are anything but simple and the word surface often serves as a way to manage their difficulty. Surface, therefore, is used as a shorthand word by critics and has proved a convenient label to attach to O'Hara's poetic, which has otherwise resisted definition, particularly with regard to technique.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁶ 'Trying to figure out what you feel', (1960), *CP*, pp. 361-363 (p. 362).

²⁷ 'Notes on Second Avenue', (c1953), *CP*, pp. 495-497 (p. 497).

Although a conclusive definition of surface is problematic, O'Hara's connection to the term is widespread and the word would be associated with him through his life and after his death. In a bizarre exchange at O'Hara's funeral, Larry Rivers read a eulogy which graphically described the poet's physical condition before he died, some of the mourners were shocked at what they thought were gratuitous and inappropriate details; the artist Andy Warhol saw it differently and said to Rivers: 'It sounded like a very Pop eulogy to me—just the surface things. It was just what I hoped people would do for me if I died'.²⁸ The theory of surface, as applied to art and poetics is beyond the scope of this discussion on sound, but as Warhol's comments testify, it was at the forefront of the critical discourse about O'Hara and his contemporaries, and though it has been described (and questioned) variously, it was applied to the poet literally to the end of his life and still is inextricably linked to his poetic.²⁹ Ultimately, surface has become a catch-all description for O'Hara's style, an easy term to drop into lines about his poems, and a term which allows critics to attach a 'technical' term to the poet's difficult-to-categorise poetic. A simple definition from Bill Berkson as 'a kind of surface energy that comes first and almost everything that you are going to get from the work is there if you pay close enough attention...', is a useful way to think of both surface and surface sound.³⁰

At the heart of the debate about surface is meaning which is a key consideration in relation to O'Hara's sound. If, as suggested in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 'Sounds can never precede meaning: they can only operate on meanings already lexically created', what happens with O'Hara's poems whose meanings are elusive, is it possible that sound can guide the reader towards an interpretation which may be unavailable to them through symbolic analysis?³¹ The combinations of sounds, referenced in different ways, add layers of 'meaning' and the tone of the world of the poem is built around them. O'Hara wrote spontaneously, anywhere he happened to be:

He was also capable of writing poems in bars or parties, and often did so, Kenneth Koch vividly recalls him sitting typing in the middle of a crowded party. "Whatever was going through his head was precious. Frank was trying to run faster than ordinary consciousness".³²

He was also surrounded by the sounds of the city, organic, mechanical, traffic, car horns, weather, together with a combination of voices, which all found their

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, p. xvii.

³⁰ 'The New York School & Poetry of Surfaces', Youtube <Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMM3bU8CLxM>> [accessed 21 August 2016].

³¹ Preminger, p. 861.

³² Ferguson, p. 27; quoting Kenneth Koch in an interview in 1999.

way into the poems. Joe LeSueur who shared an apartment with O'Hara comments on the way, '...whatever happened around him often became part of the creative act in progress', and describes the New York soundscape the poet was exposed to when he wrote:

The radio could be blaring, the phone could be jangling, people could be dropping by, someone could be in the same room with him (*talking* to him); and when we lived on East Ninth Street, in a second-floor apartment so close to the street that it seemed an extension of it, a cacophonous symphony of ugly urban sounds played fortissimo outside our window, punctuated regularly by the sound of the ... crosstown bus ... these distractions not only failed to impede but seemed to spur the steady stream of words rushing from his teeming brain...³³

These sounds infiltrate the narrative of the poems, as an echo or mirror of his surroundings and are what O'Hara's poetic is built upon. They imitate the sounds that occur in everyday life that are arbitrary in nature and devoid of individual meaning. The layered sounds of New York, of O'Hara's lifestyle and conversations, his music and background noise permeate the poems and create their own meaning after the fact. Labelle offers an explanation, 'noise can partially be heard to give form to the radically formless, creating space for the intensities of diversity, strangeness, and the unfamiliar'.³⁴ O'Hara's soundscapes recreate a scene that tells its own story.

In 'A Step Away from Them', the first of O'Hara's 'I do this I do that' poems, he builds the scene with sound, 'A blonde chorus girl clicks: he / smiles and rubs his chin. Everything / suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of / a Thursday'.³⁵ LaBelle points out, 'sound in its distributive and dislocating permeability appear as if from everywhere';³⁶ this moment when 'Everything / suddenly honks' is described by Perloff as a 'moment ... endowed with radiance'.³⁷ No meaning can be traced back to the sound and yet for Perloff, this reference produces an emotional reaction. In a documentary film of O'Hara reading, (1966) traffic noise and car horns can be heard in the distance, the ubiquitous car horn reminds us of the poet's world, and how New York was an inseparable backdrop to his poems.³⁸ Bill Berkson describes how:

³³ LeSueur, p. 82.

³⁴ Labelle, p. xxiii.

³⁵ Gooch, p. 288; 'A Step Away from Them', (1956), *CP*, pp. 257-258 (p. 257).

³⁶ LaBelle, p. xxii.

³⁷ Marjorie Perloff, 'Poetry Chronicle: 1970-71', in *To be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 59-63 (p. 62).

³⁸ While reading his poem 'Mozart Chemisier' and also during the interviews the sound of car horns and general traffic noise can be heard, first at 28 seconds, 'USA: Poetry, Frank O'Hara', (1966) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=344TyqLISFA>> [accessed 20 September 2014].

O'Hara's rhythms can be heard taxi-ing through the New York streets. You do not have to know New York or anyone in it to catch on, but the poems offer a clear expression of New York circuitry and speed.³⁹

Like surface, meaning is also a slippery term and each reader brings their own interpretations to a poem. Basil Bunting argues:

Poetry is seeking to make not meaning, but beauty; or if you insist on misusing words, its "meaning" is of another kind, and lies in the relation to one another of lines and patterns of sounds, perhaps harmonious, perhaps contrasting and clashing, which the hearer feels rather than understands, lines of sound drawn in the air which stir deep emotions which have not even a name in prose. This needs no explaining to an audience which gets poetry by ear. It has neither time nor inclination to seek a prose meaning in poetry.⁴⁰

This statement is closer to what O'Hara does, (without the patterns) though beauty is also a problematic term. The point is that poems in which meaning is elusive and content is difficult to isolate, can, nonetheless, exert a power over the reader so must necessarily have other qualities; the essence of poetry is built around these mysterious qualities that are often difficult to explain, though critics will always endeavour to translate the untranslatable. O'Hara writes:

...the reasons for loving a poem by Allen Ginsberg are the same reasons for loving a poem by John Ashbery, or by Kenneth Koch, or by Gregory Corso, just as the reason for loving a painting by Franz Kline are the same for one by Michael Goldberg: they are all distinct, individual responses to distinct, individual meaningfulness – which varies so widely in scope, in drama, in contact, that the engaged person is reeling *at last* from contact with his own life, contact which the rest of society tries to teach him to back away from like a sick leopard who doesn't know which trainer has his best interests at heart.⁴¹

The reader, as always for O'Hara, is the focus and the maker of meaning.

O'Hara writes of the 'engaged person'; and his poetry and sound require active engagement.

I have argued that O'Hara makes manoeuvres with sound that are both noteworthy and warrant critical attention. The study of sound, however, is driven by the attempt to link it to meaning, specifically the branch of poetics where the analysis of vowel and consonant structures underpin a subtle manipulation at work in a poem which produces emotional effects in the reader. O'Hara, on the whole, does not do this. In reference to a piano piece by composer Morton Feldman, O'Hara writes:

³⁹ Bill Berkson, 'Frank O'Hara and His Poems', in *To be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 226-233 (p. 232).

⁴⁰ Basil Bunting, 'The Poet's Point of View', in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. by W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis, (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2000), pp. 80-82 (p. 81).

⁴¹ 'Larry Rivers: The Next to Last Confederate Soldier', *SS*, pp. 95-96 (p. 95).

Feldman here successfully avoids the symbolic aspect of sound which has so plagued the abstract works of his contemporaries by employing unpredictability reinforced by spontaneity – the score indicates "indeterminacy of pitch" as a direction for the performer. Where others have attempted to reverse or nullify this aural symbolism (loud-passion, soft-tenderness, and so on) to free themselves, Feldman has created a work which exists without references outside itself, "as if you're not listening but looking at something in nature".⁴²

What O'Hara admires in a composer, he does himself in his poems; what he condemns in Feldman's contemporaries, their attempts to manipulate symbolism by simply using symbolism in reverse, (an endeavour that creates meaning through sound) for O'Hara is too similar to the 'elaborately sounded structures' he disapproves of. The final line of the quotation is the opposite of what happens in O'Hara's poems, so in Feldman's composition the music instead of being listened to is looked at, but in O'Hara the sound images, or words used to create them, are not simply seen but heard. O'Hara goes on to suggest:

Like Emily Dickinson's best poems, it does not seem to be what it is until all questions of "seeming" have disappeared in its own projection. Its form reveals itself after its meaning is revealed, as Dickinson's passion ignores her dazzling technique. As with several other Feldman pieces, if you cannot hear *Structures*, I doubt that studying the score would be a help...⁴³

O'Hara references poems to illustrate what he means about music; he celebrates passion which topples both form and 'dazzling technique' and he stresses that if the listener cannot hear for themselves no amount of 'studying the score' or studying the sound patterns of a poem can illuminate the work. For O'Hara, sound is not meaning; his sound does not work secretly on the reader in a manipulative emotion-generating manner. O'Hara's sound is less subtle and is often simply a system of signposts, statements or instructions to the reader to alert them to what they might hear next.

Word choices are the key component in the production of both surface sound and meaning in any poem. For O'Hara, word choice again is not necessarily driven by meaning, his word choices are original, surprising, unpredictable, arbitrary, innovative, sometimes dubious and repetitive, they inhabit the poem because of their sound, his word choices are often driven purely by a delight in the language:

⁴² 'Morton Feldman', *SS*, pp. 115-120 (p. 116).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

In ordinary speech, sound is motivated by sense: once sense is selected, sound follows. But in iconic speech, sense is motivated by sound: words are chosen for their sound, which itself determines meaning.⁴⁴

Words are what O'Hara's poems—are what all poems—are made up of, but O'Hara's vocabulary is superabundant, wild, exuberant, lavish and eclectic: 'Oh! kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas! / You really are beautiful! Pearls, / harmonicas, jujubes, aspirins! ... They / do have meaning. They're strong as rocks'.⁴⁵ Mary Oliver describes the fundamental practice of the poet's decisions on which words to choose by making the distinction between a rock and a stone, we picture a jagged rock (which mimics the hard sound of the word) and a smooth stone (which mimics the smooth sound of the word).⁴⁶ O'Hara sprinkles the surface of his poems randomly with words that simply sound good, for their smoothness for their roughness for their fullness for their playfulness for their appropriateness for their inappropriateness for their sound:

...For the heartline's fizzle though I know what I like
 And it doesn't have to have soda added (to it)
 For instance, if Tolstoy was a Pharisee, what does that make
 You or me. Art isn't musack for the moujiks after all.
 Mop please, would you please buy me a mop.
 After all I am Fräulein aus der Ohe and it is 1891
 and the pain! with me playing my head off and
 Tchaikovsky sobbing in B flat in Carnegie Hall
 while it's trying to open and he's trying to conduct!
 ...Ebbing! Ebbing! Ebbinge-Wubben and the Oderfluss.⁴⁷

This poem, even post-Google, presents a challenge for the critic. Literary and musical references are layered, spilled onto the page as if savouring the language were the principle motivation for the poem. In the second line the bracketed '(to it)' is a lovely simple sound effect mimicking the fizz of a drink, followed by more of the same with the fizzing words 'For instance, if Tolstoy was a Pharisee'. O'Hara also repeats words, in the final line of the extract, for no other reason, it seems than he likes the way the sound of a word hits the ear.

Repetition is similarly randomly executed in the following poem, where a five syllable word is repeated four times, a word that when you hear it, makes the mind bend towards it and the head swirl around the syllables:

Later on there were no eggs and no cheese crunchies. No
 nothing. The sky was blue and the street was wet. The wind
 blew through the park through all the old Lithuanians. I had

⁴⁴ Preminger, p. 861.

⁴⁵ 'Today', (1950), *CP*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Oliver, pp. 23-34.

⁴⁷ '[Just as I am Not Sure Where Everything Is Going]', (1965), *PR*, p. 234.

a friend who liked living in a Lithuanian neighbourhood because he was Lithuanian but couldn't speak Lithuanian, he just was it.⁴⁸

Single words create meaning for us, the dictionary is a site of thousands of meanings, un-associated meanings listed one after another. But O'Hara is not only concerned with how words work to create a coherent meaning, nor is his choice of words solely dependent upon the sound image created by the word. A useful way to view words in O'Hara's poems is Michael Magee's suggestion that, 'the notion that words *do* supplants the notion that words *mean*, and ... truth happens to one's words in the course of their reception and redirection'.⁴⁹ In the above example 'Lithuanian' is repeated four times because it is an audibly pleasing word. Of course, each word we use/read/hear is also a sound with associative possibilities; recall Steven Pinker's wonderful description of the word as 'a little stretch of sound'.⁵⁰ The experience of a poem is to read, hear and listen to words. A poem calls for heightened attention to each word but we draw our conclusions quickly, our mind races and ricochets from image to sound to memory, we make our own meanings that touch base with whatever sense the word might trigger for us, and in poems, of course, sight and sound dominate the sensory landscape. O'Hara's poems generate a frenzy of mental activity for the reader. But in addition to the associative possibilities of words we also feel pleasure when we hear certain words, we might say for example, that 'Lithuanian' is an 'elaborately sounded' word, a word that caresses the mind, the tongue and the ear.

An odd fact I read recently, people enter jobs that match their names, otherwise known as nominative determination, for example, statistically, there are an unlikely number of dentists named Dennis and lawyers named Laura.⁵¹ The theory of nominative determination hardly seems possible but I wonder if it is a coincidence Dennis the Menace's dog is called Gnasher? Repetition, repetition, repetition. The words we hear daily exert power over us. Consider the definition of the name, Frank: 'open, honest, and direct in speech or writing'; synonyms include: candid, direct, forthright, plain-spoken, straight, straightforward, straight from the shoulder, explicit, unequivocal, unvarnished, to the point, no-nonsense, matter-of-fact, open, honest, truthful, sincere, guileless, artless,

⁴⁸ 'What Happened to "The Elephant Is at the Door"', (1961), *PR*, p. 207.

⁴⁹ Michael Magee, 'Tribes of New York: Frank O'Hara, Amiri Baraka, and the Poetics of the Five Spot', *Contemporary Literature*, 42 (2001), 694-726 (p. 711).

⁵⁰ Pinker, p. 81.

⁵¹ BBC Radio 4 Today, 'When the name fits the job' by Tom Colls: 'Researchers writing in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* have found that, for example, people called Dennis and Denise, are more likely to become dentists...' <http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9664000/9664697.stm> [accessed 24 May 2014].

outspoken, bluff, blunt, brutal, unsparing, not afraid to call a spade a spade, informal, upfront, on the level, obvious.⁵² Frank O'Hara's poetic definitely matches his name.

But meaning with regard to sound in a poem is transient and personal. O'Hara's training, instincts and skill inevitably lead to cases where sound and meaning correlate as in the fizzing soda above. In *The Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, Geoffrey N. Leech explains:

The question of what and how a sound pattern communicates is one of the most mysterious aspects of literary appreciation. First, let us accept that to a great extent the 'music' of phonological schemes, however difficult that quality may be to analyse, is its own justification. One does not feel cheated because the alliteration of 'measureless to man', 'sunless sea', etc. do not seem to have any external significance – for example, any imitative effect.⁵³

When O'Hara uses rhyme, assonance, alliteration it is invariably for sound not meaning, even so a great deal of criticism still focuses on symbolic analysis. In a 1978 paper, Marjorie Perloff points out: 'Since O'Hara's images ... resist symbolic interpretation, we must make do with their literal meanings'.⁵⁴ This is a wise course of action to take in respect to his sound too. While O'Hara makes some pleasing moves with assonance, slant rhyme and rhythm, none of these moves are particularly original or noteworthy; what he does outside the realm of traditional sound effects and in the imaginative reach of his literal manoeuvres with sound is more unusual. Surface sound in all its manifestations invites the reader to hear the auditory qualities of the poems, for example: 'steam chuckles'; 'the rain has commenced its delicate lament over the orchards'; 'a / perky little dog barking in a bar'.⁵⁵

O'Hara's surface sound also repositions nature into the contemporary landscape. He transforms natural phenomena by attaching them through sound to something outside nature (or vice versa). O'Hara redefines nature in the following statement:

Modern life has expanded our conception of nature and along with it nature's role in our lives and our art – a woman stepping on a bus may

⁵² Google dictionary definition <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=definintion+of+frank&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws_rd=cr&ei=maALV4CzNsfWar7oINgK#q=definition+of+frank> [accessed 11 April 2016].

⁵³ Geoffrey N. Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, 15th edn (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1991), p. 95.

⁵⁴ Marjorie G. Perloff, 'New Thresholds, Old Anatomies: Contemporary Poetry and the Limits of Exegesis', *The Iowa Review*, 5 (1974), 83-99 (p. 92).

⁵⁵ 'Poem', (1954), *CP*, pp. 215-216 (p. 215); 'Joe's Jacket', (1959), *CP*, pp. 329-330 (p. 330); 'Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's', (1957), *CP*, pp. 265-267 (p. 265).

afford a greater insight into nature than the hills outside Rome, for nature has not stood still since Shelley's day.⁵⁶

He concludes here that Shelley's nature is no longer viable for him—'the very word "*nature*" has prestige in our prejudiced ears'—but nature in O'Hara's poems has evolved, is born out of the city, and through them he invites the reader to re-imagine nature by merging it with the images and sounds of an urban existence.⁵⁷ O'Hara uses synaesthesia to make surreal sound-images, as in the following example where image and sound combine: 'It's my lunch hour, so I go / for a walk among the hum-colored / cabs'; Perloff draws our attention to the title of his collection, *Lunch Poems*, and points out that the time most closely associated with the poet is indeed the lunch hour '—the busiest, noisiest hour of the day', and the time when auditory possibilities are most pronounced.⁵⁸ The conjoining of the image of the yellow and black taxi cab and a hum at once suggestive of a car engine and bees, calls forth an atmosphere of the noisy New York lunch hour as a natural phenomenon, the hum of insects, summer and heat, and a landscape where traffic becomes a living breathing entity.⁵⁹

Some poets go to great lengths to suggest sounds to their readers; think of Tennyson's, 'murmuring of innumerable bees'.⁶⁰ For O'Hara, the poetic equivalent of this suggestion of sound might simply be 'buzz' or 'bees', but the result would be the same in both cases: the reader/listener hears bees, which is surface sound. O'Hara does not manipulate the reader with tricks; all tricks, after all, suggest a degree of condescension to their recipient and a lack of transparency, that leads to the image of the poet as conjuror. Conjuring is not O'Hara's style: he documents what he sees, with his trademark imaginative flourish, and he documents what he hears, also with an imaginative investment in the auditory experience he offers the reader. O'Hara does not hold a magic wand but a baton, he is a conductor, who directs the ear of the reader, he 'points' to a sound and the reader hears it. Sound images can exert a powerful effect upon the reader. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* explains: 'Acoustic signals are received by the brain and processed according to whether they are linguistic or nonlinguistic, the latter including both ambient

⁵⁶ 'Nature and New Painting', (1954), *SS*, pp. 41-51 (p. 42).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁸ Perloff, 'New Thresholds...', p. 96.

⁵⁹ 'A Step Away from Them', (1956), *CP*, pp. 257-258 (p. 257).

⁶⁰ Alfred, Lord Tennyson from 'The Princess: Come down, O Maid', (1847), Poetry Foundation <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/45378>> [accessed 13 July 2014].

environmental sounds and music'.⁶¹ O'Hara uses a variety of methods to bring sound to the surface: sound-images; mechanical or natural sounds; implied sound; associative sound; or sound 'heard' in the narratives, dialogues, musical scripts and references which can exist inside or outside of the poem. Surface sound encompasses two other ideas: the sonic imagination and sonic dialogues, and in the following chapter I focus on these terms and also consider the influence of cinema on O'Hara's sound.

⁶¹ Preminger, p. 1174.

CHAPTER FOUR

'YOU WON'T BE BORED AND YOU WON'T BE LAZY'

The sonic imagination

Surface sound triggers the reader's sonic imagination, a term conceived as an alternative to T S Eliot's 'auditory imagination', which he describes as:

...the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.¹

Although the auditory imagination works when considering metrics, rhyme or vowel and consonant patterns and the way they exert emotion-generating effects on the reader, the term does not work as well for O'Hara's poems. I do not wish to exclude O'Hara from Eliot's auditory imagination entirely and have proposed already that his experience as a poet, musician and SONAR operator meant he had a trained ear and would have been well-equipped to access and perform poetic manoeuvres worthy of the term. On the whole, however, he does not. Indeed, during a talk in 1952 O'Hara expressed disapproval of Eliot's 'deadening and obscuring and precious effect'.² O'Hara's attitude towards metrics is also evident in his comments about Robert Lowell's 'Skunk Hour', (1956) a poem he described as:

...perfectly revolting. No matter what the metrics are. And the metrics aren't all that unusual. Every other person in any University in the United States could put that thing into metrics.³

And in his own poem, 'Episode', (1957) he writes, '...I don't believe there is such a thing as metrics. Just the old ear and the young tongue going into it...'.⁴ So for O'Hara—and his critics—the auditory imagination has limitations because it is based on the power of rhythm and music in poetry which are incompatible perspectives from which to analyse sound that is concerned primarily with the ear and the voice.

Instead of 'auditory imagination' I believe the sonic imagination comes into play in O'Hara's poems as they invite the reader to participate in a surface sonic

¹ T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, (London: Faber, 1964), p. 118.

² Gooch, p. 216.

³ 'Edward Lucie-Smith: An Interview with Frank O'Hara', (1965), *SS*, pp. 3-26 (p. 13).

⁴ 'Episode', (1957), *PR*, pp. 182-184 (p. 183).

experience and the associations generated by that experience. Labelle suggests: 'To read ... might be to also hear what lies somewhere between the words, inside the white blanks, or over and around the languages that were once scratched onto paper, as an emotional energy'.⁵ Unlike the auditory imagination, the sonic imagination does not require meaning, or at least not meaning which can be used to interpret the poem. Surface sound is not mysterious or difficult to identify but is simply an appeal to the reader's sonic imagination, which unlike the auditory imagination does not operate below the surface. A car horn in O'Hara, for example, does not signal danger, irritation or impatience, it is merely another sound reference to contribute to the overall soundscape of the poem. Like Perloff's radiant moment generated by 'suddenly everything / honks', these kinds of sound references contribute to the feel or experience on an imaginative, not physical level. Metrics and sound patterns, on the other hand, have their basis in how they instinctively produce effects upon the reader, categorised for example by attaching meaning to specific effects, for example: the anapaest produces 'a feeling of lightness or speed ... the rising [rhythm] creates a natural pleasure' or the trochee is 'particularly effective ... for incantatory (macabre poetry)'.⁶ Or with regard to sonic patterns: 'the "upness" and "downness" of vowel sounds affect us physically in different ways ... the high-frequency ee ... demonstrates greater vitality, speed, excitement than the slower-moving more sluggish waves of the oo'; these manipulations of sound by poets appeal to the reader through the '...largely subconscious, mechanisms of the brain'.⁷ Of course, O'Hara like all poets inevitably employs a variety of sounds which on an unconscious level may produce instinctive reactions when read, but his rejection of 'elaborately sounded structures' mean that these are incidental and not deliberate attempts to manipulate the experience of the reader.

The principle distinction between the auditory imagination and the sonic imagination is that in the latter the reader makes meaning through their imagination instead of the poet making meaning through their manipulation of the line. The same distinction applies to embedded sound and surface sound, where surface sound also does not generate meaning or take the reader beneath the surface of the poem to reveal a symbolic revelation. Surface sound is simply a record and the reader uses their sonic imagination to hear it.

In his chapter 'The Music of Poetry' in *On Poetry and Poets*, T S Eliot writes:

⁵ LaBelle, p. 108.

⁶ William Baer, *Writing Metrical Poetry*, (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2006), pp. 20-21.

⁷ Nims, pp. 55-56.

...a 'musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one.⁸

Sound and music in poetry are terms often used synonymously. A poem's sound might, for example, be described as melodious or dissonant, value words to assess good or bad music. The poet's purpose may indeed be to create dissonance, which in itself might be celebrated, still as 'music' and as a way to generate meaning. But sound is more than music. In O'Hara, sound and music are not synonymous. He alluded to this idea in comments about a painting where he suggested, 'the lavishly painted landscapes and dune pictures have the pleasure of a scream from a well-trained soprano, but it is nevertheless a scream and as such is more natural than singing'.⁹ O'Hara's poetic is characterised by this urge towards the natural over the embellished; a sound—any sound—is more real, more authentic than the attempt to create music in a poem. O'Hara had the ability to make music, but his poetic was unconcerned with the sonorous qualities of music, a fact that has generated a considerable amount of criticism about his inadequacy with technique and accusations that his poems amount to little more than 'humdrum incantation'.¹⁰

The above comment from a review of the *Collected Poems* is indicative of an attitude among critics that while O'Hara wrote poems that veered from the norm, they were neither sophisticated or particularly original:

With Frank O'Hara, the actual innovations he made (most notably the racy jumbling of random speech-inflected moments of recall and ephemera) seem minor, and only part of a general pattern that in terms of metrics and linear expression ambles garrulously back through Ginsberg, Cummings, Sandburg home to Whitman.¹¹

Critics use metrics and 'linear expression' as the yardstick by which to measure O'Hara, but of course, he can never measure up. O'Hara's originality resides outside these parameters and as such he was ahead of his time. Eliot writes:

...the task of the poet will differ, not only according to his personal constitution, but according to the period in which he finds himself. At some periods, the task is to explore the musical possibilities of an established convention of the relation of the idiom of verse to that of speech; at other periods, the task is to catch up with the changes in colloquial speech, which are fundamentally changed in thought and sensibility. This cyclical movement also has a very great influence upon our critical judgement ... we are inclined, in our judgements about the

⁸ T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, (London: Faber, 1971), p. 33.

⁹ 'Nature and New Painting', *SS*, pp. 41-51 (p. 50).

¹⁰ Pearl K. Bell, 'The Poverty of Poetry', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 38-39 (p. 39).

¹¹ Thomas Shapcott, 'Two Tombstones', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 40-47 (p. 48).

past, to exaggerate the importance of the innovators at the expense of the reputation of the developers.¹²

At the point when O'Hara appeared on the poetry scene in New York in the 1950s, this rejection of the established conventions was what he did. O'Hara, in this scenario, is an innovator. Over the past half a century, critics have underestimated the importance and/or greatness of O'Hara. Much critical judgement had been fixated on O'Hara's innovation at the expense of recognition of how he was also, to use Eliot's term, a 'developer' of the art form. Kenneth Koch, however, said of O'Hara: 'as far as American poetry is concerned, he started something'.¹³ In *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, (2015) Andrew Epstein also evaluates the status of O'Hara (and Ashbery) as equal to Eliot's word 'developer':

The emergence of O'Hara, Ashbery, and the New York School is a significant chapter in the evolution of American poetry because it represents a distinctive fusion of influences that has proven to be a unique and lasting contribution to American letters ... From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, the influence of O'Hara and Ashbery can be seen virtually everywhere across the variegated landscape of American poetry.¹⁴

In the essay referred to above entitled, 'Matthew Arnold', Eliot writes of the Victorian poet, 'I am not sure that he was highly sensitive to the musical qualities of verse'.¹⁵ This accusation levelled at a poet is a harsh one. A similar accusation was levelled at Frank O'Hara by Kenneth Rexroth in 1957:

Frank O'Hara is a friend and interpreter of many of the leading abstract expressionist painters. I believe he fancies himself as doing much the same sort of thing in poetry. If so, he is mistaken. This is the poetry of flat, dead-pan colloquialism.¹⁶

These were severe words from one of O'Hara's detractors, but even one of his greatest champions, Perloff, said, '...he wrote primarily for the eye rather than the ear...'.¹⁷ The reason such critical ideas about O'Hara prevail is due to the way sound in poetry is situated; theories like Eliot's 'auditory imagination' evaluate a poem's power based on the success of its music—the 'feeling for syllable and rhythm' or the 'sound and sense', and the requirement that a poet is skilful in the execution of metre, rhyme and so on. I believe O'Hara did possess a skilful ear, but his talent was improvisatory; he used his highly

¹² Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 35.

¹³ Kenneth Koch, 'A Note on Frank O'Hara in the Early Fifties', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bollinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 26-27 (p. 26).

¹⁴ Andrew Epstein, "'Street Musicians": Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, ed. by Mark Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) pp. 391-408 (p. 391).

¹⁵ T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, (London: Faber, 1964), p. 118.

¹⁶ Elledge, *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, p. 3.

¹⁷ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, p. 117.

developed ear to conduct a different kind of 'music', and as conductor, is bold in his directions, he presents possibilities of sound: the wind, a horn, a voice, even silence, and the reader is invited to hear them. The reader is not manipulated in this exchange; O'Hara offers a sound and the reader may or may not wish to hear it (indeed, most critics have chosen not to). O'Hara, as already discussed, expects or hopes the reader is an engaged one. For the reader who accepts O'Hara's offer, the experience of a poem is the reverse of 'show not tell' from a sonic perspective. The result: O'Hara's poems are noisy, packed with both surface (and embedded sounds) and in a similar way to a film, incorporate diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, which in the case of film (and poems) always take second place to the image, but nonetheless form an indispensable part of the total experience.

The tribute poem 'To John Ashbery on Szymanowski's Birthday', (1956) is a poem of surface sound that makes numerous appeals to the reader's sonic imagination. O'Hara takes on Szymanowski's role as composer and guides the reader from one sound to the next.¹⁸ He moves and directs the reader through various auditory experiences: 'someone with a Polish accent'; 'like so many violins'; 'the insect suddenly started / humming'; 'summoning thunder'; 'the delicate echoes of Slavic nostalgia'; he writes of 'a / future of crystalline listening'; and declares 'I am conducting you in his *Symphonie / Concertante*'; it is like 'taking off your earmuffs / at the North Pole'—here the earmuffs are a barrier to sound, but when removed, the sensation at the North Pole would be one of wind and as Schafer proposes, 'The wind is an element that grasps the ear forcefully. The sensation is tactile as well as aural'.¹⁹ The snow is a recurring motif in O'Hara's poems, and as snow absorbs sound it is a means to suggest a move from silence to sound; in another poem he writes the line: 'As snow comes / to the hushed ear' which suggests the presence of snow has an effect on the expectations of the listener and the very mention of snow alters the auditory impact of a scene and makes any sound introduced into that scene more pronounced against snow's backdrop of muffled silence.²⁰ 'To John Ashbery on Szymanowski's Birthday' can only be described as O'Hara in concert, wherein he directs the reader from one sound to the next. The poem closes with a sonic dialogue: 'I am writing to invite / you to the Polish Embassy for cocktails, / on this superb fall day, *musicien américain*', O'Hara's voice speaks

¹⁸ 'To John Ashbery on Szymanowski's Birthday', (1956), *PR*, p. 176.

¹⁹ Schafer, p. 22.

²⁰ '[A Face over a Book]', (1953), *PR*, p. 132.

so engagingly in this direct invitation to Ashbery and is *heard* in the same spirit by the reader. I will expand upon the subject of sonic dialogues shortly.

In the following extract from 'To Gianni Bates', (1954) imagery and sound merge subtly, and are accessed through the sonic imagination:

Like a piano concerto your black
and white eyes, your white face and bright black hair.
And then, reclining in silence you're there
with a hall of echoes arching your back
and forcing you to sigh. In me the lack
of sound is merely that I hear your stare.²¹

Here O'Hara is exacting of the reader. He turns a straightforward visual simile, the call to the reader to experience the lover's black and white eyes and hair as piano keys—a piano concerto—then in a more elaborate move he invites the reader to experience the aftermath of the concerto, the silence, the 'hall of echoes' and the exhilarated sigh, reverberations from the absence of a sound that was never there! The poet sees and hears music in the man, even though there is a 'lack / Of sound' and he hears music in his 'stare'. But 'there isn't any reason to be silent' as the 'instrument's wheeled off / and through jet tears ... scoff'; then the final line as if to concur, say, 'I've not been silent again, or since' and place the poem and poet themselves as voices against the silence. O'Hara's moves in this and many of his poems are intricate. Here he invites the reader to hear sound by way of silence, that is, to partake in the silence following the music, while the poem itself disturbs that silence. Bold.

Though half a century of criticism has suggested otherwise, sound is relevant to O'Hara; in 'At Joan's', (1959) he describes a scene in the early hours as he looks through his poems:

...the breeze is cool
barely a sound filters up
through my confused eyes
I am lonely for myself
I can't find a real poem²²

Here, the poet rifles through poems that barely make a sound, and without their sound the eyes are confused, he misses himself, the sound of his 'real' poems because for O'Hara the sound and the poem are inextricably linked. The enemy for O'Hara is always the lack of sound. Schafer's statement below applies to both O'Hara the man and to his poems:

²¹ 'To Gianni Bates', (1954), *CP*, pp. 213-214 (p. 213).

²² 'At Joan's', (1959), *CP*, pp. 327-328 (p. 327).

Man likes to make sounds to remind himself that he is not alone. From this point of view total silence is the rejection of the human personality. Man fears the absence of sound as he fears the absence of life. As the ultimate silence is death, it achieves its highest dignity in the memorial service ... Since modern man fears death as none before him, he avoids silence to nourish his fantasy of perpetual life. In Western society, silence is a negative, a vacuum. Silence for Western Man equals communication hang-up. If one has nothing to say, the other will speak; hence the garrulity of modern life which is extended by all kinds of sonic jabberware.²³

In 'Poem', O'Hara writes of an aunt's funeral, that he incidentally decides to avoid, and refers to his own funeral: 'When I die, don't come...'.²⁴ O'Hara embraces Western culture and diversity in a heightened way; his work draws upon New York street life, pop culture, film, music and as the narrator he is openly gay. As such O'Hara refuses to be silent (or silenced) and openly embraces all Schafer argues Western man represents, '...we must go on / out into the world / of inanimate voices like traffic / noises, hewing a clearing / in the crowded abyss of the West'.²⁵ In addition, the activity contained within his poems can be likened to Schafer's sonic jabberware. Micah Mattix, in an article about Lunch Poems, notes:

The volume has never gone out of print, in part because O'Hara expresses himself in the same way modern Americans do: Like many of us, he tries to overcome the absurdity and loneliness of modern life by addressing an audience of anonymous others ... O'Hara's *Lunch Poems*—like Facebook posts or tweets—shares, saves, and re-creates the poet's experience of the world.²⁶

Of course, we will never know whether a twenty-first century O'Hara would have been a prolific *Facebook* poster but what Mattix observes here is corroborated in his poems, which 'talk' incessantly and are rarely silent. David Lehman reinforces this idea of O'Hara by describing how he 'was eager for company to avoid the pain of being alone, and with a true believer's sense of his own limitless obligation ... found himself overwhelmed with people and duties'.²⁷

O'Hara's poems reference noise, hearing, music, silence, their imagery is often sound-related and the ear is both a motif and a vehicle through which the reader is invited to participate in the soundscape of the poet's world. O'Hara can create 'elaborately sounded structures'—his training as a pianist, his work at SONAR and his formal knowledge of poetry, give him an advantage—but O'Hara

²³ Schafer, p. 256.

²⁴ 'Poem', (1956), *CP*, p. 244.

²⁵ 'Ode to Willem de Kooning', (1957), *CP*, pp. 283-285 (p. 284).

²⁶ Micah Mattix, *Frank O'Hara's Lunch Poems: 21st-Century Poetry Written in 1964*, (The Atlantic, 2014) <<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/05/frank-oharas-lunch-poems-21st-century-poetry-written-in-1964/371276/>> [accessed 21 April 2016].

²⁷ Lehman, pp. 175-76.

does not simply embed sound into his poems; he has sound sit on the surface. Sound is not meaning: a car horn, a symphony, laughter or conversation are sonic references that reside on the surface for the reader to hear (if they wish). No hierarchy exists: all sounds are presented in the same way. The poems engage the reader through the sonic imagination and offer a level of interaction that makes us feel part of O'Hara's world for the duration of the poem. He recreates his environment through sounds, through noise, he talks to us, we can hear him, and if we choose, we can accompany him.

Sonic dialogues

This interaction with the reader leads me back to the subject of voice, which I raised in the Introduction when I quoted from *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*; a second definition of voice and one particularly applicable to O'Hara is:

Voice is the sum of all the strategies used by the author to create the illusion that the writer is speaking directly to the reader from the page ... voice is an effect created by the writer that reaches the reader through his ears even when he is receiving the message through his eyes.²⁸

Speech and conversation are an intrinsic characteristic of O'Hara's sound and one I refer to as sonic dialogue. Dialogue is defined as 'a conversation between two or more people as a feature of a book, play or film', synonyms include: 'conversation, talk, communication, interchange, discourse, argument'.²⁹ O'Hara deploys various manifestations of voice and dialogue and uses a number of vehicles from which to speak, for example, he gives inanimate objects voices: 'The eager note on my door said: "Call me, / call when you get in!"; 'The leaves chatter their comparisons / to the wind'; and even gives abstract concepts a voice, 'Providence, always humming'.³⁰ O'Hara's poems contain a diverse assortment of sonic dialogues, that communicate to, and are heard by the reader.

But the most pronounced of all O'Hara's dialogues are those with the reader. The physical sound of O'Hara's voice is the ultimate sonic dialogue and accounts for the power his poems exert over the reader. While engaged upon this thesis, I was outside listening to audio of Frank O'Hara read. I could hear the birds, a hosepipe and my neighbours' muffled voices over the fence when all of a sudden, O'Hara announced:

²⁸ Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), p. 112.

²⁹ Google dictionary definition <<https://www.google.co.uk/#q=dialogue+definition>> [accessed 6 April 2016].

³⁰ 'Poem', (1950), *CP*, p. 14; 'Ann Arbor Variations', (1951), *CP*, pp. 64-66 (p. 65) 'Alma', (1952), *CP*, pp. 115-116 (p. 116).

The next poem is one of a series of poems
that I wrote at work on my lunch hour
which City Lights is going to publish next year.³¹

O'Hara said these words in 1963 and *his* 'next year' was 1964 and two years later he would be dead. To hear a dead man talk of his future is chilling, even in our digital age where we are accustomed to the voices of the dead. O'Hara's voice, both physical and poetic is striking and his poems sound unique, and as with other important poets, the distinctive voice becomes part of the reader's experience. The first poem I heard read by O'Hara was 'Poem' (Lana Turner has collapsed!), (1962) and every poem I read thereafter, I heard in his voice, even those for which no physical recording exists.³² Charles Bernstein writes about this phenomenon:

... I do fetishize the acoustic inscription of the poet's voice, or at least I take it as aesthetically significant — partly because doing so returns voice from sometimes idealized projections of self in the style of the poem to its social materiality, to voicing and voices.³³

The distinctive sound of O'Hara's voice and the vernacular qualities of the poems makes him oddly present for the reader; Crain describes him as 'aggressively present'.³⁴ I do not find this presence to be as acute in other poets even those I love, often I can remember how a voice sounds, but my mind does not 'speak' the poems in their voice.³⁵ When we read, we usually hear the words in our own quietly distant voice, like an echo of ourselves. Each reader, however, may experience this disembodied voice effect with different poets (poets who resonate with them) to varying degrees or perhaps not at all. But I believe the popularity of O'Hara, with both an academic and non-academic readership demonstrates he is heard and present in a pronounced way for readers. O'Hara's poems speak to the reader and their sound is heard by the reader. Eliot wrote:

...the mature stage of enjoyment of poetry, comes when we cease to identify ourselves with the poet we happen to be reading; when our critical faculties remain awake, when we are aware of what one poet can be expected to give and what he cannot. The poem has its own existence, apart from us; it was there before us and will endure after us. It is only at this stage that the reader is prepared to distinguish between degrees of greatness in poetry; before that stage he can only be expected to distinguish between the genuine and the sham—the capacity to make this latter distinction must always be practiced first.³⁶

³¹ VP, introductory comments to 'Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour To Joan And Jean-Paul', (1959), CP, pp. 328-329.

³² VP, 'Poem' (Lana Turner has collapsed!), (1962), CP, p. 449.

³³ Charles Bernstein, 'Hearing Voices', in *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 142-148 (p. 144).

³⁴ Crain, p. 287.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 34.

This disengagement does not happen with O'Hara; he stays beside his poems, he is the poems, is distinctly present in the poems, which results in a difficulty for the reader to separate the man from the poems, subsequently if we are to concur with Eliot's theory, the reader is locked in an immature state and identifies the narrator as O'Hara and is incapable of distinguishing between 'degrees of greatness'. As has been illustrated, even O'Hara's most fervent critical admirers can only go so far in making a case for his work to be judged by degrees of greatness and often hedge their praise with references to his chatty, conversational style and claims that his poetic is one of 'natural' talent and not technical expertise.

When we speak of a poet's presence, we refer to an inexplicable ethereal presence, but also inevitably to their presence through the sound of the poem, one critic writes of O'Hara: 'For once, the immortality conferred by art seems actual; what walks, behind the imprint of voice, is not simply a ghost'.³⁷

Stephen Burt suggests:

With O'Hara, ... you *have* to think about what it would be like to meet him: the poems almost cajole you into doing so, and you'll be glad you did. O'Hara figured out how to get you to read his poems (even or especially if you'd never met him) not as you'd read other poems by other dead strangers, but more or less as you'd read poems by your close friends.³⁸

The experience Burt refers to stems from the mythical status which has grown up around O'Hara in the last half century: the combination of his legendary charisma and early death have contributed to his development of iconic status. Morton Feldman describes how O'Hara and his contemporaries 'watched each others' deaths like the final stock quotations of the day. To die early—before one's time—was to make the biggest coup of all'.³⁹ O'Hara was a most distinctive poet and character in a community of other distinctive characters and a powerful presence in his lifetime, so in death, his 'final stock quotation' could only increase. His voice, too, in the physical sense was a distinctive one. Lawrence Osgood's tribute in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, goes into detail about the way the poet spoke:

I sometimes hear Frank's voice. I hear no words, only a rise and fall of pitch ringing with great clarity in some chamber of my inner ear. But no words are needed for me to tell what his voice is saying. It twangs

³⁷ Anthony Libby, 'O'Hara on the Silver Range', *Contemporary Literature*, 17 (1976), 240-262 (p. 240).

³⁸ Stephen Burt, 'Okay I'll Call You / Yes Call Me: Frank O'Hara's "Personism"' article on poets.org, 2005.

³⁹ Morton Feldman, 'Lost Times and Future Hopes', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bollinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 12-14 (p. 12).

jauntily along, then bubbles into a laugh, suddenly jumps forward like a motorcycle revving up a hill, and finally swoops down like a Rachmaninoff glissando in a delighted pounce of a final, unintelligible word. The sound says that life is exciting, that honesty is joyous and pretension silly, that all discoveries are good, and that energy is all.⁴⁰

The moment a reader hears O'Hara, the poems and the poet become irrevocably linked. For this reason, O'Hara walks (and talks) endlessly through his poems: as actor, voiceover and director of his poems. Once his distinctive upbeat voice has been heard—especially if the reader is aware of his reputation—the man and poems become inseparable; the world of O'Hara's poems is O'Hara's world and the reader's world too. Bill Berkson writes:

The voice Frank invented is readily identifiable. It abounds with personality, revealing personal habits of inflection, irritability and jauntiness. On the other hand, it is not affected or eccentric; its peculiarity is that of authenticity. It talks.⁴¹

The poems have one narrator that can be traced back to Frank O'Hara the poet or to our version of him.⁴² In O'Hara's poems, the voice is active and in the moment, 'I do this I do that' and they are full of talk:

Kenny!
Kennebunkport! I see you standing there
assuaging everything with your smile
At the end of the world you are scratching your head wondering what is
that funny French word Roussel was so fond of? Oh "denouement!"⁴³

This use of dialogue directly engages the reader, acts as an appeal to the reader to participate in the world, the conversation, the affectionate naming and banter, the soundtrack of the world of the poem.

In 'Poem', (1959) O'Hara combines sonic dialogues and surface sound by merging the auditory landscapes of city and nature:

Now the violets are all gone, the rhinoceroses, the cymbals
a grisly pale has settled over the stockyard where the fur flies
and the sound
is that of a bulldozer in heat stuck in the mud
where a lilac still scrawnily blooms and cries out "Walt!"⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Lawrence Osgood, 'Frank's Physique (A Selective Inventory)', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bolinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 24-25 (p. 25).

⁴¹ Bill Berkson, 'Frank O'Hara and His Poems', in *To be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 226-233 (p. 229).

⁴² Lehman, p. 170; O'Hara's upbeat reputation is in contrast to a darker version of the poet and David Lehman takes issue with Gooch's biography's portrayal of this darker O'Hara, stating: 'it substitutes a 1990s narrative line for the old myth of the doomed artist who could not survive society's hostility and whose death was an indictment of that society. The hero of *City Poet* is a hopelessly alcoholic, prematurely washed-up, promiscuous homosexual, whose death accuses society of homophobia and O'Hara of not living a more moderate existence'.

⁴³ 'On a Birthday of Kenneth's', (1961), *CP*, pp. 396-397 (p. 396).

⁴⁴ 'Poem', (1959), *CP*, p. 346.

O'Hara lists flowers, violets, rhinocROSES, lilacs, he uses the visual rhyme of cymbal to echo the shape of a flower and simultaneously uses it as an eye-rhyme and pun for symbol, and of course its sound, a crash of announcement before 'fur flies'. The bulldozer hints at an urban landscape, but it is merged with a natural sound (helped along by the previous reference to rhinoceroses) that transform the bulldozer into an animal—a large animal in heat, which refers to the way the wheels of the vehicle grind and turn relentlessly in the mud. The flowers are all gone, but the lilac remains, it 'scrawnily blooms and cries out "Walt!"', and here O'Hara endows an object with a voice, not just a voice but thought and reason, a mind that speaks and this mini sonic dialogue sounds on the surface of the poem; the lilac, of course, was Walt Whitman's favourite flower.⁴⁵ The surreal dialogue from the lilac gets priority over the real dialogue (about which actor appeared in which film) presented as reported speech in the third person, which gives way to the poet's thoughts that he will dress as an asparagus for Halloween, a thought which is replied to by Vincent who 'poopees' the idea. This series of internal and external dialogues are accompanied by the rain described as a 'sentimental breeze' likened to a 'collapsed Kim Novak balloon'. In this short poem a total of thirteen names are mentioned, each only once, their conversations muffled in a confusion of reportage, and Ned, is understandably happy to retire early 'for the sake of his music and his ear / where discipline finds itself singing and screaming away'. The onslaught of voices cannot be silenced even in the third person, they continue through the poem in a relentless fashion. Until a right-justified 'knock at the door', answered visually on the page by a line break and a left justified 'my heart your heart'.

Horowitz outlines a theory that the mind produces a form of music and writes of what it might be like if we could 'convert the song of the brain into something we could listen to' and proposes if the sounds of the brain could be recorded, '...every brain would play a song composed of moments of event-driven and cognition-derived sounds'.⁴⁶ In an O'Hara poem like the one discussed above, this theory is plausible, the associative leaps and rapid-fire snippets of thought and remembered conversation are like the poet's improvisatory brain song. O'Hara' makes similar comments in reference to another poet's practice:

⁴⁵ An article about The Whitmanites, a Walt Whitman appreciation society established in 1885, describes how they: '...wore a sprig of lilac in their buttonholes to remember Whitman as this was his favourite flower' <<http://www.boltonmuseums.org.uk/archives/walt-whitman-collection>> [accessed 3 August 2016].

⁴⁶ Horowitz, pp. 283-284.

He cuts through a lot of contemporary nonsense to what is actually happening to him, and that actually reveals his real voice sounding above the inspired or willed ... technical choices.⁴⁷

O'Hara strove to achieve this depiction of the 'real voice' in his own work and it was never about technical aspirations but about how best to capture the authenticity of voice through language and recreate it in a poem. Of course, the idea a reader might in their mind hear a poet's voice is at the same time believable and unbelievable, and dependent upon the level of engagement of the listener, but I believe the physical properties of a poet's voice along with their philosophy of poetics are both components that make up a poem's sound and are qualities largely overlooked in criticism. The reader's sonic imagination brings the voice of the poet to their experience of the poem and in so doing, as Berkson stated, the poem talks.

The word 'talks' also occurs in a recent article, and reinforces the idea that readers feel they are being spoken to on a personal and intimate level:

In a Frank O'Hara poem ... there's a whole cityscape of being alive that thinks fast, acts fast, but lingers and broods, and knows ultimately there are few things in the world as intimate as hearing how another person looks dead at you, no one else, and talks.⁴⁸

The talkative quality in O'Hara's poems is often referred to using the adjective 'chatty', in a tribute poem Allen Ginsberg described him as 'Chatty prophet' but this word obscures the more sophisticated manoeuvres he makes to engage the reader.⁴⁹ O'Hara talks or 'chats' about himself and his world, but his chatter is congenial, he does not bore the reader with endless stories about himself, instead, he invites the reader to experience his stories, his excitement, to walk with him through New York and he charismatically holds the reader in his gaze and keeps them in earshot as he talks and talks but never lets his gaze drift away from them and always keeps them in range of his voice or the voices he creates— the sonic dialogues (and also the soundscape available to him). The mixture of energy and intimacy in his vocal outpourings captivate and flatter and have kept readers interested in both him and his work for fifty years; even though contemporary readers may know nothing of his world, the names he drops, the symphonies he refers to or the films he watched, the reader feels valued. O'Hara includes the person on the other side of the poem in his

⁴⁷ 'Preface to A.B. Spellman's *The Beautiful Days*', *SS*, p. 181.

⁴⁸ Jane Ciabattari, *Frank O'Hara: Poet of the Mad Men Era* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2014) <<http://www.bb.com/culture/story/20140626-the-poet-of-the-mad-men-era>> [accessed 30 October 2014].

⁴⁹ Allen Ginsberg, 'City Midnight Junk Strains', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bollinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 148-149 (p. 148).

discourse and as such he narrows the poetic divide between poet and reader. Even one of his earliest critics, Helen Vendler, acknowledges, 'O'Hara had found [a] poignant way of talking to the world'.⁵⁰ O'Hara's poems commence with an unwritten command to the reader: 'let's go' and we follow. The reader is asked to identify with the 'you' of O'Hara's poems, the dialogue directed purposefully at the reader: 'Can I talk to you? Just let me talk to you! Just for / a minute!'.⁵¹ And O'Hara will take the reader absolutely anywhere and it seems nothing can silence him, whatever the scene he always finds a voice to talk us through it; in the erotic, 'Poem', (1961) O'Hara writes, 'Twin spheres full of fur and noise ... and then my mouth is full of suns', and even from here he manages to supply an unexpected and unlikely sonic dialogue, 'that mouth that is used to talking too much / speaks at last of the tenderness of China'.⁵²

Justin Replogle in his 1978 paper 'Vernacular Poetry: Frost to Frank O'Hara', describes O'Hara's voice as a 'sound-of-sense' voice, a conversational or vernacular voice. Replogle explains:

For five hundred years most English poets have preferred chant, oratory, some species of "elevated" language. I suppose it's because, if art is always a deviation from norms of some kind, language first became art by deviating from talk.⁵³

O'Hara's work is the opposite of this statement (recall the poet's nemesis Vachel Lindsay's chanted lines quoted in Chapter One); like Vendler's characterisation of the poems as 'verbal movies', we can see how O'Hara deviates from the elevated language of the past. In O'Hara, 'talk' is incessant: chatter, small talk, jokes, questions, dialogue, quotes, interruptions, conversational exchanges both mundane and serious. Alan Feldman writes, O'Hara's 'diction resembles an open-house party at which junkies and society matrons rub elbows'.⁵⁴ And O'Hara is obsessed with these diverse voices; in his poems, even objects are given a voice: a glacier speaks, a painting hollers, swans remark.⁵⁵ Replogle goes on to point out that what sets speech apart from other forms of language is intonation; intonation is particularly effective when used to '...clear up confusions and ambiguities' and 'vernacular ellipsis', both in abundance in O'Hara's poems.⁵⁶ Replogle classifies O'Hara as 'a first rate vernacular poet, and

⁵⁰ Vendler, p. 243.

⁵¹ 'Collected Proses, an Answer', (1955), *PR*, pp. 166-170 (p. 167).

⁵² 'Poem', (1961), *CP*, pp. 405-406 (p. 405).

⁵³ Justin Replogle, 'Vernacular Poetry: Frost to Frank O'Hara', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24 (1978), 137-153 (p. 142).

⁵⁴ Alan Feldman, p. 47.

⁵⁵ 'V. R. Lang', (1950), *CP*, p. 18; 'Memorial Day 1950', (1950), *CP*, pp. 17-18 (p. 17); 'Poem en Forme de Saw', (1961), *CP*, pp. 428-429 (p. 429).

⁵⁶ Replogle, p. 149.

sometimes he was that *completely* vernacular poet the tradition hadn't produced before'.⁵⁷

A key point Replogle makes in this essay is: 'To make print sound like talk it has to *sound* like talk'. I have quoted several critics about the way O'Hara's poems 'talk', this talk is a result of a combination of his physical voice, his intonation, word choice and his skill in performing a move beyond the range of many poets, the ability to make their poems 'sound like talk'.⁵⁸ When you read O'Hara you hear him. Bill Berkson described how 'The surface is full of the feel of live talk. It is the voice that holds the surface together, and meaning is everywhere present and multiple'.⁵⁹ Two things happen at once, and with this in mind I would like to compare the way O'Hara's poems and films represent voice (and sound).

'Better than the movies'

Morton Feldman in a tribute to O'Hara described how, 'He treat[ed] the whole thing [life] as if it were some big, frantic, glamorous movie set. To us he seemed to dance from canvas to canvas, from party to party, from poem to poem—a Fred Astaire with the whole art community as his Ginger Rogers'.⁶⁰ In 'Personism', O'Hara wrote '...after all only Whitman and Crane and Williams, of the American poets, are better than the movies' and his poems contain numerous references to film.⁶¹ The comparison between film and poetry is an obvious one: both are at their core built from image and sound. Bordwell and Thompson in their book *Film Art*, state: 'Sound is often treated as a lesser partner to the images, but we need to recognise that it can actively shape how we understand them'.⁶² In contemporary poetry, this hierarchy is the same and the image is privileged. O'Hara's poems are image-driven, cinematic, with the 'action' both framed and filmic:

oh Sally
is still acting the mise en scène of her
great grandmother's embroidered graveyard⁶³

But O'Hara also has a cinematic ear for sound and one of the unusual aspects of his poetic is how he merges images with sound. In 'Ode To Michael Goldberg', (1958) O'Hara replicates the way a film director manipulates a scene:

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

⁵⁹ Bill Berkson, 'Frank O'Hara and His Poems', in *To be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 226-233 (p. 229).

⁶⁰ Morton Feldman, 'Lost Times and Future Hopes', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bollinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 12-14 (p. 13).

⁶¹ 'Personism: A Manifesto', (1959), *CP*, pp. 498-499 (p. 498).

⁶² David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 10th edn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013), p. 268.

⁶³ 'Galanta', (1962), *CP*, pp. 463-464 (p. 463).

I couldn't kill a man when he was drunk
Or shoot him
 when he's unarmed could I?
You sure couldn't, kid.
 Well give me the money.
More of your funny business!
 Talk fast, kid. You've got just one minute more. Yipe!
 Turn that stage team loose.⁶⁸

The reader recognises these scraps of dialogue and their intonations as distinct from everyday conversation and immediately hears them as film speech—staged, hyperbolic and outside their common experience. The above example is at once a combination of the Western and gangster genres, it does not matter whether the lines can be linked to specific films or actors, the dialogue in isolation does enough work to locate them and to give them a sound. O'Hara, as Brainard observed in the quotation above, heard lines, assimilated them, then rewrote them, not verbatim but more like a slant rhyme, with just enough of the original sound to alert the reader to something that they feel they already know. Listen to the following O'Hara lines:

A million guys in this
town, and you have to shoot
 the Crime Commissioner.⁶⁹

There is something vaguely familiar about them, about the intonation, and if we compare the sound to one of cinema's most famous lines, 'Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine', we hear a resemblance, as if O'Hara had composed his lines in the shadow of the sound of the original line from *Casablanca*.⁷⁰ The lines are different, but they catch the reader's ear and push them towards the classic Humphrey Bogart utterance with their intonation, the repetition of the word 'town', the rhyme of 'crime' and 'mine' and also the exact count of eighteen syllables in both sentences.

O'Hara's obsession with classic Hollywood is undisputed; Ferguson describes him as a 'man who never referred to Los Angeles, only to "Hollywood," always in search of the mythic element in everyday life'.⁷¹ But even though O'Hara wrote Hollywood mainstream film into his poems, his stylistic choices were more typical of the French New Wave directors. For example, both the French New Wave filmmakers and O'Hara drew upon their immediate environment; both used (or in O'Hara's case referenced) the same small group of people who would

⁶⁸ 'The Green Hornet', (1964) *CP*, p. 484.

⁶⁹ 'Here in New York we are Having a Lot of Trouble with the World's Fair', (1964), *CP*, pp 480-481 (p. 480).

⁷⁰ *Casablanca*, dir. by Michael Curtiz, (Warner Bros., 1942).

⁷¹ Ferguson, p. 145.

appear continually throughout their work; both used improvisational techniques, overheard conversations, accidental and incidental material to create their filmic and poetic worlds, respectively. With regard to sound, the French New Wave directors, such as Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, did not remix sound in the way classic Hollywood filmmakers did; they avoided the studio and instead filmed on location where they recorded the background noise at the source of filming without adjusting it.⁷² In their films, sound was natural and unpolished. Daniel Kane in his book about the New American Cinema and poetry highlights a 'cultural shortsightedness' in the way critics have dismissed avant-garde and experimental 'cinematic practice as an influence in O'Hara's work'.⁷³ Indeed, the cinematic techniques of the French New Wave and O'Hara, have received little attention and is a largely unmined seam for critics. Sound is a vital component of the cinematic experience and the techniques used to generate cinematic sound have strong parallels to O'Hara's surface sound.

Frank O'Hara and Alfred Leslie's collaborative short film *The Last Clean Shirt* also has resonances that touch upon how O'Hara managed sound in his poems.⁷⁴ The lost sound of 1950s New York can be rediscovered through the films of the period and from archive footage, but *The Last Clean Shirt* is a replica of the lost sound of O'Hara's New York. The film allows the viewer to experience, albeit in exaggerated form, the visual and auditory landscape of O'Hara's poems.⁷⁵

The mise en scène of *The Last Clean Shirt* echoes the iconic scene from Jean-Luc Godard's *A Bout de Souffle* where a woman and man drive through Paris in a convertible, the couple speaks in French and an American or any other non-French viewer would be provided with subtitles.⁷⁶ In O'Hara and Leslie's film, the narrative is a simple one, like Godard's scene the camera is behind a couple in a convertible, but the only dialogue is the woman's voice who speaks an unintelligible language which critic Olivier Brossard, describes as 'Finnish gibberish', the subtitles are extracts from O'Hara's poems.⁷⁷ Leslie described the usual reception for the film as 'hissing, booing, slow-clapping, and foot-

⁷² Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans. by Richard Neupert, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 70-71.

⁷³ Daniel Kane, *We Saw the Light, Conversations between the New American Cinema and Poetry*, (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009), p. 86.

⁷⁴ *The Last Clean Shirt*, dir. by Alfred Leslie (1964).

⁷⁵ Kane, p. 97. Kane describes how, 'an aural-collage of car horns is heard that is artificially manipulated by Leslie to sound more cacophonous and chaotic than usual'.

⁷⁶ *A Bout de Souffle*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Impéria Films, 1960).

⁷⁷ Olivier Brossard, 'The Last Clean Shirt a film by Alfred Leslie and Frank O'Hara', *Jacket*, 23 (2003) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/23/bross-ohara.html>> [accessed 7 April 2016], (unpaginated).

stamping'.⁷⁸ O'Hara and Leslie take experimental film even further than Godard, in the way they dislocate image, sound and meaning, to make, in Kane's assessment: 'a film so ahead of its time that it would take decades for critics to recognize its importance'.⁷⁹

The Last Clean Shirt is divided into three visually identical parts (the subtitles represent the only variation between sections): the woman speaks, without subtitles; the woman speaks, with subtitles; the woman speaks, with the man's thoughts as subtitles. Alfred Leslie says of the film: 'The first moment you see it, you hear a language that you may or may not get. You may not realise that it's a fake language. You may or may not understand the clues that are offered at the very opening of the film...'.⁸⁰ Poetry too is a fake language, or language removed from its functional domain and therefore made strange and as such can be characterised in the same way: that is, you may not 'get it' and you may not understand 'the clues'. Ferguson refers to the film's 'playful but uncompromising questioning of the very capability of language to communicate any authentic truth...'.⁸¹ The trajectory of *The Last Clean Shirt* mimics that of the critic/reader's first encounter with an O'Hara poem. In part one the woman (O'Hara) animatedly talks and talks; in part two the woman (O'Hara) is simultaneously read via the subtitles; in part three, the man (the critic/reader) makes his own 'sense' of what happens, through a thought-commentary in the form of subtitles. All the while the only *real* sounds in the film is talk with no meaning (because we cannot understand the language) and the sounds of the streets, both diegetic and non-diegetic: car horns, thunder, traffic, gunshots.⁸² Like O'Hara's 'Poem' (Lana Turner has collapsed!) (to be discussed in the next chapter) the traffic acts exactly like the sky, unpredictably, and as Brossard points out: 'The sound of something like thunder is heard repeatedly despite there being no sign of rain'.⁸³

Brossard focuses on a sequence of subtitles: 'I would like to think / that you are driving us / ... / where everyone would be happy / and safe and boring / boring in a new way'. The critic hones in on the word boring and suggests:

⁷⁸ Kane, p. 95, (quoting Alfred Leslie).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Brossard citing an interview with Alfred Leslie, (unpaginated).

⁸¹ Ferguson, p. 77.

⁸² Kane, p. 220; in a note on this section Kane points out 'Credits at the end of the film include "effects of sound Tony Schwartz," suggesting that many of the sounds heard throughout the film – simultaneous honking, rumbling thunder, what sounds like gunshots, and so on – where in fact electronically manipulated, as opposed to wholly diegetic'.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 98.

One might be fooled by the uneventfulness of the film *The Last Clean Shirt*. It is true that nothing goes on *on the surface*, although the surface here begs to be defined ... it has no boring views if you watch the film as you would look at a painting. If you listen to the film or if you read the film, you won't be bored and you won't be lazy.⁸⁴

Brossard combines dual concerns of O'Hara in his mention of surface and sound and in the comment 'you won't be bored and you won't be lazy', he echoes a statement that the poet himself made when discussing the work of sculptor David Smith.⁸⁵ O'Hara's poems and his sound also ask of the reader that they are not lazy; to read O'Hara is not a passive act, but an active one; an act of participation that calls upon the reader's sonic imagination.

Brossard describes how 'the sound of police sirens and fire engines is heard ... inserting somewhat anxious notes into the otherwise lighthearted scene'.⁸⁶ I disagree that the sirens insert 'anxious notes' but they are simply surface sounds that foreground the everyday soundscape of New York; sounds that New Yorkers (who given the underground status of the film would be the target audience) are unlikely to become anxious by. For O'Hara, the cinema screen's surface, like the poem's present similar possibilities. Kane argues:

O'Hara's impossible efforts to somehow enact the present moment ... are perhaps more able to be interrogated when text becomes film. Cinema only fully exists in the present, urged into being as it is through the whirr of the machine, the practically magical projection of light.⁸⁷

His comment reminds us of the difficulties critics have experienced 'interrogating' O'Hara's poems and also of the qualities that the poet himself hoped for them, in Kane's words the enactment 'of the present moment'. It suggests too, the coalescence of the poem and cinema and how O'Hara's poems are reminiscent of the narratives of experimental films and not the straight-forward narrative arcs typical of classic Hollywood. He goes on to point out:

Perhaps it is because of film's ability to perform presence that O'Hara chooses to reimagine the function his poems could play in the space of *The Last Clean Shirt* ... O'Hara brought his work into a new kind of life that was mechanically predicated on the immediacy and instantism he so desired.⁸⁸

O'Hara's desire to re-create the presence and immediacy of films in his poems has been noted in regard to his imagery as already mentioned with Vendler's 'verbal movies'.

⁸⁴ Brossard, (unpaginated).

⁸⁵ Ferguson, p. 17. O'Hara's exact words from a television film in 1964 about the sculptor David Smith were: 'Don't be bored, don't be lazy, don't be trivial and don't be proud'.

⁸⁶ Kane, p. 98.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

In the same way that O'Hara brought poetry to film in *The Last Clean Shirt*, his poems also recreate the cinematic formula where both images and sounds occur at once. The image first, the sound second. We watch a film, we read the text of a poem, but it is much easier to describe images than to translate sound onto what Schafer called 'silent pages'. Even so, the image in a film or poem is poorer without sound. In film, the voice is at the top of the 'hierarchy of perception' in relation to sound.⁸⁹ Michel Chion writes:

Sound in film is voco- and verbocentric, above all, because human beings in their habitual behaviour are as well. When in any given sound environment you hear voices, these voices capture and focus your attention before any other sound (wind blowing, music, traffic). Only afterward, if you know very well who is speaking and what they're talking about, might you turn your attention from the voices to the rest of the sounds you hear. So if these voices speak in an accessible language, you will first seek the meaning of the words, moving on to interpret the other sounds only when your interest in meaning has been satisfied.⁹⁰

This scenario applies to O'Hara's poems individually and over the body of his work, in that the voice (not merely a physical voice but what it says) is always most prominent and the other sounds the 'wind blowing, music, traffic' have been drowned out by the force of the voice, of language and the desire to find meaning, as a consequence other sounds have not been heard by critics at all. Also in the final sentence of the quotation we see a scenario that has been re-enacted by critics for the last fifty years, where the quest to seek the meaning of the words has produced thousands of pages of text, but because with O'Hara meaning is a challenge and often elusive, critics have largely never been in a position to move on to next phase, the phase after 'meaning has been satisfied', a phase where the focus can be moved to hearing sound for its own sake, sound beyond meaning and image, the sound of O'Hara's poems.

'Playing the Typewriter'

I have now covered several manifestations of O'Hara's sound, discussed how it occurs outside the poem as it materialises with the reader, and also considered the difficulties in evaluating the reader's experience of his sound. This problem of evaluation raises the question of what sound *is* with regard to a poem. I propose that the reach of the term sound is much wider than poetry criticism allows. To suggest part of a poem's sound could be attributed to the poet's

⁸⁹ Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 5.

⁹⁰ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 6.

physical voice might seem strange; to suggest a reference to the wind or rain or traffic could trigger the sound of those things being heard in the mind of the reader might also seem strange; but only in the way the successful poem exerts a strange power on the reader. Which is also the way imagery exerts power over a reader. For example, when we read William Carlos Williams', 'The Red Wheelbarrow', (1923) we immediately visualise a scene, but each one of us sees a different scene, a different farmyard and different chickens that negotiate the space in different ways.⁹¹ With a sound, if I were to refer to a bell, we would not hear the same bell, at the same volume, or for the same duration, but we would all, if we actively engage with the language, hear *our* bell. In poetry, to echo Williams' poem, 'so much depends' on the imagination, but the manoeuvre the reader makes to visualise an image requires no explanation, we take it for granted. With regard to sound, we do not take the connection for granted, but nevertheless, the imagination is stimulated by sonic directions in the same way it is by visual directions.

I also suggested in the Introduction that the poet is a vehicle for their sound and that it is a manifestation of their influences. O'Hara plays around with sound, assimilates the sounds of his environment, New York, the cinema, music, conversations, whatever he hears is potential material. He used the expression 'playing the typewriter' and the rhythm of the typewriter is one where the movement of the fingertips matches the rhythm of thought, at times sporadic, hesitant, fluent, silent, all these rhythms come from the mind of the poet, through the body and hands to create the poem. Poet and friend of O'Hara, James Schuyler, described him writing 'in a great clatter of keys'⁹² And in a documentary in 1966, O'Hara was filmed while working on his typewriter—which generated a loud din, like gunfire, in contrast to the barely audible keys I type on now—while typing he received a telephone call, continued to type and talk and even incorporated words spoken by the caller into his script.⁹³ O'Hara's poems emerge to the beat of the noisy stop-start rhythm of the typewriter. Schafer wrote how, 'Other rhythms—hammering, sawing, casting—take their measure from the arm; still others like knitting or playing a musical instrument are dictated by the motions of the fingers', the typewriter, O'Hara's instrument,

⁹¹ William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Charles Tomlinson, (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 57.

⁹² Lehman, p. 169.

⁹³ Documentary about Frank O'Hara, at 8 minutes, 'USA: Poetry, Frank O'Hara', (1966) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=344TyqLISFA>> [accessed 20 September 2014].

is also, 'dictated by the motion of the fingers'.⁹⁴ Horowitz discussing music, writes:

...our minds are built moment by moment within the tension between input and output, formed by our life experiences just as the breath from a sax player shifts the energy in the body of the instrument, adding the reverberations of the metal and the room, amplifications and filtering of lungs, lips, face, and instrument, guided by hands. And what emerges is not just modulated air but music.⁹⁵

He refers to how the mind is built by life experiences and that art as an extension of the body determines form. This sounds implausible, but consider the measures of poets before O'Hara, Schafer describes the 'influence of horses hooves on poetical rhythms' and describes how 'Sir Richard Blackmore once spoke of turning verses "to the rumbling of his coach's wheels"'.⁹⁶ O'Hara's sporadic 'measure' created by the typewriter is a long way from the soothing rhythm of Blackmore's but is nonetheless the foundation and reflection of his sound.

O'Hara himself wrote:

...it seemed to me that the metrical, that the measure let us say, if you want to talk about it in Olson's poems or Ezra Pound's, comes from the breath of the person just as a stroke of paint comes from the wrist and hand and arm and shoulder and all that of the painter. So therefore the point is really more to establish one's own measure and breath in poetry, I think, than — this sounds wildly ambitious since I don't think I've done it but I think that great poets do do it — rather than fitting your ideas into an established order, syllabically and phonetically and so on.⁹⁷

So 'measure' for O'Hara starts in the breath, in the voice, in the talk of the poet but is realised ultimately through the sporadic rhythms of the typewriter. In the quotation above, O'Hara is modest, 'I don't think I've done it but I think that great poets do do it'. But the sound of his poems are distinct, as O'Hara himself was a distinctive personality and he has established his 'own measure'. Surface sound, the sonic imagination and sonic dialogues provide a vocabulary from which to analyse O'Hara's sound and his 'measure'. And in the following chapter, I turn up the volume on this neglected area of O'Hara's poetic and tune into the auditory world he invites the reader to experience through their sonic imagination.

⁹⁴ Schafer, p. 228.

⁹⁵ Horowitz, p. 282.

⁹⁶ Schafer, p. 63.

⁹⁷ 'Edward Lucie-Smith: An Interview with Frank O'Hara', (1965), *SS*, pp. 3-26 (p. 17).

CHAPTER FIVE 'HOLDING HIS AUDIENCE'

'Everything is in the poems'

Throughout this thesis, I have introduced a number of terms that constitute O'Hara's sound. I will briefly summarise them here to illuminate what is to follow. As already stated, O'Hara was a more sophisticated technician than many critics acknowledge and was capable of accessing what Eliot described as the 'auditory imagination'. Although O'Hara's poems contain sporadic embedded sound effects, they are not particularly noteworthy, and while some pleasing examples can be found throughout his work, his poetic does not exhibit exceptional manoeuvres in this respect. The search for rhyme, alliteration, assonance, metrics and other patterns, concentrations or combinations of vowel or consonant sounds is standard territory for poetry analysis, but because these effects are not a significant feature of O'Hara's poetic, critics have largely read his poems with minimal consideration of their sonic properties.

A more noteworthy manifestation of O'Hara's sound is surface sound, which is stated overtly; a reference that may or may not generate meaning but is not driven by meaning. Surface sound is an appeal to the reader to hear by simply directing the ear to the possibility of a sound. Surface sound differs from embedded effects, which manipulate the ear of the reader, for example, the careful placement of mournful vowel sounds to suggest sadness or death. In O'Hara's, 'A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island', (1958) the following lines provide a metaphoric interpretation of the difference between surface and embedded sound:

...It's / easier for me to speak to you out
here. I don't have to slide down
between buildings to get your ear.¹

Surface sounds are out in the open, whereas embedded sound attempts to 'get your ear' through concealment within the lines of the poem.

The sonic imagination is the second key term I employ and the route by which O'Hara invites the reader to experience the surface sounds in his poems, through suggestion and an appeal to the imagination, an invitation to hyper-listening. For example, in 'Blocks', (1952) he describes mice who lick the

¹ 'A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island', (1958), *CP*, pp. 306-307 (p. 307).

floorboards for sugar, 'rolling their light tails against / the rattling marbles of granulation'.² Similarly, elsewhere, he invites the reader to 'hear the grass walking by'.³ The reader becomes an active participant and may or may not follow the direction of the sound, (as mentioned O'Hara was keen on the idea of an engaged reader). If a poet writes, for example, 'the dog barked', the reader will not hear the dog bark, but she or he will hear *a* dog bark. The sonic imagination is not without limitations, but when one considers the way the reader manages imagery in a poem, it is no more of a stretch than this; the same appeal to the imagination, through imagery or an image, can be applied to sound.

Sonic dialogues are an extension of the sonic imagination; in 'A Pleasant Thought from Whitehead', (1950) O'Hara writes, 'my poems speak on the silver of your eyes', and in this early poem he voices the directive that would form a consistent part of his poetic.⁴ O'Hara's poems are replete with sonic dialogues that invite the reader to hear the words being spoken; by definition, dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. In a poem, dialogue creates a pause, a space for the reader to hear what is being said; this may be direct speech, reported speech or merely the suggestion of speech, for example, you can sometimes hear conversation though you cannot hear the words themselves: '...drowsing on bales in a warehouse of cotton / listening to soft southern truck talk'.⁵ O'Hara's dialogues take various forms, not least his own dialogues addressed directly to the reader as discussed in Chapter Four; indeed many of the poems, particularly the 'I do this I do that' poems are complete sonic dialogues. But a dialogue can also be isolated phrases from people or things: 'Five sobs lined up on the doorstep / and one said "Is he blond and has he / blue eyes?".⁶

One of the problems with analysing O'Hara's poems for their sound is its sporadic quality. In the absence of patterns or effects, the sound of the poem appears choppy or fitful. But this is the character of O'Hara's sound. For my analysis I have taken five poems in chronological order from 1950 to 1962, short and longer poems, including some of O'Hara's most well-known work, for example 'The Day Lady Died', (1959) and 'Poem' (Lana Turner has collapsed!), (1962). I have chosen these iconic poems, already extensively discussed by

² 'Blocks', (1952), *CP*, p. 108.

³ '[Dusk. Dawn. The Land. / An Albatross Thinks of Spain.]', (1956), *PR*, p. 172.

⁴ 'A Pleasant Thought from Whitehead', (1950), *CP*, pp. 23-24 (p. 23).

⁵ 'Ode to Michael Goldberg ('S Birth and Other, Births)', (1958), *CP*, pp. 290-298 (p. 295).

⁶ '[Five Sobs Lined up on the Doorstep]', (1954), *PR*, p. 151.

critics, to provide alternative readings focussing on what they suggest to the reader through their sound. Other lesser-known poems—though still significant contributions to his work—are also under consideration because they are intriguing for their manoeuvres with sound. Where appropriate I have supplemented my analysis with commentaries from other critics. I have, however, chosen to avoid an excess of biographical material to explain the content, simply because a reader's experience of a poem's sound is an immediate and participatory one, which happens at the moment of reading and does not usually occur from within a fortress of books.

'I thought I had a lot to say'

'Memorial Day 1950', (1950) is a poem of sonic dialogues, which illustrates O'Hara's predilection for giving voices to inanimate objects, to ideas, to people, dead and alive. The entire poem is an unlikely dialogue between disparate elements: 'I thought / I had a lot to say, and named several last things / Gertrude Stein hadn't had time for' O'Hara writes, his partial though unvoiced resurrection of Stein denotes an urgency that time, to say all he has to say, is running out and there is a need to counter silence with ideas, but 'art is no dictionary, / Max Ernst told us that'. Words for O'Hara are invariably spoken not written, even art, which cannot be reduced or fully translated by language, is given a voice, Picasso's 'Guernica hollered look out!' The voice of one painting is interrupted by a second dialogue with art, but this time it is we who are talking, or not we exactly, but our eyes: '...we were all busy hoping our eyes were talking / to Paul Klee', here O'Hara merges the senses, and sound and vision converse in a manoeuvre typical of the poet. A counterpoint is the argument that the reader cannot actually *hear* these voices, but a sonic dialogue is carried out nonetheless, like white noise in the imagination where O'Hara voices Stein's unspoken words, Max Ernst chips in, Guernica exclaims 'look out!' and our own eyes talk to Paul Klee. As if these exchanges are not enough, O'Hara's mother and father appear and ask him—although we do not hear their request—but he answers them 'from [his] tight blue pants...' and even the narrator's penis has its say. The voices are relentless, noisy, disruptive, saying nothing that makes sense and, like Murray Schafer's 'sonic jabberware', the poem layers voice upon unlikely voice to fend off the silence, where even sewage is given a voice and it sings.

'Memorial Day 1950' is a fast poem, like O'Hara's own conversational style, quick and breathy. O'Hara tells his parents '...we should / Love only the stones, the sea, and heroic figures. / Wasted child! I'll club you on the shins!'—the romantic sentiments the poet expounds—the dialogues reminiscent of a nobler poetic form—are met with a dialogue of violence and abuse and O'Hara though somewhat crestfallen is not 'surprised when the older people entered / my cheap hotel room and broke my guitar and my can / of blue paint'—the 'cheap hotel room' of O'Hara's poems is represented first by sound through the guitar (the broken guitar of the poet's sound) and then by image in the can of blue paint.⁷ The poem is O'Hara's personal dialogue with art too, described by David Lehman as 'a crash course in modernism'.⁸ He name checks his influences, he thanks them: 'Father of Dada! ... Thank you!'; he celebrates the voice in poetry and sound in poetry:

...O Boris Pasternak, it may be silly
to call to you, so tall in the Urals, but your voice
cleans our world, clearer to us than the hospital:
you sound above the factory's ambitious gargle.
Poetry is as useful as a machine!

The playful sound of the poet's voice topples the 'factory's ambitious gargle', is as useful as the machinery of commerce. The location of the final stanza is the poet's private space:

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

Here the very idea of utility of purpose comes under scrutiny; the pictures are held up by guitar strings, (O'Hara is not interested in creating music so the strings are dispensable), the piano is overthrown by the naked, unadorned voice. All sounds are worthy of celebration and hierarchies are questioned, the locomotive 'is more melodious than a cello'. Micah Mattix points out, 'Guillaume Apollinaire's clay candelabra' refers to:

...a painting that Apollinaire mentions in *The Cubist Painters*. Claiming that art can contain anything, Apollinaire writes that he has even seen

⁷ The images of a guitar and blue paint simultaneously reference Wallace Stevens' poem, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', (1937), *Collected Poetry & Prose*, (New York: The Library of America, 1997), pp. 135-151 and Picasso's 'The Old Guitarist', (1903-04).

⁸ Lehman, p. 181.

"earthenware candelabras which were to be stuck to a canvas so that they seemed to protrude from inside it".⁹

In *Art Chronicles*, O'Hara refers to a painting that has had objects attached to the surface, describing enthusiastically: '...extraneous objects imbedded in the surface, like souvenirs of accident: a cigarette, half its paper torn off to expose the tobacco, two keys, nails, a cluster of tacks, and paint-tube tops making little blind eyes here and there'.¹⁰ And here in 'Memorial Day 1950' he orchestrates a series of sounds, dialogues and images that test both the ear and the eye, and test too, what is worth hearing and seeing. His father mistakenly trusts the eye, because the answer can be found: 'in the belly, not in the eye. If only he had listened...'. The final clause of the poem directs the reader to a clichéd sound, a decidedly unmelodious sound, the cries of 'stuck pigs', killed in the line of duty and offered up in celebration of Memorial Day 1950.

'Walking is a dialogue'

'On the Way to the San Remo', (1954) is untypically formal compared to much of O'Hara's other work.¹¹ The poem demonstrates O'Hara's ability with technique, form and embedded effects and also exhibits what he does with surface sound. The location is the sidewalk; it is a walking poem, illustrated at once in the back and forth stepped formation of the stanzas and a poem which has at its epicentre the beat of the walker and where the act of walking, 'is a dialogue flexed by rhythmical propulsion'.¹² The walker's experience, however, is re-envisioned through a surreal filter:

...the stepping body learns the promise of the horizon from the perspective of the sidewalk: this line of pavement, of stone or concrete, acts as a blank page for the imagination. Yet the page is certainly already occupied, by others and by many scripts—an occupation that brings to earth the flight of the imagination.¹³

The San Remo was a literary bar frequented by O'Hara and his cohort, and the poet, aware of the many scripts available, including his own, rewrites the script of New York, which differs from his 'I do this I do that' walking poems in its imaginative reach. 'On the Way to the San Remo' is a visual poem and also a poem *about* sound. The poem is loud with surface and surreal sound. O'Hara endows a variety of living and inanimate objects with a voice and appeals to the reader through a series of sensory integrated sounds and images. The poem

⁹ Micah Mattix, *Frank O'Hara and the Poetics of Saying "I"*, (Plymouth: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), p. 40.

¹⁰ 'Jackson Pollock', *AC*, pp. 12-39 (pp. 28-29).

¹¹ 'On the Way to the San Remo', (1954), *CP*, pp. 205-206.

¹² LaBelle, p. 100.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

opens as 'black ghinkos snarl their way up', the ginkgo tree (spelt ghinko by O'Hara), is described in *The New York Times*:

as a street tree ... The ginkgo may be one of the world's toughest trees — in fact, six are known to have survived the atomic bomb and still grow in or near Hiroshima, Japan.¹⁴

O'Hara has chosen his words carefully and sets the stage in this poem for a singularly harsh view of New York City. The snarling ghinkos are night-black; the 'moon growls' with menace as the windows timidly blink; apartment houses 'climb deafeningly'—this use of the word deaf immediately draws the reader's attention to noise, and for O'Hara even supposedly silent buildings make a noise. Horowitz describes how all buildings make noise (usually undetectable to the human ear), noise which is dependent upon the acoustic sound space around them. He describes how a recording of the Eiffel Tower revealed how he could 'hear the tower breathe and moan, shudder and sway as if it were a living organism, reacting to the things that crawled on it and the winds and rain that blew through it'.¹⁵ O'Hara's vision of New York makes these objects' sounds as prominent as their images. Echoing the word climb the poem steps in the following stanza (in a visual indent) and a 'bat hisses northwards'. Bats are the ultimate high-frequency creature, undetectable usually to the human ear but not for O'Hara, and bats 'Even though their brains are tiny compared to ours ... are mighty auditory engines'.¹⁶ The 'perilous steps' echo once again the indented steps of the poem and 'lead to a grate'; the sounds are harsh: snarl, growl, hisses, grate, a 'cross-eyed dog scratches'. The cross-eyed vision of the dog testifies that this poem is not dependent on the image, it is a poem where the senses interact, a poem where O'Hara invites the reader to experience New York with their ears as well as their eyes. The dog's right leg is 'maimed in the shape of a V', another aggressive image, and though 'no trace of his nails', the reader hears the absent nails and supplies the auditory blackboard and scratching sound in an associative leap. An abstract concept is endowed with sound as a woman 'cajoles', 'whistles her filthy hope / that it will rain tonight'. Sounds are layered one on top of the other:

The 6th Avenue bus trunk-lumbers sideways
it is full of fat people who cough as at a movie
they eat each other's dandruff in the flickering glare

¹⁴ Dave Taft, 'The Female Ginkgo Tree's Acrid Smell of Success', *The New York Times*, (15 October 2015) <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/nyregion/the-female-ginkgo-trees-acrid-smell-of-success.html?_r=0> [accessed 1 August 2016].

¹⁵ Horowitz, p. 29.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Here O'Hara takes the reader through a series of sounds: the bus moves along clumsily, it is loud and he combines the words 'trunk-lumbers' to onomatopoeic effect to imitate the low-frequency rumble of the bus on concrete, he cuts cinematically to the irritating coughers at the movie theatre, he cuts again to the flickering glare, and the word flickering evokes the whirr of the movie projector.

O'Hara reinvents sounds by splicing them with images that in combination become surreal and therefore speak to the reader's imagination. Here, the noise and movement of the subway train become a bison which simultaneously represents the act of love:

The act of love is also passing like a subway bison
through the paper-littered arches of the express tracks
the sailor sober he feeds pennies to the peanut machines

Embedded effects recreate the scene, 'paper-littered arches of the express tracks' allows the reader to hear the movement of the train and the dispersal of litter through the sibilance of the words 'express tracks'. Similarly, the inverted 'sailor sober', which should be sober sailor, has the reader question the reliability of the narrator; the sailor 'feeds pennies to the peanut machines' in imitation of the slot machine's rhythm and sound.

It is a walking poem, a New York poem, and a love is painful poem, and with the line, 'the nostrils are full of tears' we hear the sound of stifled sobs. O'Hara was purposeful in his attention to the nuances of sound when he composed this poem:

High fidelity reposed in a box a hand on the windowpane
The sweet calm violin strings tie a young man's hair

The use of the words 'High fidelity', which mean, 'the reproduction of sound with little distortion, giving a result very similar to the original', suggests his method is not to distort sound with excessive embedded effects but to present sound without the distortion.¹⁷ But some sounds cannot be reproduced and the 'sweet calm violin' of love has been silenced; its strings serve another purpose and create for the reader the image of the young man. Schafer describes an illustration in Robert Fludd's *Ultrisque Cosmi Historia* entitled "The Tuning of the World" in which the earth forms the body of an instrument across which strings are stretched and are tuned by a divine hand.¹⁸ O'Hara too has a

¹⁷ Google dictionary definition <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=high+fidelity&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab&qfe_rd=cr&ei=K7K-V6XINsLO8gfv4jIBg#safe=off&q=high+fidelity+definition> (accessed 7 March 2015).

¹⁸ Schafer, p. 6.

fondness for removing the strings of an instrument and placing them in another context. In 'Memorial Day 1950', recall how he deployed guitar strings to hang pictures, appropriating an object that makes a sound and placing it in service of the image. And in 'Ode' he writes 'I wear my violin strings / around my neck in case I need them', and here the play on the word 'case' suggests he turns himself into a violin (and also matter-of-factly references suicide).¹⁹ The idea of the poet as instrument is a striking one, which critic Charles Molesworth refers to as follows: 'Unlike Whitman, O'Hara never sings *of* his self; rather, his self is the instrument *on* which the poet sings. More than an instrument, though, for his various selves form an ensemble...'.²⁰ O'Hara constantly questions what music represents and attempts to re-envision the part music plays in poetry.

'On the Way to the San Remo' walks the reader through a New York of images and noise. Labelle observes: 'The experience of the city sidewalk, as zone of pedestrian life, is partly shaped by a continual flood and movement of sonic activity'.²¹ And this 'sonic activity' runs throughout the poem in the noise of the vehicles, the people, the buildings, but O'Hara puts his own twist on the sonic territory of New York; I made the distinction between Eliot's 'auditory imagination' and what I refer to as the sonic imagination, and here O'Hara invites the reader to activate their sonic imagination in almost every stanza. The reader accompanies him on a walk to a literary bar and experiences a landscape where inanimate objects and abstract concepts make human sounds, a journey which results in an excess of sensory experience, Labelle writes:

As my descriptions of sidewalk acoustics suggests, the blending of all that input radically places demand on the senses, often challenging one's sense of self with an excess of public presence. The urban if anything is that condition of excess on so many levels.²²

By merging sound and the imagination, a simple walk becomes a surreal and disturbing vision of a dark New York, a vision in opposition to O'Hara's usual upbeat jaunts around the city. O'Hara transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary with each step he takes, rewriting the streets through sound and image, and as one reviewer wrote, 'He walks real boots into imaginary skies'.²³

¹⁹ 'Ode', (1954), *PR*, p. 152.

²⁰ Charles Molesworth, 'The Clear Architecture of the Nerves': The Poetry of Frank O'Hara', *Iowa Review*, (1975), 61-74, (p. 62).

²¹ LaBelle, p. 93.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²³ W. T. Scott, 'The Everyday and the Fanciful', in *Frank O'Hara to be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 4.

The ugliest poem

Critic Paul Carroll describes 'The Day Lady Died', (1959) as 'an impure poem'.²⁴ He lists a number of criticisms from various unnamed sources, including: 'Little more than boring odds and ends'; 'insipid prose'; 'top-heavy: the first four stanzas could have been deleted...'; 'banal catalogue of the poet's odyssey around New York City'; '...just plain ugly: its language dull chatter; its imagery non-existent; its description bad prose; its rhythms graceless'.²⁵ Carroll agrees with these comments and adds his own—'Listen to the clodhopper sound', before quoting the following extract, marked with metrical stresses to support his assertion:

I wálk úp the múggy streeet begínníng to sún
and háve a hámburger and a málted and búy
an úgly NÉW WÓRLD WRÍTING to sée wát the
 poéts
in Ghána are dóing these dáys

Carroll surprisingly goes on to write that the poem '...is excellent *because* of its trivia and ugliness ... Few poems look and sound uglier'.²⁶ The reader can see from the above image of Carroll's marked text that the poem cannot withstand metrical analysis. O'Hara, when judged within the parameters of metrics or of binaries like beautiful or ugly with regard to his sound will inevitably fail. But I would disagree that the poem sounds ugly and believe O'Hara's manoeuvre from silence to surface sound is actually quite beautiful. Carroll goes on to say condescendingly, 'The Day Lady Died' is 'a masterpiece in its own special way'.²⁷ Carroll's commentary highlights the difficulties critics have faced when discussing O'Hara's poems for their sound; the only way to talk about them is to refer to 'sounded structures', and as Carroll points out, because of this he '...doesn't sound like a poet'.²⁸

How then, can this poem be critiqued as a document of sound? In 'The Day Lady Died' O'Hara manipulates silence and degrees of silence. When reading a poem, sound occurs first in the mind of the reader, and absence of sound means the mind of the reader is silent, which is generally not the desired effect of a poem. Silence, however, can be a useful technique and paradoxically, in a poem, silence is also sound. From the outset of 'The Day Lady Died', O'Hara directs the

²⁴ Paul Carroll, *The Poem in Its Skin*, (Chicago: Big Table Publishing Company, 1968), p. 157.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

reader towards silence: 'It is 12.20 in New York a Friday', yet even though the direction points to what should be a busy pre-weekend lunch time, *this* New York lunchtime scene is an oddly quiet one, and 'Silence, especially in a normally noisy context, can be an extraordinarily powerful emotional acoustic event'.²⁹ The heavy sibilance of 'three days after Bastille day, yes' and a 'shoeshine', shushes the reader.³⁰ The first stanza is marked by the passage of time, four digit numbers slow the lines, which tick-tock along as O'Hara ambles through a silent New York. Several references to books reveal a reader's city. The reader watches—their mind quiet—as O'Hara flicks through the pages of poetry books and plays. The only 'noise' is the graphics, a reader's noise, in the capitalised magazine title 'NEW WORLD WRITING', newspaper, street sign and shop; Feldman describes O'Hara's incorporation of these place names in his poems as 'fragments of the city's linguistic surface'.³¹ The ordinarily outspoken Genet's play is whispered '*Le Balcon* or *Le Negres*' and the un-capitalised Ziegfield Theatre is also quiet. O'Hara's sonic dialogue too is muted, and with an untypical lack of energy to the 'I do this I do that' style, exemplified in much of his work, he tells the reader he is 'practically going to sleep'. The name of the bank teller 'Miss Stillwagon', reinforces the atmosphere of contemplation and an associative wagon stands quietly, in replacement of the ubiquitous traffic and car horns typical of O'Hara's verse. The bank teller, also infected by lethargy, cannot be bothered to look up the customer's balance. With the word 'muggy' the reader makes another associative leap as muggy weather leads to inactivity and to quietness.

Then in the final stanza, a cinematic jump cut takes the reader to the 5 SPOT nightclub; four lines and Billie Holiday's song:

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

The stillness of the street is echoed in the nightclub—this silence foreshadows the biographical snippet from Joe LeSueur who wrote how the bar that night had been uncharacteristically quiet—and the *reader* can now hear the pin-drop silence in the bar, 'while she whispered a song along the keyboard', and the voice of Holiday is low, the piano trailing, tinkling alongside it.³² A final slower

²⁹ Horowitz, p. 120.

³⁰ 'The Day Lady Died', (1959), *CP*, p. 325.

³¹ Alan Feldman, p. 68.

³² LeSueur, p. 193. LeSueur recounts how the performance described in O'Hara's poem was her last and how, 'she "whispered a song along the keyboard" at the Five Spot, "whispered" definitely being

than slow-motion line, 'to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing'. Even the name 'Mal Waldron' sounds like a record on the wrong speed, rhymed, like a song lyric, with 'everyone'. O'Hara orchestrates the poem to its finish with silence; as mentioned above, silence in an ordinarily noisy atmosphere has an ominous quality, Horowitz suggests, 'It may be that inappropriate silence ... sends signals throughout your brain that something is missing, something is wrong, preparing you for something bad'.³³ Lehman, describes how:

The sharpness of the contrast between the vitality of the living man, attending to the errands and tasks of life, and the dead singer is like a last percussive note held in an expectant stillness. The poem's breathless ending virtually enacts the death of the "first lady of the blues".³⁴

O'Hara prepares us for Holiday's death by manipulating the silence in the poem and providing an ending that has captured readers with its emotional resonance. Edward Hirsch in a back-handed compliment states 'O'Hara avails himself of some of her tragic beauty in his poem, a quality that he doesn't often capture elsewhere in his urbane, high-spirited work. It is as if Holiday lent him her tragic measure here, her bearing'.³⁵

'The Day Lady Died' ends with no full stop, the song hangs permanent, heavy, unnamed and silent in the air of the poem. Holiday's story, however, does not end with her death because her sound remains, and O'Hara, without quoting a lyric or referring to the title of the song Holiday sang invites the reader to hear her song—or what they invent as her song—in their sonic imagination. The poem's surface contains an unnamed song and part of the magic of this poem is in the way O'Hara does *not* reveal what Holiday sang. Consider for a moment the difference in the experience of the poem if a song had been named, if the 'soundtrack' of the poem had Holiday sing, 'Strange Fruit', 'Gloomy Sunday' or 'Summertime', the symbolic reverberations of each of these songs would take the reader too deeply beneath the surface and trigger an avalanche of meaning. Or consider, reading this poem, *not* having heard of Billie Holiday or knowing her style, or any of her songs, the reader still brings their own song to it, it might not have lyrics or even a tune but it plays throughout the final stanza and is heard in the distant chambers of the mind. O'Hara invites the reader to inhabit the surface of the poem, to hear *a* song and to bring their own sound and meaning.

le mot juste, since her whiny little voice could scarcely be heard, though the place was half empty and unusually quiet'.

³³ Horowitz, p. 121.

³⁴ Lehman, p. 202.

³⁵ Edward Hirsch, *The Demon and the Angel*, (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2002), p. 47.

'Invisible italics'

A discussion of O'Hara's sound would not be complete without some consideration of how he read his poems. I will, therefore, critique the long poem, 'For the Chinese New Year & for Bill Berkson', ('CNY'), (1961) from a dual perspective of page and audio recording.³⁶ 'CNY' has O'Hara's signature informality in its narration and diction; the only punctuation—also not unusual for the poet—apostrophes, speech-marks, dashes, make it a fast-moving poem. It opens with an epigraph of the rhymed final stanza of D. H. Lawrence's poem 'Tommyes on the Train', a formal poem with a regular four-line stanza and ABBA rhyme scheme throughout.³⁷ O'Hara's poem has a regular five-line stanza and un-patterned slant rhymes. Lawrence's subject is the First World War and O'Hara's is a post-war, Cold War and pre-war poem; it moves through ideas of conflict, in reality, and as an inevitable and recurring event written across the poem, you might say the spectre of impending war can be felt within its lines.

I have touched upon O'Hara's performance style, his conviction that he was a poor reader, and how others believed his delivery was not accomplished. Perloff for example, whose statement I have already partially quoted, thought, 'O'Hara was not ... a particularly good reader of his own poetry. Like Williams, he wrote primarily for the eye rather than the ear'.³⁸ Though, there are contradictory views: listeners who recognised the shortcomings of O'Hara's style but not the sound of his voice, such as Ron Padgett:

I was surprised by how formal Frank was when he read his poems at the Eisner-Lubin Auditorium at N.Y.U. one Sunday afternoon. He read with a dry dignity I found inappropriate, but the beauty of his voice, the part he couldn't disguise, was compensation, a voice that often reminded me of bourbon and smoke, nightclubs, a phone call that changes your life, and warmth.³⁹

And others who thought his voice 'lacked resonance' but that his reading style was engaging, as in Joe LeSueur's assessment:

I liked to hear Frank read his poems, and I think a lot of other people did, too. Even with a voice that was nasal, lacked resonance, and had a curious Yankee twang to it, he was a consummate reader who had no trouble holding his audience.⁴⁰

³⁶ 'For the Chinese New Year and Bill Berkson', (1961), *CP*, pp. 389-393; *VP*, the audio recording under consideration is from the *Voice of the Poet* series.

³⁷ D.H. Lawrence, 'Tommyes on a Train', from the bibliographic record: Harriet Monroe, ed. (1860-1936). 'Poetry: A Magazine of Verse', 1912-22 <<http://www.bartleby.com/300/1491.html>> [accessed 9 August 2014].

³⁸ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, pp. 116-117.

³⁹ Ron Padgett, 'Six Memories of Frank', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bollinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 132-133 (pp. 132-133).

⁴⁰ LeSueur, p. 265.

Though it is not within the parameters of this study to do an in-depth analysis of poetry readings, I believe the recordings of O'Hara offer a valuable perspective on the written text and reveal how the poet was invested in the sound and delivery of his poems.⁴¹ James Schuyler described how O'Hara's conversation was 'self-propelling and one idea, or anecdote, or *bon mot* was fuel to his own fire, inspiring him verbally to blaze ahead, that curious voice rising and falling, full of invisible italics'.⁴² And this quality is evident in the reading of 'CNY' and adds another dimension to the written text. Lesley Wheeler in her book *Voicing American Poetry* argues, 'voiced texts are as important as textual voices'.⁴³ And 'CNY' is a good example of how the 'voiced text' can illuminate the 'textual voice', and how in the recitation of this poem we hear the realisation of a sound that is testimony to the poet's attention to delivery, voice, and the fine-tuning of an auditory experience carefully executed for the benefit of the listener, and while not dramatic—O'Hara expressed disapproval of such readings, referring for example to Dylan Thomas's 'over-emotional and semi-hysterical readings...'—the poem nonetheless has an abundance of what Schuyler referred to as 'invisible italics'.⁴⁴ The recording of 'CNY', is, therefore, a rich sonic document that enacts the distinctive areas of O'Hara's poetic, such as intonation, voice and voices, dialogue, presence, speed and the control of pace, and as such is a valuable resource for the critic.

The recording begins with O'Hara reading Lawrence's words, he reads them carefully, emphatically, pausing at the line ends, and his diction is precise and formal. There is a noticeable change in his voice, tone and delivery when he launches into his own much more conversational lines. O'Hara's style at the start, however, is one of restraint, a little nervousness, he even fumbles the words of the second stanza, but as the poem progresses his confidence increases and by the second and third sections he is comfortably in character/s, and performs the variety of voices and back and forth sonic dialogues with vitality and enthusiasm.

'CNY' is another walking poem, and like 'On the Way to the San Remo', depicts a night-time walk through New York on the Chinese New Year that is filled with menace; indeed Jason Lagapa's reading draws parallels with the horror movie

⁴¹ Gooch, p. 431. Gooch points out that in the later years, O'Hara's readings improved, 'With so much practice he had gradually grown out of his earlier dry, arch Anglo reading style toward a chattier, more conversational tone'.

⁴² James Schuyler, 'Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters (excerpts)', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bolinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 82-83 (p. 82).

⁴³ Wheeler, Lesley, *Voicing American Poetry*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 3.

⁴⁴ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, pp. 60-61.

genre.⁴⁵ In the opening section, 'behind New York there is a face', it is 'red', 'strange', 'hateful' and 'I became a child again', youth is voiced in alliterative, stammering syntax 'it is perhaps the period that ends / the problem as a preposition of days of days'. This repetitive, faltering syntax is repeated sporadically throughout the poem. As elsewhere, in O'Hara's poems, images are on double duty:

then the parallel becomes an eagle parade
of Busby Berkeleyites marching marching half-toe

In this reference to the wholesome Busby Berkeley musicals of the golden age of Hollywood, O'Hara's feathered dancing girls are eagles, (the third Reich adopted the eagle as a national symbol), the choreography of the dancers is merged with a military-style repetition and rhythm, 'marching marching half-toe'. LaBelle suggests 'the rhythmic pulsing and physical exertion of marching in time and collectively literally composes sound and the body into a larger disciplinary system', and in O'Hara's lines, therefore, the sugary image and sound of the musical dissolve into the image and sound of fascism.⁴⁶

With an allusion to Rupert Brooke: '...Where is sunny England/and those fields where they stillbirth wars...', O'Hara invites the reader to recall the well-known First World War poem.⁴⁷ The word 'stillbirth' also is a reminder of the 'sonic suspensions' described by Seiler in reference to O'Hara's early war poems, where war was silent and 'still' like the poet's work in SONAR. Historic references are interspersed with up-to-the-minute conflict and anticipated conflict, and in sonic dialogues inflected with angst, fear for the future and the hopeless inevitability and culpability of 'my "generation"': 'we are going to blow it up like daddy did'.

The shadow of destruction is re-enacted through surface layered mechanical sounds where:

the inscrutable passage of a lawn mower punctuates
the newly installed Muzack in the Shubert Theatre am I nuts
or is this the happiest moment of my life...

The domestic existence of the American citizen is characterised by the noises of everyday life, of technological advances that represent an ugly-sounding

⁴⁵ Jason Lagapa, 'Parading the Undead: Camp, Horror and Reincarnation in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara and John Yau', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33, (Winter 2010) 92-113 (p. 99).

⁴⁶ LaBelle, p. 116.

⁴⁷ Rupert Brooke, 'The Soldier', (1914); the opening stanza of Brooke's poem which is the inspiration behind O'Hara's line: 'those fields where they still birth wars', begins: 'If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England. There shall be / In that rich earth a richer dust concealed; / A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,' <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/13076>> (accessed 4 September 2016).

progress. The words 'lawn mower' produce a constellation of associations: of domesticity, white-picket fences and the American dream but the sound is as 'inscrutable' or unreadable as the 'Muzack' which despite its newness also 'clashes/cuts' (as Muzack is wont to do), and newness, of course, becomes a negative here, characterised by passive hearing and not active listening, a musical aberration that undermines the pure authentic sounds of both Schubert and the theatre. LaBelle attributes the spread of muzack (which was originally designed for the workplace) to:

the emergence of a domestic culture seeking stability against the malaise of the economic depression followed by the social intensities of the Second World War ... If music has the ability to effect psychology, and so support the fatigue of psychological expenditure, can we hear Muzak as a form of environmental conditioning to aid in the general mood of the populace.⁴⁸

Muzack for O'Hara represents a dehumanising of the population by the negation of the real emotions generated by actual music. The narrator's ironic sonic dialogue cuts in, 'am I nuts / or is this the happiest moment of my life...', which in the audio is delivered in the exaggerated over-excited intonations typical of the Hollywood romantic comedies. O'Hara scatters sonic dialogues reminiscent of movie lines throughout the poem, 'what do you do with a kid like me'; 'you sure don't know much about war-guilt or nothing', these lines are delivered in hybrid movie voices with tones ranging from a melodramatic James Dean style to John Wayne bravado.

An image is accompanied by the hint of a sound, an association in 'the soft air wraps me like a swarm', swarm being a resonant word, a word with strong associative possibilities, the discerning reader will hear the word, see the image in the mind's eye, the sheer mass of it physically and the volume of it audibly. Leech explains:

The connection is made not via the ear alone, but through the little understood pathways of empathy and synaesthesia.⁴⁹

Later this image is escalated to the next level in the penultimate stanza's reference to locusts with both their harsher sound and connotations of threat and biblical plague. The poem contains a variety of surface sounds, including Chinese wind-bells and O'Hara's ubiquitous horns, which are rendered here through 'stranded / ships honking their horns full of joy-seeking cadets in bloomers ... must they cheer while they honk'. And once again in an O'Hara

⁴⁸ LaBelle, p. 173.

⁴⁹ Leech, p. 97.

reading, an actual horn can be heard in the fourteenth stanza, it sounds assertively but seems to go unnoticed.

In the following stanza, another shift takes place where the reader becomes aware of the writer and of writing:

I wonder if I've really scrutinized this experience like
 you're supposed to have if you can type there's not much
 soup left on my sleeve energy creativity guts ponderableness
 lent is coming in imponderableness "I'd like to die smiling" ugh
 and a very small tiptoe is crossing the threshold away

We are invited into the writer's world; to feel the rhythm of thought, the rhythm of O'Hara typing and be part of the poem as it comes into being, as it materialises before our eyes and ears as we read—from the mind, through his arms (sleeve stained with soup), through his fingers as he types his way out of thoughts into words and sounds, we feel his 'ponderableness' and 'imponderableness', and hear his optimistic sonic dialogue "'I'd like to die smiling'", a cliché met by a disgusted 'ugh' a reaction not worthy of speech marks, and closely followed by familiar (for O'Hara) footsteps in the 'small tiptoe is crossing the threshold away'; the light steps, emphasised by the final rising rhythm of the word 'away', move us beyond and away into the next stanza to experience another shift with the dramatic event of the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, (1961) the first democratically elected leader of the Democratic Republic of Congo. And for this the sound of the poem takes a radical turn, 'whither Lumumba whither oh whither Gauguin', this strange and incantatory repetition—delivered with a mock Shakespearean flourish on the audio—might trivialise the event in the hands of a lesser poet, but here the repetition is simultaneously mournful, songlike and in tribute.

I mentioned the absence of punctuation, but in O'Hara's reading, he adds punctuation throughout. To read the poem from the page in the same way as O'Hara reads it aloud is, therefore, impossible. In particular, several back and forth dialogues are documented in the text without any speech marks. In this respect, we have two poems that work in their own way, but each in a different way. The three sections in the poem are marked from the first to the second by an increased energy of delivery, which gives way in the final section to a heightened exuberance in the recitation. The line lengths of each section increase physically on the page; the poem becomes more urgent with an increased breathlessness to the longer lines, as the typing becomes more intense and relentless, until the last single (shorter) line stanza, where a faltering monosyllabic syntax takes over, and breath runs out in a dramatic

proclamation following a sequence which repeats 'no...' six times, then the final line, 'you will not die not knowing this is true this year', is pronounced deliberately and emphatically in the recording, 'you-will-not-die-not-knowing-this-is-true-this-year' (punctuation mine). Geoff Ward describes the last three lines of the poem as a 'snarled and snarling termination'.⁵⁰ From the reference in the opening section to Sibelius (where O'Hara sees a face that is not the composer), 'CNY' has parallels to a musical composition, building gradually to a crescendo in the third, and like O'Hara's reference to Tchaikovsky's symphony ending in a sob, the poet ends what has been a fluent, tumultuous movement through radically varied stanzas, to the final odd sounding double-negative delivered in heavy broken syntax.

The story of a sound

'Poem' (Lana Turner has collapsed!), (1962) is one of O'Hara's best known and quoted poems. On first reading, the poem resists technical analysis; though witty and engaging, there appears to be nothing of significance to note about technique or sound. One reviewer asserts, 'It's funny enough, but maybe silly and perhaps to like it is to be duped by the charlatantry of modern poetry'.⁵¹ But, he goes on to concede:

There's a lot more (the craftsmanship of participles, so consistent, and, say, the slanted rime of head/hard, too) but that will do ... Here is a poet infatuated with the music of words, rime, metre ... but his instrument is usually a hurdy-gurdy'.⁵²

The reviewer recognises some craftsmanship, but his 'that will do' suggests though O'Hara is 'infatuated with the music of words...', his poetry does not justify too much attention being given to technical matters, indeed it seems the reviewer has started something he cannot finish. To liken O'Hara's music to a hurdy-gurdy, an instrument with 'a droning sound' makes it clear that this reviewer does not think an in-depth analysis of the poet's sound would reap rewards.⁵³

Yet, this whole poem is a sonic dialogue:

Poem

Lana Turner has collapsed!
I was trotting along and suddenly

⁵⁰ Geoff Ward, *Statutes of Liberty: The New York School of Poets*, 2nd edn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 48.

⁵¹ Alan Axelrod, 'Frank O'Hara's Work Early and Found', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp.77-84 (p. 79).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵³ Google dictionary definition <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=hurdy+gurdy&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab&gfe_rd=cr&ei=rz-jV4mkAoeDaKjWqBg> [accessed 4 August 2016].

it started raining and snowing
 and you said it was hailing
 but hailing hits you on the head
 hard so it was really snowing and
 raining and I was in such a hurry
 to meet you but the traffic
 was acting exactly like the sky
 and suddenly I see a headline
 LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!
 there is no snow in Hollywood
 there is no rain in California
 I have been to lots of parties
 and acted perfectly disgraceful
 but I never actually collapsed
 oh Lana Turner we love you get up⁵⁴

The back-story to the composition illustrates the poet's 'I do this I do that' method. At an event with Robert Lowell on Staten Island, O'Hara explained to the audience how he had composed the poem on the ferry to the venue. He had seen the Lana Turner headline on a newsstand earlier, it also happened to be snowing. The Staten Island reading was not recorded, although in two other recordings O'Hara reads 'Poem' in an upbeat manner and on both occasions the audience laugh appreciatively at its close. Lowell took the stage after O'Hara had read for an hour instead of his allotted twenty-minute set, peevishly stated he would only read for a few minutes and apologised for not having written *his* poem on the way to the venue. The two poets had a radically different philosophy about both writing and the art form itself. Gooch's account suggests they actively disliked each other because of it, though LeSueur maintains it was Lowell's poetry that O'Hara did not like and not Lowell personally.⁵⁵ Though the two poets were on opposite sides of the 'keyboard of sound' in the way they wrote poems, emphatic distinctions are problematic when we try to assess poets' respective methods.⁵⁶ Sound cannot be viewed only as a formal consideration, and to compare a formal poet like Lowell and a free verse poet like O'Hara, asking: 'do they or don't they use metre or rhyme or assonance?', is unproductive. Sound in poetry (or any literary work) is about style as well as technique.

'Poem' for the twenty-first century reader is a story of a lost New York, a lost sound, as are many of O'Hara's poems. 'Poem' contains a number of traits that form the basis of the themes of the poet's sound, namely: the significance of walking, its relationship to the city, to nature, the documentation of internal and

⁵⁴ 'Poem', (1962), *CP*, p. 449.

⁵⁵ Gooch, pp. 386-387; LeSueur, p. 265.

⁵⁶ Nims, p. 159.

external voices, dialogues and narratives. 'Poem' is a perfect example of surface sound and much more. The quick-fire method of composition, as documented by Gooch, demonstrates O'Hara's ability to embed sound perhaps unintentionally.

Edward Mendelson argues:

He's playing every variation he possibly can on a line with three stresses on it, with the trimeter line, deliberately making every line different ... making metrical moves that are clearly very careful imitations of the theme he is talking about...⁵⁷

This poem is not a trimeter, and counting serves no purpose here as O'Hara's moves are often invisible to the eye (though not the ear). The narrator is 'trotting along', the trimeter typically is a trot, fast-moving; a famous trimeter is Theodore Roethke's 'My Papa's Waltz', (1942) where the rhythm imitates the one/two/three beat of the waltz.⁵⁸ Strict adherence to the trimeter can result in a nursery rhyme feel to a poem and here there is a sense of playfulness but it is muted and ultimately saved by its irregularities.

Sounds tell a story. LaBelle documents how in the contemporary urban soundscape:

...an entire history and culture can be found within a single sound; from its source to its destination sound is generative of a diverse range of experiences, as well as remaining specifically tied to a given context, as a deeper expressive and prolonged figure of culture.⁵⁹

Though LaBelle's theories on the urban soundscape are not founded in poetry, they can be used in the analysis of the sound component of O'Hara's poetic and illuminate what he manages to achieve through his poems, namely to make 'sound a significant model for ... thinking and experiencing the contemporary condition'.⁶⁰ O'Hara's work is filled with the city sounds he listened to each day. At the same time, the reader experiences the noise of the 'rain hitting the head hard', the short staccato language and the hard consonant sounds of the 'traffic/ ... acting exactly like the sky', the reader also *listens* to a headline from half a century ago, which shouts: 'LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!'. One wistful critic writes, the headline:

...stuck in my head the first time I read [it] and I'd like to go ahead and claim it is attractive to everyone. It's got the rhythm of a protest slogan but it's sad and beautiful. If chanted it would make for a sad and

⁵⁷ Edward Mendelson and Sasha Weiss, *Edward Mendelson on Frank O'Hara* [podcast], New York Review of Books, 15 September 2008 <<http://media.nybooks.com/091508-mendelson.mp3>> [accessed 28 March 2016].

⁵⁸ Theodore Roethke, 'My Papa's Waltz', (1942), on Poetry Foundation <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43330>> [accessed 13 February 2014].

⁵⁹ LaBelle, p. xvi.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

beautiful demonstration. Anyway then you get this exquisite breathless thing ... then he says it again, this time all in caps ... Then it's liturgy.⁶¹

The experience described here is a heard experience, she does not simply read it, she hears it and through the sonic imagination, it becomes for her, a 'chant', an 'exquisite breathless thing', and 'he says it again' and it takes on the significance of a liturgy. The technique O'Hara uses here is concerned with guiding the reader's attention, he does this by imitating the way *his* attention was captured by the headline: '...stimulus-based attention is about grabbing and redirecting your attention from elsewhere ... The redirection of attention based on a stimulus requires that something be novel and sudden—in other words startling'.⁶² O'Hara opens his poem with this technique, 'Lana Turner has collapsed!' And immediately he has our attention. O'Hara moves us away from the statement, only to repeat it again later as a headline: 'LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!'. His 'I do this I do that' poems seem to point to little craft, however, I want to highlight Terrell Scott Herring's comments about the structure of 'Poem', he explains: 'Following the climactic encounter with the newspaper, the poem inverts the action that came before'; he clarifies:

Turner's fall
 Speaker's walk
 Snow
 Rain
 New York
 LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!
 California
 No snow
 No rain
 Speaker's composure
 Turner's rise⁶³

In this insightful observation, where Herring points out the chiasmic structure of the poem we see the charges against O'Hara and the 'charlatany of modern poetry' as quoted at the outset of this section, are called into question. In this upended vision of New York, imagined one might assume from Turner's vantage point on the ground, 'the traffic was acting exactly like the sky'; LaBelle posits a theory he calls 'the poetics of the sky', where the sky becomes:

...the point of departure not only for imagining but for sound as well, to leave behind the underground, the streets and sidewalks, even the home and the city, to leap into the void above and into the medium by which sound becomes.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Jennifer, Michael Hecht, 'What Frank O'Hara Means to Me', *Mississippi Review*, 31 (2003), 149-61 (p. 151).

⁶² Horowitz, p. 110.

⁶³ Terrell Scott Herring, 'Frank O'Hara's Open Closet', *PMLA*, 117 (2002), 414-427 (p. 421).

⁶⁴ LaBelle, p. 204.

The reader hears the sky, through the layering of sound references and the manipulation of structure and language—the seven 'ings' for instance in the weather sequence—reminds us of O'Hara's remark about Philip Guston's paintings and 'the marvellous burgeoning into life of their surfaces'. When O'Hara used these words it was to describe a painting, but this surface life is what he creates in his poems, the city poems suggest through their *surface sound* a 'marvellous burgeoning into life'; readers of 'Poem' hurry along with O'Hara as the onslaught of rain/snow/hail hit our collective heads. The poet's exuberance and engagement transfer to the reader and make the reader feel part of his soundscape.⁶⁵

O'Hara's poems are often centred around the walker's trajectory through the landscape. Specifically, in this instance, O'Hara's journey along the sidewalk to meet the 'you' of the poem. The sidewalk in O'Hara is a recurring location.

LaBelle suggests:

As an essential site for contact, the sidewalk resounds with acoustical expressions aimed at or initiated by the walking body. The interlocking of steps and forces of inscription, as the dynamism aligning the body and location, opens up to rhythmical expressions.⁶⁶

O'Hara enters into a dialogue with his landscape, where '...the walking body carves out within the environment a sort of refuge for making contact or for cultivating an explicit orchestration'.⁶⁷ O'Hara's poems act as a site for wide-ranging sonic activity, sonic ideas and associations, external *and* internal, for the narrator and the reader. The poet walks as if he holds a hand-held camera, in much the same way as the French New Wave film directors did; he captures what he sees, what he hears. O'Hara hears the sounds of the landscape, the rain, hail, traffic and *he* becomes another sound *within* the landscape, he speaks to the landscape, he speaks to the 'you' of the poem. But who is the 'you' of the poem? Practically, the 'you' would appear to represent the myriad friends and acquaintances that O'Hara makes his way towards, but I think the reader, in some small way, suspends disbelief so that for the duration of the poem *they* also become the 'you':

I was trotting along and suddenly
it started raining and snowing
and YOU said it was hailing

And O'Hara's observations about the weather are corrected in the reader's train of thought, 'but rain and snow *is* hail', and he answers 'but hailing hits you on

⁶⁵ 'Growth and Guston', *AC*, pp. 134-141 (p. 141).

⁶⁶ LaBelle, p. 89.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

the head / hard'; as Lehman observes: 'his poetry sounds like someone is alive and talking to you'.⁶⁸

David Herd in his essay 'Stepping Out with Frank O'Hara', (2010) argues the footstep is a trope and the step itself 'is integral to his thinking, that in thinking he steps, that in stepping he thinks', and points out how the poet literally uses the word 'steps' many times throughout his poems.⁶⁹ Herd posits the step as a metrical equivalent to demonstrate ultimately how O'Hara 'insist[s], always on poetry's own measure'.⁷⁰ Herd's idea of O'Hara's 'own measure' is convincing though it deals ostensibly with the notion of rhythm (albeit an irregular one) and not sound, indeed Herd asserts '...these days in British universities not least, it is good to give thought to the matter of measure'.⁷¹ O'Hara does make his own (irregular) rhythms, as pointed out by Mendelson and Herd, but he also has sounds punctuate or accompany his rhythms, which leads to the continual interaction of rhythm and sound.

I have already discussed in some detail the inadequacy of poetry criticism to discuss certain aspects of sound. Consider, for example, how many sounds are now extinct, absent from our contemporary or personal 'vocabulary'. The sounds of 1950s and '60s America: the swish of a shoe shine, the call of a newsvendor, the vintage car engine are no longer available to us, in the same way twenty-first century sounds were not available to O'Hara: the mobile phone ringtone, the muffled songs of a stranger's *iPod*, the contemporary car engine. In referring to the Staten Island reading, I also refer to a lost sound, one which was heard in the past but is no longer available to us, was never available to us, of O'Hara's voice and Lowell's voice saying the specific words they said. LaBelle describes how: '...in traveling away from itself, sound is picked up elsewhere, overheard, carried forward, or brought back, through memories and recordings'.⁷² And we are, therefore, left with something equally precious, the story of a sound, recreated un-specifically, even falsely, first through Gooch's words, then in our imagination where we can hear the lost sound for ourselves.

⁶⁸ The Best American Poetry, 2013 <http://blog.bestamericanpoetry.com/the_best_american_poetry/2013/05/mark-doty-and-david-lehman-talk-about-frank-ohara-.html> [accessed 21 April 2016].

⁶⁹ David Herd, 'Stepping Out with Frank O'Hara' in *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2010), pp. 70-85 (p. 71).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷¹ Herd, p. 72.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

CONCLUSION

'MY POEMS SPEAK ON THE SILVER OF YOUR EYES'

Following a period when O'Hara had not written, he broke his silence with the poem, 'In Memory of My Feelings', (1956) it opens:¹

My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent
and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets.²

Here the quietness (or the absence of sound) becomes tangible and contains the poet, but he is 'transparent' or intangible in his silence; he does not walk, an activity so intrinsically linked with the composition of his poems, he is carried, unable to speak.

At the outset I listed the four components of O'Hara's poetic which Perloff documented in 1977; this thesis has introduced, explored and defined a fifth exciting characteristic, sound. Sound in poetry is mysterious. The best poems are inexplicable, indescribable, they not only appeal to the intellect but also to the senses and imagination; they make us feel. O'Hara's poems have made his readers feel for over sixty years, and admirers of his work remember and hold them in their heads and hearts because poetry is not mathematics, and formulas cannot explain its power. Books about sound in poetry try to explain it by listing effects, but the way sound works in a poem cannot be summarised in a glossary.

O'Hara is playful; he tests, delights in, experiments and makes sounds for the pure auditory pleasure of them. But these forays into auditory playfulness are sporadic; a quiet poem often bursts into sound midway, as if the poet were warming up—'playing the typewriter'—then drifts into subdued reverie as it closes, or as Koestenbaum suggests, 'A Frank O'Hara poem begins with a bang. That bang—that crash of self-announcement ("I'm here!")—may be followed by some whimpers, some lists, some further bangs, and then an instantaneous disappearance'.³ As such, the poems can resemble musical compositions made up of episodes where each marks a change in pace, content or tone, and consequently in sound.⁴ As with music, these changes are stimulating and often

¹ Gooch, p. 283.

² 'In Memory of My Feelings', (1956), *CP*, pp. 252-257 (p. 252).

³ Koestenbaum, (unpaginated).

⁴ 'An element found in music that is a digression from the main structure of the composition. It is a passage that is not a part of the main theme groups of a composition, but is an ornamental or

signal the sections which make the listener feel most deeply. They make the mind ask, what happened, which creates a pause on each hearing. Or they are like the volta in a sonnet—but where a sonnet turns in content or meaning and asks of the reader that they reconsider what has been said in a new light—O'Hara's poems often turn unexpectedly into playful, unexpected or meditative sound. This volta in sound pushes the reader out of the groove they believed the poem had created. O'Hara's rhythms, however, stand in opposition to the music of poetry. For O'Hara, it is not simply melodious sounds that are worthy of inclusion, but all sounds.

Consistency is not a quality of O'Hara's poems, or of his sound, but his characteristic inconsistency adds to the surprise and enjoyment of them, and I believe the element of surprise is key to his appeal. For the critic, the question is how to explain poems like these; the traditional tools to measure sound are not appropriate for O'Hara, simply because his poetic is not one of patterns. Adjectives like sporadic, inconsistent and uneven are all words that have been used to describe O'Hara's poems and none of these words are typically used to compliment a poet, but why not? Because, as an art form, poetry's god is control; O'Hara's poetic does not hinge on control or on the offspring of control, coherence. O'Hara's sound *is* sporadic but no less worthy of attention because of it. Discussions about metre often refer to the natural beats of nature, the rise and fall of the breath, the ebb and flow of the tide, the way the iambic line is the human being's natural speech length, but what about unnatural sounds? The unplanned, the surprise, the jump, the jolt, the car horn, the cough, the impromptu hum, or the song that someone starts to sing, forgets the words, and trails off; a song that when sung tunelessly by a loved one can be more authentically beautiful in that moment than an opera or Shakespearean sonnet. In 'Joe's Jacket', (1959) O'Hara writes:

a somnolent envy of inertia makes me rise naked and go to the window
where the car horn mysteriously starts to honk, no one is there
and Kenneth comes and stops it in the soft green lightless stars
and we are soon in the Paris of Kenneth's libretto...⁵

O'Hara's 'music' is generated from unlikely sources and there is a place in his poems for anything that can be heard. It is this authenticity of sound that O'Hara strives for and achieves.

constructive section added to the main elements of the composition'. Artopium Library
<<http://musicterms.artopium.com/e/Episode.htm>> [accessed 21 June 2016].

⁵ 'Joe's Jacket', (1959), *CP*, pp. 329-330 (p. 329).

Central to O'Hara's sound is the way he transcribes the rhythms of the city to resemble the unnatural and discordant undulations of its soundscape. Of course, it is not our city that we hear, but a lost city belonging to a lost poet, whose voice we also hear in the poems. Labelle points out, 'The question becomes not so much to seek the original sound, in pure form, but to hear it within history, through an extended ear', and through the imaginative reach of the reader and their 'extended ear', the lost-ness of O'Hara is found and becomes a powerfully attractive force in his poems.⁶

The absence of significant critical attention to sound in O'Hara's poems over the last five decades might suggest that the subject does not warrant scholarly attention. But while sound is not O'Hara's most obvious characteristic, it is a quality so intrinsic to the experience of a poem that in order to evaluate a poet's poetic it should not be overlooked. The small number of critics who have discussed O'Hara's sound—and none have focussed solely upon it—have looked at sporadic examples of embedded sound effects, but as already stated, the unpatterned nature of his poetry make analysis of metrics, rhyme and assonance unproductive. Therefore, critics have largely avoided sound altogether. I have applied my theories about surface sound, sonic dialogues and the sonic imagination in the previous three chapters and these terms present alternative possibilities from which to consider and hear O'Hara's poems. These observations are new to O'Hara studies and provide a vehicle from which to expand the subject of sound. Imaginative use of sound and O'Hara's invitation to the reader to use *their* imagination are crucial. O'Hara wrote for an engaged reader and his manoeuvres with sound require active participation. Careful listening to the poems will be rewarded. But measuring surface sound and monitoring the sonic imagination will always be more difficult to evaluate than a metrical pattern or a vowel sequence because it is primarily a reader's sound and not a critic's. The results are nonetheless equally engaging and pleasurable. This is O'Hara's technique; invisible technique is O'Hara's technique.

When I began this project, Perloff's words were constantly on my mind: O'Hara 'wrote primarily for the eye rather than the ear'.⁷ This thesis, drawing on O'Hara's poetry and critical writings, challenges Perloff's statement, arguing that he also wrote for the ear. The goal was to reveal the gap in the critical discourse on sound and in order to achieve this it was necessary to address the broad range of O'Hara's manoeuvres with sound to reveal, if nothing else, that there

⁶ LaBelle, p.108.

⁷ Perloff, *Poet Among Painters*, p. 117.

are a broad range of manoeuvres *to* consider. There is scope, therefore, to expand the subject in various areas, including the relationship to the cinema, the imagination, voice, the dynamic between the written text and the archive of the poet's readings, and perhaps most notably, the influence of music and the way O'Hara's poems can be compared to the way a composer creates, organises and conducts a musical composition. O'Hara's poems are his music, but they are not measured by the metronome. The following from Keith Flynn, though not written about O'Hara, is a perfect description of the poet's engagement with sound:

The poem and its sound have always walked together—one inside the other. The poet wears his music like a skin, and his poem is the force the music exerts. To produce a perfect sound, one has to abandon oneself to the making of it.⁸

O'Hara abandoned himself to the making of his sound and it is inseparable from his poems. That O'Hara's sound sprees are barely acknowledged by critics is curious, though can be simply explained, O'Hara himself directed their attention away from sound. This is not a bad thing because critics have unearthed a diversity of material to enrich the critical discourse on the poet.

This thesis is not only about O'Hara, but about how we read, hear and listen to poems and how sound merges with the imagination. Poems are not usually written for critics, nor are they invitations to analyse, deconstruct, define or determine meaning; poems are written for readers. One of the early reviewers of O'Hara wrote '...he is great fun to read, I must urge the review-reader not to slide over that praise as innocuous in consideration of the rarity with which one can say that of a book of poems'.⁹ In O'Hara's poems, you do not have to dig for sound or excavate patterns; it is presented on the surface and 'in the moment': here it is, *life*, enjoy it, it will soon be over. Memory, O'Hara writes in one of his poems, 'is a soundless ruin'; surface sound, therefore, is about both the present and about presence.¹⁰ Labelle describes sound in the way O'Hara used it: 'sound impart[s] a feeling for intimacy: sound is already mine and not mine—I cannot hold it for long, nor can I arrest all its itinerant energy. Sound is *promiscuous*'.¹¹ O'Hara's sound celebrates its promiscuity, his poems represent liberation from his era's strait-laced formulas, the sounds of the poet's time did not follow

⁸ Keith Flynn, *The Rhythm Method, Razzmatazz, and Memory*, (Ohio: Writers Digest Books, 2007), p. 227.

⁹ W. T. Scott, 'The Everyday and the Fanciful', in *Frank O'Hara to be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 4.

¹⁰ 'Ode on Saint Cecilia's Day', (1950), *CP*, pp. 27-29 (p. 28).

¹¹ LaBelle, p. xvii.

patterns and they are as unpredictable as the car horns honking their way into his poetry readings.

Lehman says of O'Hara, 'his poetry sounds like someone is alive and talking to you'; I have written briefly about how O'Hara was not an accomplished reader and did not particularly like formal readings, and yet an element of performance is already written into the lines of his poems, a performance that plays itself out when the reader hears them.¹² O'Hara's poems are charismatic. Presence is the foundation of charisma and is one of the most positive adjectives (from a long list of dismissive ones) that has been repeatedly applied to O'Hara, and it is this presence that accounts for his appeal. O'Hara's poetic is one of surface, of transience, of movement, of presence and disappearance, so the search for meaning will inevitably always miss something, and as critic Jennifer Hecht points out, when his poem's close, 'That's the end, the poem resolves nothing, but it was a good chum while it lasted'.¹³

I titled my thesis 'As obvious as an ear' because O'Hara's sound *is* obvious, so obvious that at times it troubles critical approaches. Since criticism strives to avoid what is obvious in literature, this can be problematic when analysing O'Hara's poetry. 'Biotherm', (1961-62) one of O'Hara's final longer poems, for example, is mind-boggling in its manoeuvres from stanza to stanza, each section like a musical episode that sounds slightly different or even radically different from the previous one, with no coherent narrative or meaning to illuminate the auditory effects, a poem Joe LeSueur described as:

...written for other poets, clever, dry, experimental, obscure, arcane, inaccessible, no lines to cherish and commit to memory, nothing to move and stir the reader.¹⁴

Yet it is still a deeply satisfying poem. And O'Hara's *Collected Poems* contain poem after poem with intriguing sound that curiously resist analysis. But ultimately, this is what makes O'Hara's poems great and compels readers to return to them. Critics' tools for measuring sound will never fully explain an O'Hara poem. But the difficulty in describing the sound of 'Biotherm' does not dilute the effects O'Hara creates in this and other poems, nor should critics' inability to explain or even identify what he does with sound become a judgement on the quality or effectiveness of his practice. Sound cannot be easily paraphrased, explained or defined, and it is not a puzzle to solve. Poets with an

¹² The Best American Poetry, 2013 <http://blog.bestamericanpoetry.com/the_best_american_poetry/2013/05/mark-doty-and-david-lehman-talk-about-frank-ohara-> [accessed 21 April 2016].

¹³ Hecht, 149-161 (p. 156).

¹⁴ 'Biotherm', (1961-62), *CP*, pp. 436-448; LeSueur, p. 238.

ear for sound are engaging, we know they are doing something, they surprise us, we become hooked, curious about where they will lead us, they make us feel good. But we do not know why; there is no name for it and this is why sound is where the poem's real power lies:

All that matters about poetry is the enjoyment of it ... You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it technically tick, and say to yourself, when the works are laid out before you, the vowels, the consonants, the rhymes or rhythms, "Yes, this is it. This is why the poem moves me so. It is because of the craftsmanship." But you're back again where you began.¹⁵

The sound of a poem comes from the page to the reader through individual words, through the combination of words, from embedded sound, surface sound, associative sounds, dialogue, from surprise and, perhaps most revealingly, from the reader's imagination. The possibilities for sound are many, but serious study of sound in poetry is narrow and covers only embedded effects. Poetry *is* sound. O'Hara's publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti describes poetry as:

...a sofa full of blind singers who have put aside their canes ... Poetry is the sound of summer in the rain and of people laughing behind closed shutters down a narrow street.¹⁶

With these disparate images, Ferlinghetti attempts to capture the spirit of sound but ultimately illustrates the impossibility of effectively describing it. What is clear is that the imaginative use of sound stimulates the reader's imagination and makes them alive to the possibilities a poet suggests in their work, and these possibilities stay in the memory long after the words have gone. Poetry was always an oral art form, and even after it became so firmly fixed 'between pages', it still comes to us as an auditory experience. Lesley Wheeler writes, 'To address sound in poetry is to invoke a body—whether the body belongs to the poet, the audience, or both'.¹⁷ LaBelle suggests sound:

...opens up a field of interaction, to become a channel, a fluid, a flux of voice and urgency, of play and drama, of mutuality and sharing, to ultimately carve out a micro-geography of the moment, while always already disappearing...¹⁸

Each one of the qualities listed here could equally be applied to O'Hara's poems. The essence of O'Hara's poems *is* their sound. Because whatever the reader hears *is* the poem's sound. Schafer explains the power of hearing:

¹⁵ Dylan Thomas, 'Poetic Manifesto', in *The Poet's Work*, ed. by Reginald Gibbons, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 184-190 (p. 190).

¹⁶ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, in *The Bloodaxe Book of Poetry Quotations* ed. by Dennis O'Driscoll, (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2006), p. 13, (the original quotation appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, 16 January 2016).

¹⁷ Wheeler, p. 23.

¹⁸ LaBelle, p. xvii.

Touch is the most personal of the senses. Hearing and touch meet where the lower frequencies of audible sound pass over to tactile vibrations ... Hearing is a way of touching at a distance...¹⁹

'Touching at a distance' accounts for O'Hara's fifty-year hold over his readers—his voice and the sonic world he creates touches us, he speaks directly to us and we hear the poet in his world. O'Hara's sound, like Billie Holiday's song in 'The Day Lady Died', is ultimately realised by the reader. With each new generation, poets and their poems become new again. I hope this discussion of O'Hara's sound encourages readers to listen to his poems with wiser ears.

¹⁹ Schafer, p. 11.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Altieri, Charles, 'The Significance of Frank O'Hara', *The Iowa Review*, 4 (1973), 90-104.
- Attridge, Derek, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Baer, William, *Writing Metrical Poetry*, (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2006).
- Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).
- Beum, Robert and Shapiro, Karl, *The Prosody Handbook: A Guide to Poetic Form*, 2nd edn (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2006).
- Bergman, David, *The Poetry of Disturbance: The Discomforts of Postwar American Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- Berkson, Bill, 'Frank O'Hara and his Poems' in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, ed. by Jim Elledge, 4th edn, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 226-233.
- Berkson, Bill & Joe LeSueur, (eds), *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, 3rd edn, (Bolingbrook: Big Sky Books, 1988).
- Bernstein, Charles, (ed), *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- _____, 'Hearing Voices', in *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009),
- Blasing, Mutlu Konuk, 'Frank O'Hara's Poetics of Speech: The Example of 'Biotherm'' *Contemporary Literature*, 23.1 (1982), 52-64.
- _____, *Politics and Form in Postmodern Poetry: O'Hara, Bishop, Ashbery, and Merrill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Boone, Bruce, 'Gay Language as Political Praxis: The Poetry of Frank O'Hara', *Social Text*, 1 (1979), 59-92.
- Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 10th edn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013).
- Brainard, Joe, 'Frank O'Hara', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bolingbrook: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 167-69.
- Bredbeck, Gregory W., 'B/O-Barthe's Text/O'Hara's Trick', *PMLA*, 108 (1993), 268-282.
- Breslin, James, 'The Contradictions of Frank O'Hara', *The American Poetry Review*, 12 (1983), 7-16.

Brossard, Olivier, 'Frank O'Hara's poetry, a "Whitman's birthday with static"', *Revue Francaise D Etudes Americaines*, 108 (2006), 63-79.

_____, 'The Last Clean Shirt a film by Alfred Leslie and Frank O'Hara', *Jacket*, 23 (2003) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/23/bross-ohara.html>> [accessed 7 April 2016].

Brown, Merle, 'Poetic Listening', *Literary Hermeneutics*, 10 (1978), 125-139.

Basil Bunting, 'The Poet's Point of View', in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. by W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis, (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2000), pp. 80-82.

Burt, Stephen 'Okay I'll Call You / Yes Call Me: Frank O'Hara's "Personism"', (2005) <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/okay-ill-call-you-yes-call-me-frank-oharas-personism> [accessed 21/11/14]

Carroll, Paul, *The Poem in Its Skin*, (Chigago: Big Table Publishing Company, 1968).

Chion, Michel, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

_____, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Clark, Roy, Peter, *Writing Tools*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006).

Clune, Michael, "'Everything We Want": Frank O'Hara and the Aesthetics of Free Choice', *PMLA*, 120 (2005), 181-196.

Crain, Caleb, 'Frank O'Hara's "Fired" Self', *American Literary History*, 9 (1997), 287-308.

Cran, Rona, *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature, and Culture: Joseph Cornell, William Burroughs, Frank O'Hara, and Bob Dylan*, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014).

Davidson, Ian, 'Frank O'Hara's Places', *Jacket*, 36 (2008) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/36/davidson-ohara-places.shtml>> [accessed 7 April 2016].

_____, 'Symbolism and code in Frank O'Hara's early poems', *Textual Practice*, 23 (2009), 787-802.

Davidson, Michael, 'From Margin to Mainstream: Postwar Poetry and the Politics of Containment', *American Literary History*, 10 (1998), 266-290.

_____, *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Politics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Diggory, Terence, 'Questions of Identity in Oranges by Frank O'Hara and Grace Hartigan', *Art Journal*, 52 (1993), 41-50.

_____, 'Selected affinities', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 54.2 (2008), 263-71.

Diggory, Terence and Miller, Stephen Paul, *The Scene of My Selves: New Work on New York School Poets*, (US: National Poetry Foundation, 2001).

Dyer, Geoff, *But Beautiful: A Book about Jazz*, (New York: Picador, 1996).

Eliot, T.S., *On Poetry and Poets*, (London: Faber, 1971).

_____, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 3rd edn (London: Faber, 1967).

Elledge, Jim, "'Never Argue with the Movies": Love and the Cinema in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara', in *Frank O'Hara: To be True to a City*, 4th edn, by Jim Elledge, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 350-57.

_____, ed., *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, 4th edn, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993).

Epstein, Andrew, *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2006).

_____, "'Street Musicians": Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, ed. by Mark Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) pp. 391-408.

Feldman, Alan, *Frank O'Hara*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979).

Feldman, Morton, 'Lost Times and Future Hopes', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, 3rd edn, ed. by Bill and Joe LeSueur (Bolinis: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 12-14.

Ferguson, Russell, *In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

Frost, Robert, 'The Figure a Poem Makes', in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. by W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis, (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2000), pp. 44-46.

_____, *Robert Frost on Writing*, ed. By Elaine Barry, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973).

Ginsberg, Allen, 'City Midnight Junk Strains', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bolinis: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 148-149.

Goble, Mark, "'Our Country's Black and White Past": Film and the Figures of History in Frank O'Hara', *American Literature*, 71 (1999), 57-92.

Goldstein, Laurence, *The American Poet at the Movies: A Critical History*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

Gooch, Brad, *City Poet The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1993).

Gray, Timothy G., 'Semiotic Shepherds: Gary Snyder, Frank O'Hara, and the Embodiment of an Urban Pastoral', *Contemporary Literature*, 39 (1998), 523-559.

Hammond Helwig, Magdelyn, 'Scratching the Surface: Frank O'Hara's and Larry Rivers's Integrated Collaboration on "Stones"', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 43 (2010), 59-73.

- Hampson, Robert, and Will Montgomery, *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2010).
- Hartman, Anne, 'Confessional Counterpublics in Frank O'Hara and Allen Ginsberg', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28 (2005), 40-56.
- Hecht, Jennifer, Michael, 'What Frank O'Hara Means to Me', *Mississippi Review*, 31, (2003), 149-161.
- Herbert, W.N., and Matthew Hollis, (eds), *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2000).
- Herd, David, *John Ashbery and American Poetry*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).
- _____, 'Stepping Out with Frank O'Hara' in *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery, (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2010), pp. 70-85.
- Herring, Terrell, Scott, 'Frank O'Hara's Open Closet', *PMLA*, 117 (2002), 414-427.
- Hirsch, Edward, *The Demon and the Angel*, (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2002).
- Horowitch, Seth S., *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).
- Hrushovski, Benjamin, 'The Meaning of Sound Patterns in Poetry: An Interaction Theory', *Poetry Today*, 2 (1980), 39-56.
- Kane, Daniel, *All Poets Welcome The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, (Bolinias: University of California Press, 2003).
- _____, *We Saw the Light, Conversations between the New American Cinema and Poetry*, (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009).
- Koch, Kenneth, 'A Note on Frank O'Hara in the Early Fifties', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, 3rd edn, ed. by Bill and Joe LeSueur (Bolinias: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 26-27.
- Koestenbaum, Wayne, 'Oh! kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas!': Frank O'Hara's Excitement', (2011) <<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/oh-kangaroos-sequins-chocolate-sodas-frank-oharas-excitement>> [accessed 21 November 2014].
- LaBelle, Brandon, *Acoustic Territories / Sound Culture and Everyday Life*, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2010).
- Lagapa, Jason, 'Parading the Undead: Camp, Horror and Reincarnation in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara and John Yau', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33, (Winter 2010) 92-113.
- Leech, Geoffrey N., *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, 15th edn (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1991).
- Lehman, David, *The Last Avant-Garde*, (New York: First Anchor Books, 1999).

Leslie, Alfred, *The Hasty Papers Millennium Edition* (Texas: Host Publications, 2000).

LeSueur, Joe, *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

Libby, Anthony, 'O'Hara on the Silver Range', *Contemporary Literature*, 17 (1976), 240-262.

Lowney, John, 'The "Post-Anti-Esthetic" Poetics of Frank O'Hara', *Contemporary Literature*, 32 (1991), 244-264.

Mackay, Nathaniel, 'Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol', *Callaloo*, 30 (1987), 29-54.

Magee, Michael, 'Tribes of New York: Frank O'Hara, Amiri Baraka, and the Poetics of the Five Spot', *Contemporary Literature*, 42 (2001), 694-726.

Marie, Michel, *The French New Wave An Artistic School*, trans. by Richard Neupert, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

Mattix, Micah, *Frank O'Hara and the Poetics of Saying "I"*, (Plymouth: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011).

_____, *Frank O'Hara's Lunch Poems: 21st-Century Poetry Written in 1964*, The Atlantic, (2014) <<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/05/frank-oharas-lunch-poems-21st-century-poetry-written-in-1964/371276/>> [accessed 21 April 2016].

Mendelson, Edward and Weiss, Sasha, *Edward Mendelson on Frank O'Hara* [podcast], New York Review of Books, (2008) <<http://media.nybooks.com/091508-mendelson.mp3>> [accessed 28 March 2016].

McCabe, Susan, *Cinematic Modernism*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Molesworth, Charles, 'The Clear Architecture of the Nerves': The Poetry of Frank O'Hara', *Iowa Review*, (1975), 61-74.

Moramarcio, Fred, 'John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara: The Painterly Poets', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 5 (1976), 436-462.

Nims, John, Frederick and David Mason, *Western Wind*, 4th edn (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000).

O'Driscoll, Dennis, ed. *The Bloodaxe Book of Poetry Quotations* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2006).

Frank O'Hara, *Art Chronicles 1954-1966*, ed. by Donald Allen, (New York: George Braziller, 1991).

_____, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Donald Allen, 9th edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

_____, *Early Writing*, ed. by Donald Allen (San Francisco: Grey Fox, 1977).

- ____, *Lunch Poems*, (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1964).
- ____, *Lunch Poems*, ed. by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 50th anniversary edn (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2014).
- ____, *Meditations in an Emergency*, 2nd edn (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
- ____, *Poems Retrieved*, ed. by Donald Allen, 8th edn (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 2001).
- ____, *Standing Still and Walking in New York*, ed. by Donald Allen, 13th edn (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1975).
- ____, *Frank O'Hara: Voice of the Poet*, [CD] (Random House Audio Voices, 2004).
- Oliver, Mary, *The Poetry Handbook*, (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc. 1994).
- Osgood, Lawrence, 'Frank's Physique (A Selective Inventory)', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn, (Bolinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 24-25.
- Padgett, Ron 'Six Memories of Frank O'Hara', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bolinas: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 132-133.
- Perloff, Marjorie, *Frank O'Hara Poet Among Painters*, 3rd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- ____, 'New Thresholds, Old Anatomies: Contemporary Poetry and the Limits of Exegesis', *The Iowa Review*, 5 (1974), 83-99.
- ____, "'Transparent Selves': The Poetry of John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 8 (1978), 171-196.
- ____, 'Watchman, Spy, and Dead Man: Jasper Johns, Frank O'Hara, John Cage and the "Aesthetic of Indifference"', *Modernism/Modernity*, 8 (2001), 197-223.
- Perloff, Marjorie and Craig Dworkin, (eds.), *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- Pinker, Steven, *The Sense of Style*, (London, Penguin Random House, 2014).
- Pinsky, Robert, *The Sounds of Poetry*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).
- Preminger, Alex and T.V.F. Brogan, (eds), *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 3rd edn (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- Replogle, Justin, 'Vernacular Poetry: Frost to O'Hara', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24 (1978), 137-153.
- Rexroth, Kenneth, 'From "Two Voices Against the Chorus"' in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City* 4th edn, ed. by Jim Elledge, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 3.

- Richardson, Mark, *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- Riggs, Sarah, *Word Sightings: Visual Apparatus and Verbal Reality in Stevens, Bishop and O'Hara*, (London: Routledge, 2002).
- Roberts, Phil, *How Poetry Works*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin Books, 2000).
- Robertson, Josh, 'A Gasp of Laughter at Desire': Frank O'Hara's Poetics of Breath, in *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 144-159
- Ross, Andrew, 'The Death of Lady Day' in *A Guide to Poetics Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field, 1982-1998*, ed. by Lyn Hejinian and Barrett Watten (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 367-377.
- Rother, James, 'Frank O'Hara's Meditations in an Emergency (1957): A Retrospective Essay', *Contemporary Poetry Review*, (2001) <www.cprw.com/Rother/ohara.htm> [accessed 6 December 14].
- Sadoff, Ira, 'Frank O'Hara's Intimate Fictions', *The American Poetry Review*, 35 (2006), 49-52.
- _____, 'Hearing Voices: The Fiction of Poetic Voice', *New England Review*, 14 (1992), 221-232.
- Schafer, R. Murray, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 2nd edn (Vermont: Destiny Books, 1994).
- Schuyler, James, 'Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters (excerpts)', in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 3rd edn (Bolinias: Big Sky Books, 1988), pp. 82-83.
- Seiler, Claire, 'Francis O'Hara, War Poet', *Contemporary Literature*, 54 (2013), 810-833.
- Shaw, Lytle, *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006).
- Shaw, Robert, B, *American Poetry Since 1960: some critical perspectives*, (Cheshire: Carcanet Press, 1973).
- Silverberg, Marg, 'Ashbery, O'Hara, and The Neo-Avant-Garde Manifesto', *Arizona Quarterly*, 59.1 (2003), 137-165.
- Siskel, Callie, 'It's Cooking' *The work behind Frank O'Hara's seemingly light Lunch Poems, now 50 years old* (2014) <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/248084>> [accessed 12 July 2014].
- Smith, Jr., Alexander, *Frank O'Hara: A Comprehensive Bibliography*, (New York: Garland, 1979).
- Smith, Hazel, *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

____, 'In Memory of Metaphor: Deconstructive Modes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara', *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 84 (1995) 65-83.

____, *The Writing Experiment*, (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

Stoneley, Peter, 'O'Hara, blackness, and the primitive', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 58.3 (2012), 495-510.

____, 'Frank O'Hara and French in the Pejorative Sense', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 34 (2010), 125-142.

Sutherland, Keston, 'Close Writing' in *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2010), pp. 120-130.

Sweet, David L., 'Parodic Nostalgia for Aesthetic Machismo: Frank O'Hara and Jackson Pollock', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 23 (2000) 375-391.

Syme, Holger Schott, 'The Look of Speech', *Textual Cultures*, 2 (2007), 34-60.

Tallman, Warren, 'Kerouac's Sound', *The Tamarack Review*, 11 (1959), 58-62.

Thomas, Dylan, 'Poetic Manifesto', in *The Poet's Work*, ed. by Reginald Gibbons, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

Tsur, Reuven, *Poetic Rhythm: Structure and Performance*, (Berne: Peter Lang, 1998).

____, *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1992).

Tursi, Mark, 'Interrogating Culture: Critical Hermeneutics in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara', *The Nieve Roja Review*, 4 (1998) <nieveroya.colostate.edu /index.html> (accessed 6 December 2014).

Van den Oever, Roel, '"A common ear/for our deep gossip": Selfhood and Friendship in the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg and Frank O'Hara', *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 53 (2008), pp. 521-533.

Van Sijll, Jennifer, *Cinematic Storytelling*, (Los Angeles: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005).

Vendler, Helen, 'The Virtues of the Alterable', in *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, 4th edn, ed. by Jim Elledge, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 234-252.

Ward, David, *Statutes of Liberties: The New York School of Poets*, 2nd edn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

Wheeler, Lesley, *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Williams, William Carlos, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Charles Tomlinson, (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

Yau, John, 'At the Movies with Weldon Kees and Frank O'Hara', *The American Poetry Review*, 34 (2005), 11-17.