

Review Paper

A Study of O'Hara's Poetry in the Light of Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper seeks to apply Maurice Merleau-Ponty's eco-phenomenology to the selected poems composed by Frank O'Hara, the prominent figure of the New York School of Poetry. 'Eco-phenomenology' is where philosophy and ecology meet. Encouraging to review the traditional beliefs of Western philosophy about nature, this relatively new vogue of criticism deals with environmental issues from a phenomenological perspective. Although the New York School of Poetry is considered urban in nature, this article intends to study several poems written by Frank O'Hara, in the light of eco-phenomenology in order to challenge the reductive features of being urban and unaware of the natural environment, ascribed to this poetic movement, by bringing to the fore a fissure within this poetry that expresses an awareness of a broader phenomenological world, comprising both the humans and the non-humans. Being a Critique of Cartesian mind-body dualism and the anthropocentric perspective resulting from it, this study applies the chiasmic ontology of Merleau-Ponty to the selected poems. Based on the examples given, the present research shows that the mutual participation between human flesh and the 'flesh of the world,' i.e., Merleau-Ponty's chiasm, prevails in O'Hara's poetry, especially at moments of perception. In view of this, this study reveals how the concept of 'body'—one of Merleau-Ponty's key terms—is demonstrated in O'Hara's work and how this demonstration contributes to building up an eco-phenomenological perspective in his urban poetry. Conducting both textual and contextual analyses, this research brings to the fore O'Hara's eco-consciousness and his vision of interrelations governing the universe, despite his embracing urban life.

Keywords: Chiasm; Eco-Phenomenology; Embodiment; The Flesh of the World; Urban Poetry

مقاله پژوهشی حاضر بر آن است تا فلسفه پدیدارشناختی-بوم‌گرایانه موريس مرلوپونتی را در منتخبی از اشعار فرانک اوهارا، شاعر برجسته مکتب شعر نیویورک، به‌کار گیرد. پدیدارشناسی-بوم‌گرایی، نقطه تلاقی فلسفه و محیط زیست است. این رویکرد نسبتاً جدید نقد

ادبی با بازبینی عقاید سنتی فلسفه غرب در باب طبیعت، به مسائل زیست محیطی از منظر پدیدارشناسی می‌پردازد. اگرچه مکتب شعر نیویورک با ماهیت شهرنشینی‌اش شناخته می‌شود، این مقاله در صدد است منتخبی از اشعار اوهارا را در پرتو پدیدارشناسی-بومگرایی بررسی کند تا با برجسته‌سازی تَرَک موجود در این اشعار که نمایانگر آگاهی از جهانی پدیدارشناختی مشتمل بر انسان و غیرانسان است، ویژگی‌های واگشت‌گرایانه شهرنشینی و ناآگاهی از محیط زیست متناسب به این جنبش را به چالش بکشد. این پژوهش با رد دوگانه‌گرایی ذهن و بدن دکارتی و دیدگاه انسان‌محور منتج از آن، هستی‌شناسی کیاسمی مرلوپونتی را در اشعار منتخب به کار می‌گیرد. بر اساس مثال‌های ارائه شده، مشارکت متقابل بین گوشت انسان و «گوشت جهان»، یعنی کیاسم مرلوپونتی، در اشعار اوهارا، به‌ویژه در لحظات ادراک، مشهود است. از این رو، این مطالعه نشان می‌دهد که چگونه مفهوم «بدن» - یکی از اصطلاحات کلیدی مرلوپونتی - در آثار اوهارا نشان داده شده است و چگونه این نمایش به ایجاد دیدگاهی پدیدارشناختی-بومگراییانه در شعر شهری او کمک می‌کند. این تحقیق با تمرکز بر مشارکت متقابل گوشت انسان و "گوشت جهان" در لحظه‌های ادراک، هستی‌شناسی موجود در این اشعار را آشکار می‌سازد تا عمق رابطه اوهارا با طبیعت را به منصفه ظهور رساند. این تحقیق با انجام تحلیل‌های متنی و زمینه‌ای، بوم‌آگاهی اوهارا و اعتقاد او را به روابط متقابل حاکم بر جهان را به نمایش می‌گذارد.

کلمات کلیدی: کیاسم، پدیدارشناسی-بومگرایی، تنانگی، گوشت جهان، شعر شهری

INTRODUCTION

The autobiographical poetry of Frank O'Hara (1926-1966) is entangled with New York City since he put down his observations of this city, wherein he lived for fifteen years, from 1951 until he died in 1966. He was so renowned for being connected with urban life that Brad Gooch even used this reductive attribute in the title of his book, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* (1993). Therefore, it is presumed that not much research has been conducted on the ecological aspects of O'Hara's poetry to challenge this limiting association.

Needless to say, O'Hara is not linked with pastoral nature as much as the Beats or the San Francisco Renaissance poets are. Although he passed his childhood in Grafton, the Massachusetts rural area, where people are assumed to show a high sense of connection to nature, he did not find pleasure in spending time in natural surroundings; in fact, he found rural America unfriendly:

When I was a child
I played by myself in a
corner of the schoolyard
all alone.
I hated dolls and I
hated games, animals were
not friendly and birds
flew away. O'Hara (1995)

And he found it hostile, "The chamois found him [the human hunter] and they came / in droves to humiliate him. Alone, / in the clouds, he was humiliated" (O'Hara, 1995). He mostly disapproved of the tranquility of the countryside. Instead, he warmly embraced the vibrant life in cities,

For O'Hara who disliked the peace and quiet of the countryside, nothing could be more pleasant than to come back to town and hit the street again: 'I was back in town! / what a relief! / I popped into the nearest movie-house and saw two marvelous Westerns' (Brossard, 2009).

In his poem "Meditations in an Emergency," O'Hara clearly stated that he sought solace in the hectic pace of city life,

However, I have never clogged myself with the praises of pastoral life, nor with nostalgia for an innocent past of perverted acts in pastures. No. One need never leave the confines of New York to

get all the greenery one wishes—I can't even enjoy a blade of grass unless I know there's a subway handy, or a record store or some other sign that people do not totally *regret* life. (O'Hara, 1995)

O'Hara, who served in the Navy during World War II and experienced the calamities arising from this war firsthand, felt safe and secure living among fellow humans,

Far from being the source of all modern ills, the city is the best remedy to postwar anxiety: for existential crisis, go to the countryside, O'Hara seems to say, suggesting that the physical encounter with the streets and walls of the metropolis soothes one's fear of emptiness." (Brossard, 2009)

Therefore, New York as one of the most populous megacities in the world provided him with this security.

Indubitably, the fact that O'Hara disapproved of living in pristine nature or even the countryside does not mean that he wiped out nature from the realm of his attention altogether,

the degree to which O'Hara, particularly in his earlier poems, uses natural imagery to describe the city and the ways in which, even in the most city-centered poems, nature is still an important force (in the form of weather), is often overlooked." (Smith, 2000)

Cities are not completely devoid of nature. Although no sight of wavy oceans, alluring sunsets, or mighty tempestuous rivers might be found, birds, trees, parks, roof gardens, and feral cats still indicate the presence of nature in busy metropolises. New York City, one of the most developed megacities in the world, is also affluent with urban greenery, including famous lakes and parks, such as Niagara Falls State Park or the iconic Central Park. Thus, by reasoning from evidence found in O'Hara's poems, we arrive at the conclusion that Frank O'Hara is not oblivious to nature; in point of fact, he disfavors a romantic outlook that prefers nature to culture in the conventional, long-held dichotomy of nature/culture.

O'Hara's nature is mostly limited to pieces he finds in his urban-dwelling; to put it another way, in his poetry "urban environment interfaces with the natural environment" (Smith, 2000). For instance, in "Music," he depicts snow, but on newspapers, "and my door is open to the evenings of midwinter's / lightly falling snow over the newspapers" (O'Hara, 1995); in "Les Etiquettes Jaunes," he picks a leaf but from a sidewalk, "I picked up a leaf / today from the sidewalk." (O'Hara, 1995); in "Cambridge," he drinks a cup of *instant* coffee—the fastest way to get his shot of caffeine in the hustle and bustle of urban living—while staring out of the window at the rain falling on Cambridge Street:

It is still raining and the yellow-green cotton fruit
looks silly round a window giving out on winter trees
with only three drab leaves left. The hot plate works,
it is the sole heat on earth, and instant coffee. I (O'Hara, 1995)

Or in "Poem ['Lana Turner has collapsed!']," O'Hara likens city traffic—a modern-day nuisance to a natural phenomenon:

... 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 (O'Hara, 1995)

As stated by Rona Cran in her book *Collage in Twentieth-Century art, literature, and Culture: Joseph Cornell, William Burroughs, Frank O'Hara, and Bob Dylan*, "to quote Jed Perl, 'how hopelessly mixed up nature and culture had become'" (Cran, 2016).

To bring O'Hara's latent ecological awareness to light, the study picks an eco-phenomenological approach with a focus on the concept of 'chiasm' put forth by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This study conducts both textual and contextual analyses to address a selection of Frank O'Hara's poems.

Review of Literature

Since Frank O'Hara has been mostly associated with urban life, it is inferred that not much research has been conducted on ecological aspects of his poetry to challenge the limiting associations of being urban and oblivious to the natural environment.

AMONG A VERY LIMITED NUMBER OF WORKS TAKING THE ASPECT OF NATURE IN O'HARA'S POETRY INTO CONSIDERATION, TIMOTHY GRAY'S, *URBAN PASTORAL: NATURAL CURRENTS IN THE NEW YORK SCHOOL* (2010) CAN BE REGARDED AS POLEMICAL. IN THIS BOOK, THIS AMERICAN AUTHOR TOOK A NEW APPROACH TO THIS ANTI-ACADEMIC POETIC MOVEMENT IN ORDER TO SHED LIGHT ON ITS LATENT PASTORAL INCLINATIONS. *URBAN PASTORAL* IS CONSIDERED THE FIRST, MAJOR ECO-CRITICAL STUDY OF THE POETS OF THE NEW YORK SCHOOL. IN THIS BOOK, NOT IN ACCORD WITH THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE DAY, GRAY CLAIMS THAT THE POETS OF THE NEW YORK SCHOOL "SHOULD BE PLACED ALONGSIDE ANNIE DILLARD, WENDELL BERRY, AND MERRY OLIVER IN THE RANKS OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NATURE WRITERS" (GRAY, 2010). IN THE SAME BOOK, HE HOLDS THAT THESE POETS ALLOWED

THE WONDERS OF NATURE TO SHAPE THEIR APPRECIATION OF THE CITY LIFE. MORE SUBTLY THAN THEIR PEERS IN SAN FRANCISCO AND BLACK MOUNTAIN, THEY LEARNED HOW TO FASHION AN 'OPEN FIELD' POETICS WITHIN CITY LIMITS INSTEAD OF CONSTANTLY HEADING OUT TO THE COUNTRY SIDE TO ENJOY THE NATURE"(GRAY, 2010).

MOREOVER, WHILE FINDING JAMES SCHUYLER MORE ENVIRONMENTAL THAN OTHER POETS OF THE NEW YORK SCHOOL, TATIANI G. RAPATZIKOU, IN THE ABSTRACT OF HER ARTICLE "JAMES SCHUYLER'S FLOWER POEMS AND THE URBAN PASTORAL AESTHETIC" PUBLISHED IN *CONTESTING ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINARIES: NATURE AND COUNTERNATURE IN A TIME OF GLOBAL CHANGE*, HELD,

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENHANCED POINT OF VIEW THAT MOVES BEYOND THE CULTURE/NATURE DICHOTOMY SO AS TO EMBRACE A MORE NUANCED ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE ENCOMPASSING HUMAN NATURE. THE ECOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF HIS POETRY IS TO BE FOUND IN ITS ABILITY TO SYN-THESIZE CONTRASTING VIEWPOINTS SO AS TO ACCENTUATE READERS' PERCEPTIONS OF NATURE AND AID IN RE-ORIENTING THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ENVIRONMENT, NOT ONLY BY RAISING THEIR AWARENESS OF IT BUT ALSO BY RECONCEPTUALIZING THEIR VERY ROLE IN IT. (RAPATZIKOU, 2017)

Elizabeth Black's *The Nature of Modernism: Ecocritical Approaches to the Poetry of Edward Thomas, T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, and Charlotte Mew* (2017) also proved to be of great use, despite not being involved with the New York School of poetry directly. Challenging the traditional ways of representing nature and upholding new modes of addressing nature in urban, tech-rich environments, this book has paved the way for applying more complicated ecocritical approaches to city poetry.

What the present research intends to add to the existing corpus is to study the ecological aspect of this poetry from a different angle 'eco-phenomenology', to disclose a strain within this poetry that expresses an awareness of a broader phenomenological world, consisting of both the human and the non-human. Leading toward the desired conclusion, this study attempts to crack several questions that may be raised. How does phenomenology, as a critique of Cartesian dualism, create new ways of presenting the non-

human world through the work of Frank O'Hara? How have the concepts of 'body' and 'embodiment', as two key terms in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, been demonstrated in the selected poems? And in which ways can this demonstration contribute to building up an eco-phenomenological perspective in his urban poetry? Regarding the phenomenological idea of the immediacy of perception, have the selected poems used more sensory and palpable imagery? Besides, since the New York School is highly urban in focus, how does O'Hara address human entanglement with the natural environment in the cities?

METHODS

The present review paper, as a qualitative, descriptive, and library-based one, conducts both a textual and contextual analysis to address Frank O'Hara's poetry. The main underlying theoretical premise of this study is the eco-phenomenological concept of 'chiasm' put forth by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Though hydrometeorological hazards are natural events in weather cycles, the current scale of destruction has been terrifying. This unprecedented destruction has mostly proved to be human-induced. The Cartesian mind-body dualism is mostly to blame for the current environmental crises. Based on this dualistic worldview, humans, as the only creatures in possession of the faculty of reason, have always been privileged over non-humans. Taking advantage of this privilege, humans have justified their exploitation of nature and have caused a large number of human-induced weather and climate disasters that have claimed many human lives.

In human history, there have been some opposing voices against Cartesian dualism, among which 'phenomenology' from the realm of philosophy has been selected for this research. Phenomenology encourages humans to return, as Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology states, "to the things themselves." The philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, the later French phenomenologist, consists of two components: "we are open onto the world and that we are embedded in it" (Carman, 2008). Emphasizing 'embodiment,' he put forth 'chiasm,' "the reciprocal participation—between one's own flesh and the encompassing flesh of the world" (Abram, 2012). The term 'chiasm,' originated from an ancient Greek word meaning 'crisscross.' In the realm of eco-phenomenology, chiasm is defined as the reciprocal participation between the subject and the object, between one's flesh and the flesh of the world in a moment of perception, "we situate ourselves in ourselves and in the things, in ourselves and in the other, at the point where, by a sort of chiasm, we become the others and we become world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Thus, the human flesh and the flesh of the world are not separate from one another; on the contrary, they are intertwined. Human intertwining with the flesh of the world includes human's relationship with the natural world.

Thus, this chiasm, i.e. the intertwining is believed to be a solution to the environmental crisis:

Merleau-Ponty thus not only provides the most detailed critique of the traditional dualistic ontology, but he also offers a highly original, nondualistic ontology in its place. His critique includes a very comprehensive examination of traditional approaches to nonhuman animals. (Langer, 2003)

When a human considers himself a part of nature and not separate, and accepts that he and nature are both in the same boat and share the same fate, he does not ruin and overexploit nature. Phenomenology is able to create eco-awareness among people and save nature from being destroyed by humans. Hence, a careful eco-phenomenological study of literary products can gain significance as it can help to raise awareness about nature, wherein humans are immersed. This research intends to detect the overall effect of

phenomenological understanding on human understanding of ecology to offer a fresh look at Frank O'Hara's poetry.

DISCUSSION

This eco-phenomenological reading intends to defy the conventional features of being urban and unaware of nature, which are attributed to the New York School of poetry, by bringing to the fore a fissure within this apparently very urban poetry that expresses an awareness of a broader phenomenological world. It is worth mentioning that this research paper does not intend to present O'Hara as a nature poet; as a matter of fact, this research aims to provide some instances which could show O'Hara as a poet who has opened up new possibilities for addressing the non-human lives and natural sources in urban literature, with regards to eco-phenomenology.

Metaphoric Language: Dismantling Nature/Culture Opposition

Studying O'Hara's poetry meticulously, the readers run across a considerable amount of nature imagery, including animals, landscapes, and notably atmospheric conditions, i.e., rain, snow, and wind, but all falling and blowing in a metropolis. For instance, in one of his most anthologized poems "Poem [Lana Turner has collapsed!]," when the speaker is on his way to visit a friend, it starts raining and snowing in New York,

I was trotting along and suddenly
it started raining and snowing
and you said it was hailing (O'Hara, 1995)

Here, the embodied perception of the surroundings represents the subjective consciousness of the speaker; thus, consciousness, the surrounding world, and the human body are tightly intertwined to bring Meleau-Ponty's 'flesh of the world' to the fore.

Self-evidently, many of O'Hara's nature images are used as vehicles in his metaphoric language, as in "F.M.r. 6/2s/61," "I want / you to be very very happy like Central Park" (O'Hara, 1995), or in "Poem [Let's take a walk],"

we'll stroll like poodles
and be washed down a
gigantic scenic gutter (O'Hara, 1995)

or later in "Meditations in an Emergency," "My eyes are vague blue, like the sky, and change all the time" (O'Hara, 1995); or later in the same poem, he compares himself to a pile of leaves under a tree: "Even trees understand me! Good heavens, I lie under/ them, too, don't I? I'm just like a pile of leaves" (O'Hara, 1995)(O'Hara, 1995). It goes without saying that in the history of world literature, metaphoric language has always been used to guide readers to a new awareness of the Natural environment.

Sometimes, O'Hara uses anthropomorphism—a literary device that attributes human emotional and behavioral qualities to animals, inanimate objects, or other non-human beings. Anthropomorphism has been a central trope in representing nature in literature. For instance, in "Les Etiquettes Jaunes," he addressed an autumn leaf as if it were human and portrays its actions as displaying human characteristics like disloyalty:

Leaf! you are so big!
How can you change your
color, then just fall!
As if there were no
such thing as integrity! (O'Hara, 1995)

In “Meditations in an Emergency,” the human speaker finds urban trees empathetic to his emotions, “Even trees understand me!” (O’Hara, 1995).

Since matter/spirit and its consequent nature/culture dualism have been an essential feature of Western Ontology, likening humans to “more-than-human-world” (Abram, 2012) or vice-a-versa blurs this long-standing human/nature boundary, reorients human assumptions of power and challenge the Cartesian outlook in favor of a holistic one, where humans and nature are intertwined with one another in a Merleau-Pontean ‘chiasm. Thus,

we are left with a diversely differentiated field of animate beings, each of which has its gifts relative to the others. And we find ourselves not above, but in the very midst of this living eld, our own sentience part and parcel of the sensuous landscape. (Abram, 2010)

Realm of Colors: Somewhere Near the Primordial World

Frank O’Hara, as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, befriended American painters of the day, especially those whose works he wrote about. Thus, this art form, notably abstract expressionism¹— that was occurring in New York at the same time that O’Hara was writing his poetry— left an indelible mark on his work. Since this research paper intends to interpret Frank O’Hara in the light of Merleau-Ponty’s green philosophy, it seems necessary to provide a brief description of Merleau-Ponty’s almost primary focus on painting—among all art expressions—in the first place. Merleau-Ponty wrote three essays on painting, “Cézanne’s Doubt” (1945), “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” (1952), and “Eye and Mind” (1964) which demonstrate the importance of this art form in his philosophy.

Frank O’Hara, as a curator applied the anti-mimetic style of Abstract Expressionism, to poetry. Abstract Expressionists, like all who survived the catastrophe of World War II which had claimed more than 60 million lives, felt a strange sense of urgency and immediacy that was deeply reflected in their paintings. Being influenced by this art movement, the New York School of poets also laid considerable emphasis on sensory presence, immediacy, and spontaneity. Thus, being cognizant of Merleau-Ponty’s highlighting of the immediacy of experience as the foremost element of his green philosophy; this research paper intends to interpret Frank O’Hara through an eco-phenomenological lens, with knowledge of the relation between Merleau-Ponty and this broad movement in American painting. Therefore, it seems necessary to provide a brief description of Mreleau-Ponty’s almost primary focus on painting in the first place.

Merleau-Ponty believed that painting was closer to the world of immediate, pre-scientific, pre-linguistic, and pre-reflexive bodily relations; a world wherein all dichotomies including the presumably conceptual/perceptual dichotomy of culture/nature, mutually flow into one another; a world without human-made classification rules. Praising Vincent van Gogh—a Dutch Post-Impressionist artist who gained recognition among the avant-garde after his death—for being unwilling to “abstract his intellect from his body’s reality, unwilling to abandon the myriad things, to tame his senses and so to stie the steady eros between his flesh and the flesh of the earth,” David Abram (b. 1957), the American eco-phenomenologist, who has been heavily influenced by Merleau-Ponty, states that although Vincent wrote often to his brother “it is only in the act of drawing or painting that he is able to give expression to this ongoing intercourse”(Abram, 2010). Abram believed that at the beginning of the twentieth century, “certain religious assumptions, regarding the distance of humankind from earthly nature” and “the more modern

¹ a post–World War II art movement in American painting, developed in New York City in the 1940s.

separation between 'subjects' and 'objects'" began to collapse, "a more primordial possibility" made itself felt, and this primordial possibility was embraced by avant-garde movements in art. Merleau-Ponty praised Paul Cezanne—the French post-impressionist painter who challenged all the conventional values of painting in the 19th century, notably 'perspective'—because "[Cezanne's painting] would be a paradox: investigate reality without departing from sensations, with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature, without following the contours, with no outline to enclose the color, with no perspectival or pictorial composition (Merleau-Ponty, 2007). From this view, abstract expressionists, like all who survived the catastrophe of World War II which had claimed more than 60 million lives, felt a strange sense of immediacy that was deeply reflected in their paintings. As Jack Pollock—the 20th-century American painter who was the leading figure of abstract expressionism—states:

[But] [w]hen I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. . . It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take. (Emmerling, 2003)

Abstract expressionists' anti-mimetic mode with its emphasis on urgency and physicality—two terms also prioritized in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty—was strongly approved by the poets of the New York School who intended to carry out in composition what these painters created on canvas. Therefore, from this point of view, the New York School of poetry is expected to lend itself well to Merleau-Ponty's environmental philosophy.

Much of the styles of O'Hara's poetry can be explained by reference to abstract expressionism, to be more precise, O'Hara "constantly renew the cherished subterfuge of spontaneity, immediacy, and improvisation within his work" (Cran, 2016). It can therefore be claimed that O'Hara's poetry which is concerned with the spontaneous expression of the individual's mental and emotional states, is abstract expressionism in words. In his ekphrastic poem "Why I Am Not A Painter," O'Hara himself confesses that he, as a poet, is very absorbed in the realm of painting, "I am not a painter, I am a poet. / Why? I think I would rather be / a painter, but I am not. Well," (O'Hara, 1995). Whilst seemingly denying his connection to the realm of colors, he contradicts himself by employing many color images in this poem that he wrote after visiting his abstract expressionist friend, Michael Goldberg. As implied in the poem, O'Hara and Goldberg both were inspired by a word—ORANGE and SARDINES respectively; thus, the creative process of telling a poem or painting a picture is similarly provoked by a moment of immediate, primordial perception, i.e., in Joycean terms, an 'epiphany.' Ariane Mildenberg likens modernist epiphanies—the inspirational moments of sudden experience of pure being—with phenomenological reduction, i.e., 'bracketing' or 'epoché'— a process involved in blocking biases to reach the real meaning of a phenomenon,

Rejecting the traditional mind/world split that informs Cartesian dualism . . . , the epiphanic moment is a momentary shift of attitude that does not reject the real world; rather, it restores openness to the world, affirming the pre-theoretic in-each-other of the subject and the world. (Mildenberg, 2017)

At these critical moments, every cell of the body gets involved in a reciprocal relationship with 'the flesh of the world.' Needless to say, in his poems, O'Hara employs these epiphanic moments a lot which leads him to a 'truth' immersed in the primordial world.

Coming under the influence of painting, O'Hara devotes special attention to the concept of 'color.' It cannot be gainsaid that colors make poetry more embodied and perceptive, "To learn to see colours it is to acquire a certain style of seeing, a new use of one's own body: it is to enrich and recast the body image"

(Merleau-Ponty, 2013). In his article “Eye and Mind” (1961), Merleau-Ponty criticizes Descartes for preferring engraving and drawing over painting, i.e., over the color that crosses the borders as an “opening upon things,”

If he [Descartes] had examined that other, deeper opening upon things given us by the secondary qualities, especially color, then...[h]e would have been obliged to find out how the indecisive murmur of colors can present us with things, forests, storms—in short the world. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012)

Campbell in her Master’s Thesis *Little Reminder of Immortal Energy: Frank O’Hara’s Poetics of Colour* states that “Of the seven principal colours that the poet makes use of (blue, green, orange, pink, purple, red, yellow), blue occurs most frequently” (Campbell, 2015). For instance, in one of his best-known poems “On Rachmaninoff’s Birthday,” O’Hara laments the death of Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff — a Russian composer, pianist, and conductor, who was considered one of the last great representatives of Romanticism in Russian classical music—on the musician’s birthday. He starts:

Blue windows, blue rooftops
and the blue light of the rain,
these contiguous phrases of Rachmaninoff
pouring into my enormous ears and the tears
falling into my blindness. (O’Hara, 1995)

According to Campbell, “O’Hara sees blueness as an intrinsic characteristic; if his eyes are blue, then he is blue”(Campbell, 2015). In this poem, besides the speaker, the whole surrounding, including both the animate and the inanimate is covered in blue that echoes Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmatic intertwining. Thus, O’Hara experiences a moment of unification and wholeness arising from his deep immersion in the music being played. Merleau-Ponty in his essay “Cezanne’s Doubt” states,

If the painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colors must bear within this indivisible whole, or else his painting will only hint at things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964)

The starting line of the second stanza informs the readers that Rachmaninoff is dead, “For without him, I do not play.” later; Rachmaninoff is brought back to life in the speaker’s imagination. Thus, ‘visible and invisible,’ palpable and imperceptible mingle through the perceiving body of O’Hara’s persona to propose nature: the composite of interconnected beings. Moreover, the starting stanza incorporates the senses of sight and sound synesthetically. This rhetorical device, synesthesia, appear in some other lines of his poetry collections, especially due to O’Hara’s being influenced by cubism and surrealism. In his other famous poem “A Step Away from Them,” he states: “It’s my lunch hour, so I go/for a walk among the hum-colored/cabs...”(O’Hara, 1995), he refers to taxis as “hum-colored cabs,” to eliminate the domination of visual perception. It seems not only does the process of perceiving colors activate the visual system, but also the whole body. Poets like Painters perceive how this integration works. Maurice Merleau-Ponty called this cross-sensory experience or intertwining between the senses “amodal perception.” He states that

Synesthetic perception is the rule, and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how to see, hear, and generally speaking, feel, in order to deduce, from our bodily organization and the world as the physicist conceives it, what we are to see, hear and feel. (Merleau-Ponty, 2013)

Merleau-Ponty believes that in the primordial world, there are no distinctions among senses. Thus, involving the readers' sensory perceptions in a synesthetic manner, O'Hara connects them with the primordial realm of the experience, a pre-objective world wherein primary perception takes place.

Turning over to page 25 of David Allen's *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, readers see a calligram—a text whose font type, font size, word placement, and gaps, are arranged in such a way that it creates an image related to the meaning of the text itself—entitled “Poem,” whose words are arranged into the shape of the portrait of O'Hara's friend Jane Freilicher. Besides his Apollinaire²-inspired calligrams, O'Hara collaborated with visual artists such as Michael Goldberg, Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher, and Norman Bluhm to create text-images. To be more precise, “O'Hara graces his artist friends' paintings with poetry in a style akin to the mark making of his contemporaries, blurring the lines between visual and verbal form” (Snyder 1). For instance, O'Hara combined his poetry with the strokes of the 20th-century Abstract Expressionist, Norman Bluhm, to create twenty six 'poem-paintings,' among which “Meet Me in the Rain” is one of the most famous ones. Needless to say, stimulating visual and aural senses simultaneously, poet-paintings enhance sensory perceptions; thus, “dueling modalities of text and paint spark in the viewer a synesthetic experience of onomatopoeia”(Campbell, 2015).

Embodied Perception through Walking in the City Streets

Body as the primary place of knowing the world is of major importance in the green philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. Rejecting the transcendental subject, Merleau-Ponty proposes the body-subject. It should be noted that the body is not limited to bones and muscles, but rather the lived body. Thus, the more embodied and sensuous a poem is, the more environmental it is. What makes O'Hara's poetry environmental, more than anything, is its emphasis on embodied perception, “Subjectivity in O'Hara, however, is always an embodied subjectivity, which walks the city, performs variegated sexual identities, and ‘writes the body’” (Smith, 2000). In his poetry collections, everything is experienced by an embodied ‘I,’ trying to “transmit an embodied presence in language” (Smith, 2000). One of the motifs employed throughout his poetry is ‘walking.’ The perceptive ‘I’ paces through the streets of New York, specifically to and fro from his workplace at the Museum of Modern Art. In “A Step Away from Them,” he states,

It's	my	lunch	hour,	so	I	go
for	a	walk	among	the		hum-colored
cabs.		First,	down	the		sidewalk
where		laborers	feed	their		dirty
glistening			torsos			sandwiches
and	Coca-Cola,		with	yellow		helmets
on.	They	protect	them	from		falling
bricks, I guess.						

(O'Hara, 1995)

Some of O'Hara's poems even include ‘walking’ in their titles, such as “Walking,” “Let's take walk,” or “Walking to Work” which demonstrate the importance of this whole-body movement in his lifestyle, as reflected in his poetry:

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

² Guillaume Apollinaire (1880- 1918) was a French poet, playwright, short story writer, and art critic whose poetry collection entitled *Calligrammes* (1918) presented hybrid text-image poems that influenced Frank O'Hara.

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

exciting!... (O'Hara, 1995)

In general, 'walking,' 'strolling,' or any other outdoor pursuit can be closely associated with the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty for its being an embodied engagement with the surrounding world, for "walking is not merely limb movement, but intelligent interaction with the environment" (Morris, 2010). Walking in the streets provides O'Hara, as the voice behind the poems, with a unique opportunity to make a perceptive relationship with the world, the walker "explores ways of relating to the external world or to be more precise, moves towards reconciliation of the interior/exterior dichotomy through an "enactive understanding of the body in its environment" (Widger, 2017). Needless to say, this relationship is a bilateral one,

reciprocity is the very structure of perception. We experience the sensuous world only by rendering ourselves vulnerable to that world. Sensory perception is this ongoing interweavement: the terrain enters into us only to the extent that we allow ourselves to be taken up within that terrain. (Abram, 2010)

While walking in the city, constantly, the lived body is called upon to engage with the universe which is called upon by our body to engage, "here is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). This is what Merleau-Ponty calls 'the reversibility of the flesh.' In his book *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), David Abram comments on the experience of walking in a forest,

we peer into its green and shadowed depths, listening to the silence of the leaves, tasting the cool and fragrant air. Yet such is the transitivity of perception, the reversibility of the flesh, that we may suddenly feel that the trees are looking at us." (Abram, 2012)

Walking in an urban environment still connects a daily human activity to the experience of an active, bodily presence in the midst of a hybrid nature-culture environment to which the human body belongs, in "The Day Lady Died," O'Hara states, "I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun," thus, the sun, as a nature image spreads its light over the city streets, wherein the speaker is treading.

Here, it is worth mentioning that walking as a way to provide writers with moments of inspiration, i.e. epiphany, has been rooted in the history of English literature, notably, in the Romantic poetry of the nineteenth century, the poetry of Transcendentalism, and the nature poetry of the 20th-century. But these poets' worldview of nature is somehow dualistic because they privilege nature over culture, "Since there is a divorce or faultline between nature and humans, Snyder's 3attempt to conjure or evoke in worlds the nonduality of natural order and human perception succumbs to a dualism of sorts" (Whalen-Bridge & Storhoff, 2009). Based on phenomenological theories, the elimination of the subject-object dichotomy can "imply the suspension of the reflective thinking that Merleau-Ponty theorizes is necessary to rediscover, to

³ Gary Sherman Snyder, (b. 1930) a Pulitzer Prize-winning American eco-poet, identified with the Beat movement and the San Francisco Renaissance, and from the late 1960s, an important spokesman for ecological activism.

‘conquer,’ the pre-objective” (Schreyach, 2013). O’Hara and some other poets of the New York School mix nature and modern American civilization together inseparably without preferring one over the other. As Tatiani G. Rapatzikou, in the abstract of her article “James Schuyler’s Flower Poems and the Urban Pastoral Aesthetic” praises James Schuyler, whom he finds the most environmental poet of the New York School for accentuating readers’ perceptions of nature through developing “an enhanced point of view that moves beyond the culture/nature dichotomy so as to embrace a more nuanced attitude towards nature encompassing human nature” (Rapatzikou, 2017).

O’Hara is not only attentive to the objects he comes across in the street, but also to his own perceptual, embodied system, i.e., his lived body, the gateway to the world. In the process of walking, not only is the walker “attentive to the objects that constitute her particular route, but also to the activity of her perceptual system and its specific ways of engaging with the environment” (Widger, 2017):

the shape of the toes as
 it describes the pain
 of the ball of the foot,
 walking walking on
 asphalt
 the strange embrace of the ankle’s
 lock
 on the pavement (O’Hara, 1995)

It is worth mentioning that ‘kinesthesia’—a poetic device that gives a feeling of physical, bodily movement or action—is not limited to walking, “However, part of the animate nature of our experience, for O’Hara, is its constant flow. ... Everything is moving” (Mattix, 2011). Abstract expressionism, which influenced O’Hara’s poetry heavily, is also a very kinetic art. Thus, from any angle we look at O’Hara’s poetry, the concept of movement and its immediate, bodily perception—emphasized in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy—can be easily discerned; in Rona Cran’s words, in the work of several Black Mountain, Beat, and New York School poets, whose ‘images of ‘writing a poem’, as David Antin argues, are all ultimately ‘a way of being moved and moving, a way of walking, running, dancing, driving’” (Cran, 2016).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This application of the recent approach of literary criticism, eco-phenomenology, to the poetry of prominent New York School poet, Frank O’Hara, aimed to trace the reflection of nature in a selection of his poems. The New York School of poetry has always been regarded as urban, in this connection; its consideration of the natural environment has been mostly ignored or overlooked by its urban attributes. This research paper tried to bring to the fore O’Hara’s eco-consciousness, despite his embracing the urban, hectic social life. Reading O’Hara’s poems meticulously and taking both textual and contextual approaches into account, this study manifested the depth of this poet’s engagement with the natural world.

In this connection, this research took special account of some rhetorical techniques used by O’Hara to show how these devices dismantled nature/culture opposition in favor of a holistic worldview. Since Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy focuses on perception and its prerequisite, embodiment, this research emphasized the importance of the body in the process of perception by rejecting the transcendental subject in favor of the body-subject through the examination of a range of tangible images and sensory perceptions. Also, it demonstrated that since abstract expressionists’ anti-mimetic mode with its emphasis on urgency

and physicality—two terms also prioritized by Merleau-Ponty—had a huge impact on the poets of the New York School, including Frank O’Hara, this school of poetry lent itself well to Merleau-Ponty’s environmental philosophy. Moreover, considering walking—one of the motifs employed throughout O’Hara’s poetry—to be closely associated with the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty for its being an embodied engagement with the surrounding nature, the research demonstrated that walking in an urban environment, i.e., New York, still connected O’Hara’s daily activity to the experience of an active, bodily presence amid a hybrid nature-culture environment to which the human body belonged.

Challenging the traditional mode of addressing nature in literature based on a strong desire to get back to nature, the chiasmic ontology of Merleau-Ponty was employed to reveal an intertwinement of the human body with the flesh of the world, in a way that the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity—culture and nature—blurred. Applying eco-phenomenology to O’Hara’s poetry has offered the potential for new insights and opened up new possibilities for representing non-human lives in urban literature, associated with cities that are regarded as the symbol of modern life.

Thus, phenomenology can create eco-awareness among people and save nature from being ruined and overexploited by humans. Hence, a careful eco-phenomenological study of literary productions can gain significance as it can help to raise awareness about nature wherein humans are immersed.

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