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### The Technique of Poetic Collage in the Selected Poems of New York school poets

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<b>Keywords:</b>  -Collage  - New York School of poetry  - Kenneth Koch  - John Ashbery -Frank O'Hara	<b>Abstract</b> The word 'collage' simply means pasting unrelated things together to form artistic objects of sorts. It began first to be used by the painters and artists in general to produce a kind of art suitable to the prevalent avant-garde movement in art and literature. T.S. Eliot's <i>The Wasteland</i> and Ezra Pound's <i>The Cantos</i> are two master examples of the use of collage in the early modernist poetry. The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of collage by the poets New York School in selected poems as exemplified in the major poets of the school, namely John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch. The paper argues that the poets of the New York school have been influenced heavily by the prevalent art movements specially the Abstract Expressionism. They imitated the Abstract Expressionists in their rejection of figurative subject matter and their working completely in the abstract. Their resort to such art as collage is to challenge the conventional ideas about art.
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استخدام تقنية الكولاج الشعري في قصائد مختارة لشعراء مدرسة نيويورك الشعرية

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<p><b>الخلاصة:</b> تعني كلمة "الكولاج" ببساطة إنتاج لوحات فنية عبر لصق اشياء غير مترابطة من حيث الشكل سوية على لوح. كان الرسامون اول من بدأ باستخدام هذه التقنية لإنتاج نوع من الفن يتلاءم والحركة الحداثوية الرائجة في حينها اما في الادب فقد برع شعراء العصر الحديث مثل ت. س. اليوت في رائعته (الارض اليباب) و عزرا باوند في قصيدة (الكانتوس). يدرس هذا البحث استخدام تقنية الكولاج في قصائد شعراء مدرسة نيويورك وهم جون آشبييري و فرانك اوهارا و كينيث كوك. تجادل الورقة البحثية ان شعراء مدرسة نيويورك الشعرية تاثروا بالحركات الفنية السائدة حينها وخصوصا المدرسة التعبيرية التجريدية حيث قاموا بتقليد مدرسة تجريدية التعبير في رفضها للموضوعات المجازية و كان التجريد هو محط اهتمامهم عوضا عن ذلك. خلص البحث الى ان الاستعانة بفن الكولاج كان لتحدي الافكار التقليدية السائدة حول الفن.</p>	<p><b>الكلمات الدالة:</b> - - الكولاج - مدرسة نيويورك الشعرية - كينيث كوك - جون آشبييري - فرانك اوهارا</p> <p><b>معلومات البحث</b> <b>تاريخ البحث:</b> الاستلام: ٢٠٢١_٨_١٢ القبول: ٢٠٢١_٩_١ التوفر على النت</p>
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## Introduction

The term collage comes from verb *coller in the French language* with the meaning of "to paste or glue". The term in visual arts denotes a "technique that involves juxtaposing photographs, cuttings, newspapers, or other media on a surface" (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>). Collage initial development was in the early twentieth century by Pablo Picasso, the Spanish painter, and other Cubist artists. Marjorie Perloff argues that Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* "... is usually put forward as the first true collage, as it incorporates a ready-made oilcloth print of chair caning and a frame made out of a rope" (Quoted in Danash, 2004).

Collage as a technique was adopted by the poets since the early years of its spread. The Avant-garde groups like the Surrealists and Dadaists have employed this technique for the making of new language-based visual works. The Romanian-born French poet Tristan Tzara in his "Manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love" offers a number of instructions to the would-be Dadaists that involves taking clippings of words from a newspaper articles and select at random the words from a bag to create a poem.

Defining the collage as "a complex new hybrid in which the philosophical core of modernism received its most literal expression," Budd Hopkins opines that "the radical intermixture of methods and materials gave birth to the physical medium of collage,"(5). Since collage is not limited as a technique to visual arts Budd believes that, instead, it is a "philosophical attitude" and "an aesthetic position" that can nearly permeate any medium of expression (5). When comparing the technique of collage in both literature and visual arts Jacob Korg states that collage in literature consists of "... fragments of reality brought together into a new unity the repetition of forms in the painting and themes in the poem"(90).

An early example of the collage in the modernist poets is found in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which includes clippings from newspapers, lyrical lines, rhymes of nurseries, and talks from the child Eliot's memory. The same exactly is found in Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. Like the visual artist, Eliot used various fragments from old and contemporary literature and glued them together in the Wasteland (especially in "The Burial of the Dead"). A close investigation of the fragment collaged together reveals that they are centered on the themes of mortality in the possibilities of death, death as a life-giving power. The fragments were too many that Eliot had to republish the poem with annotations explaining the source of each borrowed fragment.

Just as the painter who would cut an item and then pastes it on the canvas so that the whole can be seen as one work, Eliot in his poem brought different views and lays them side by side and puts them for the reader to read and then compare. T.S. Eliot used are of people Eliot who are not capable to get in touch with modern life and hence, they are dead-in-life to say the least.

Collage is incorrectly equated in meaning with such terms like pastiche and bricolage. While the former means "[an] artistic composition made up of selections from different works, or a usually incongruous medley of different styles and materials" (thefreedictionary.com). The latter refers to the construction or creation of an artwork from any materials that come to hand.

In sum, collage, for the poets, was the perfect means with which to free the creative impulse to pull the world apart in the name of aesthetic originality, liberty, and soul-searching. And to quote as Pierre Joris "there isn't a 20th century art that was not touched, rethought or merely revamped by the use of [collage]" (quoted in Cran, 213).

#### **For New York School of Poetry**

For poets of such as the New York school poets the association of the visual artists (and the intellectuals in general) with the poets is then inevitable. The time in which the New York school of Poetry emerged was a time of strong changes as far as the social, cultural and artistic scenes in America are concerned. Speaking about New York school of Poetry takes us necessarily into tackling the other New York school which is associated with the abstract expressionism in painting.

The thriving art community in Paris was hampered by World War II which influenced the whole western civilization. However, after the war America became the overriding artistic center and for the first time American painting acquired international significance. America's largest metropolis, New York City, has become artistic leading international center. New York became the home of a movement in American called abstract expressionism. The movement included painters like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, "... who brought modern, kinetic, urbane sensibilities to their works"(literature for student).

When the painters of the New York School are mentioned normally other intellectuals who lived in the city are mentioned too. Those intellectuals are writers who become known as the New York School of Poets. The poetry produced by the poets of the New York School

was, like its counterpart in painting lively and urban. It took urban life as its theme and evaded any kind of meditative poetry such as poems written by their contemporary Black Mountain College group of poets. Nicolas (2015) illustrates that "[New York Poets'] poetry was distinctly tied to New York, which functioned as both the place they lived and as their canvas and muse" (12).

The major characteristic of the New York School is the mutual influence which writers and visual artists have on each other. The New York School was centered on the world of visual art, gallery, museum, studio, and culture as well as informal purlieus like cafés. However, nowadays, the term New York School more describes writers rather than painters. The major figures of New York School of Poets are Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Barbara Guest and Kenneth Koch.

To call the group of friends with similar mentality a school of poetry is not accurate. Hence, the New York School of Poets was not actually a school in the manner of the Romantics or the Confessionals or even a movement in the manner of the Beats. These writers were not involved in advocating certain political causes, nor are they trying to attract people's attention towards any specific social concerns. Tesse (2021) quotes Ashbery remarking that the New York School is distinguished by its "absence of any program," its way of "not planning the poem in advance but letting it take its own way." (171) Kenneth Koch himself object the naming saying:

. . . there was no school of New York poets, in the sense that the French and other European countries have schools of poetry; that is, there was no manifesto, there were no rules, there were no meetings. There *was* a group of friends—John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara and me at the beginning and later James Schuyler" (Tranter "Interview" 177).

In terms of themes and structure, the New York School poets evaded themes that have to do with the decadence of the American society very prevalent in the poems, say, from the Confessional school. Instead, humor their central theme is their attention to language itself, in particular in the ordinary speech that was used by laypeople of their time. Subjects like the discussion of nature and the relation between Man and the universe are only used as long as it could shed light on aspects of urban living in New York City.

Stylistic diversity did exist within New York School poets, their poetry, however, is characterized by being witty, urbane, and conversational. Everyday experience, the search to capture life as it happens and pop culture found their way into their poems. All that is because of the influence of both literary surrealism and abstract expressionist paintings on their poems. The pessimistic seriousness of the post-war poetry is replaced by light comic, albeit not without bitterness, tone of the New York school poets.

There are, however, similarities that give all reasonable excuses to group those poets together. The most important of these similarities are their defiance of art institution, the relationship of art to life in general and aesthetics. The New York School poets wrote in immediate spontaneity in the manner of [stream of consciousness](#) oeuvre, restoring in many instances to the employment of vivid imagery. They were inspired by the contemporary schools and movements such as [Surrealism](#), particularly [the artistic works](#) of their New York City art friends. Like their abstract expressionist counterparts, the poets grew more and more interested in the medium and surface of the work of art. That is to say, the New York School poets believe that the poem's language and its sounds, forms and structures, interactions and textures of words must be just as central as any effort to generate meaning.

### **John Ashbery and Collage**

Since the very start of his life, Ashbery was engaged with collage, a medium he never considered as different from composing poetry. Ashbery started creating collages when he was at Harvard studying English literature. The earliest known collage of Ashbery was collaboration with Fred Amory that appeared on the cover of the *Harvard Advocate* in 1948. His visual art contribution includes creating lots of collages. One time acknowledged that he "did the collages for amusement, without thinking anyone else would see them or be interested" (Cotter, 2008).

Collage for Ashbery is a central part of his creative process; but also it is his way for giving life to his poem. He is a fanatic with a chance of being excited by all shapes and forms of things, from the haughtiest realms of upper culture to the strangest currents of popular culture. Furthermore, collage empowers him with the ability to present ideas or concepts at the same time as he is resisting splendor. To quote Cran:

he values its accessibility and democracy, its ability to keep secrets, drop hints, and provoke discussions, to play with time, and to be simultaneously the simple souvenirs of a life and also compelling works of art. Physically, his visual collages enable him to embody the pluralism he has manifested throughout his oeuvre, as well as 'the fated nature of encounter' (216).

That multifacetedness, as it were, can be noted in a work he produced in 1952 which, practicably, could not be called either collage or a poem. This work can fairly be dubbed as a collage-poem. Ashbery pasted lines of existing text on a sheet of lined notebook paper. Ashbery's poetry aesthetics progressively followed a kind of collage; amalgamate art imagery with gaudy pop American culture and the probing of identity. Bessa (2018) notes that "His poems are famously difficult because they go to four different places at one time and ... that clash prompted an idea of the concept." (23)

To give the best example of the extensive use of collage by a New York School poet, one should only have a very quick view of Ashbery's collection of poems, *The Tennis Court Oath* which he has composed while in Paris in 1962. Bessa (2018) opines that it is a book "beyond comprehension, because [Ashbery] was collaging a lot of different sources" (38). Ashbery's poetry is generally concise, with the sources being cut-and-glued from art history, literature, pop culture, and film. Ashbery's collages "are a vindication of childhood, or a rediscovery of childhood" (39) Bessa states. In his collages, language and visual arts come together in a way that's not pretentious. As far Bessa goes to conclude that Ashbery's collages "[are] not too self-important or trying to make a historical statement. They're just playing with sources and quotations." (42)

#### **Ashbery's *The Tennis Court Oath***

Ashbery's most successful and prominent use of collage in poetry is in his collection *The Tennis Court Oath*, which he described as "highly experimental, oppositional" volume of poetry (qtd in Shapiro, 90). The book, published in 1962, was panned at its release and some of Ashbery's admirers expressed their unfavorable judgments<sup>1</sup>.

Disquieting, hard-to-understand, and vague as they have come to be seen, the poems are an alternative interpretation of what it means to be avant-garde and powerful in their raw experimentalism (Cran, 217). Assemblage which is defined as "an artistic composition made from scraps, junk, and odds and ends (as of paper, cloth, wood, stone, or metal)" (merriam-webster.com), *Tennis* can be regarded as variously approaching the type of assemblage. The collection includes artistic poems that are made up of interacting, heterogeneous

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Vendler values the book of poems as an unsuccessful 'mixture of wilful flashiness and sentimentality', Marjorie Perloff, finds them 'excessively discrete', and Harold Bloom, who argues that Ashbery "attempted too massive a swerve away from the ruminative continuities of Stevens and Whitman" As Frank O'Hara announced, having apparently found himself brought almost to hysteria by it, it is 'a work of desperate genius'. ( See Rona Cran, Collage in Twentieth Century Literature, ) pages 217-219.

components, components which do not blend insofar as they interact namely, a complex of external relations

The poems in *The Tennis Court Oath* challenge the expectations of poetry readers. Their many missing words, ellipses, rapid transitions, illogical constructions, and disjunctive syntax make the reader search for ways of grasping the meaning of his work leaving behind the traditional methods. Collage use is reason why the collection stood out among those works of literature in general and, actually, it makes it removed from any appropriate cultural or literary context compared to the works released during the period.

Just like the case in Ashbery's visual collages, the collection's success, to quote Shapiro (1979), is in its "distribution of the elements of discontinuity so that they are just held in balance, or framed, by the fewest necessary cohesive elements"(61.) *The Tennis Court Oath* exemplifies Ashbery's rejection of giving meanings that are fixed to his poems, and thus imposes boundaries around the meaning giving to the imagination the full freedom to add meaning.

### **'They Dream Only of America'**

'They Dream Only of America' is the second poem in *The Tennis Court Oath*, the collection that testifies for Ashbery's use of collage. This poem is both a collage of anecdotes and an assemblage of stories and illusions, some of which are not so clear. That number of small images is stitched together in a big (but fragmented) image formed by discontinuous narration. The use of collage is exemplified in the heavy employment of illusions, misstatements, disguises, temporal shifts and other imagery that have been glued side by side in the poem.

'They Dream Only of America' begins with "they" an unrevealed personal pronoun ('They dream only of America'), and it is repeated in the second stanza ('They can be grownups now'). The title of the poem is related to the poet's preparation for revisiting America in the summer of 1957 while he was in Paris. It is not explained who is (are) the other(s) with whom Ashbery would go to America. The second line introduces a complex image and, in fact, explains the first line, i.e. their dream of America "To be lost among the thirteen million pillars of grass" (Ashbery, 132). The allusion here is to Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*; but instead of leaves; we have pillars.

The second image presented in the poem is that of the honey that 'burns the throat' (Ashbery, 132). The image was overloaded with false analysis and it is no more than a very personal anecdote in which the poet's French friend, Pierre Martory, who Ashbery dedicated the collection *The Tennis Court Oath* to, made the brilliant statement, "*This honey is delicious / Though it burns the throat*"(Ashbery, 132). Ashbury, then brings the same unidentified 'they' hiding from the darkness in the barn and the children "can be grownups," Thus, Williamson (1984) believes that the scene of recognition that is "averted ... by stopping time, freezing the journey of escape in an eternal present of pastoral beauty" (121).

Next in the collaged poem are the two fragmented images of the "murderer's ash tray," a description of a probable crime scene, followed by a more bizarre image of a 'lake lilac cube'. Nothing connects the two other than being in the same poem. Then the pronoun 'they' appears again and this time 'they' are driving through the dandelion. The image is of two (or more men) who may or may not be the same people who dream of America going through the dandelion in a car journey. The journey is marred by someone's feeling of a headache, something one cannot but connect the stanza with the next of the leg breaking.

Following that the pronoun 'he' and a speaker talks appears in the third and the penultimate stanza and clearly the person who speaks about the honey is not the same person who speaks about the dream, because he appears in quotation marks 'please'.

The final stanza includes the pronoun 'I' within quotation marks. The person other than the speaker is narrating the story of breaking a leg in a room table. Williamson (1984) notes

that the speaker ends paralyzed between "alternatives of ecstasy and destructiveness" (122). In the lines "There is nothing to do / For our liberation, except wait in the horror of it" (Ashbery, 132) freedom "our liberation," requires nothing of them.

The collage of various unrelated stories stitched together by Ashbery in a dreamlike tableau. Ashbery juxtaposes a number of different cuts into his poem, some of which are allusions to other literary works and others and personal experiences. The poem works as a visual tapestry in which the various collaged images.

#### **Frank O'Hara: a Poet among Painters**

The second poet in the order of study of the use collage is Frank O'Hara, who should be the first for he was the founder of New York School of poetry. O'Hara is described as "a dynamic leader of the New York School of poets" (poetryfoundation.org). His juvenilia poetry was occupied with the arts: dance, music and painting. It is not odd that he reflects his interest in art in his poetry since he majored in music at first entered Harvard University, later; however, he changed to English and decided to be a poet.

Francis Russell O'Hara was born in Baltimore, Maryland, but moved early on to Grafton, a town in Worcester, in central Massachusetts. During his teenage years, O'Hara was a serious music student and his first dream is to be a concert pianist. Something he would not carry out because while he was living in Cambridge, he met a man who would influence him much, namely, the poet John Ashbery who was working in the *Advocate* magazine as an editor. On special visits to New York, he met Koch and Schuyler; the two are prominent New York School poets.

O'Hara's interest in art was manifested in his long involvement with the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This association with art and artists in general began when O'Hara was hired as the information and sales table officer in the front lobby, then; he became an assistant curator at the museum in 1965.

Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960) was the first to bring O'Hara's to the public's attention. Two factors have helped to increase his fame one was the publication of *Lunch Poems* in 1965 and the other was his sudden death in 1966. He has left a huge legacy and influence on almost all the poets of the generation to follow, including Bill Berkson, Alice Notley, Ted Berrigan and others.

His premature death has added to his already well-established fame as a legend. The publication of the *Collected Poems* in 1971 established for many that O'Hara was an enormously gifted poet. While he was still alive, O'Hara was known as "a poet among painters," as he associated himself with a group of poets who found inspiration from the painters they attached themselves to. Like the other poets in the New York School, O'Hara wrote more art reviews and commentary than literary opinion. O'Hara made unison between the Surrealistic and Dadaistic techniques on the one hand and the colloquial speech the result was poetry that has a flexible syntax and postmodernist touch.

#### **Collage in O'Hara's *Second Avenue***

*Second Avenue*, is among the early poems that O'hara published in his lifetime in 1960. The poem consists of eleven parts and is both easy and ambitious. The poem is, in the words of Cran (2018), "a collage-heavy poem" (137). For most part, the poem was composed in the painter Larry Rivers's plaster garden studio that overlooks Second Avenue between 7th and 8th streets in New York. "Second Avenue" is surely indebted to New York City and metropolis society in general. New York is treated as "the most substantial art product of our times" (*CP*, 149)<sup>2</sup>. Giving the poem such a spatial title is very crucial in emphasizing the pictorial character of the poem.

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<sup>2</sup> - All references to the poem "Second Avenue" will to this source: Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 139-50.

Tnt on the poem. In addition to Rivers, Kenneth Koch is a major influence on writing the poem. Koch had a significant role in the poem's composition. He finds the poem "among the wonders of contemporary poetry" (poetryfoundation.org). Ashbery, on the other hand, in his introduction to the *Collected Poems* gives a paradoxical statement by lamenting the obscurity of the poem opining that this makes reading it such a "difficult pleasure" and stresses that the sense of experimentation that underlies "Second Avenue" proves "unsatisfactory." ("Introduction" to *Collection Poems*, ix). O'Hara himself recognized that he allowed "obscurity" to enter into his poem via "the relationship [between] the surface and the meaning," to purposely keep the poem, in painter's parlance, "high and dry" ("Notes on *Second Avenue*," 7).

*Second Avenue* is dedicated to the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, and it happened that in an earlier draft the dedication was to Willem de Kooning. Even though the original dedication to de Kooning was cancelled in favor of another, the dedication of the poem to a painter is a testimony of the influence of artists and art in general on the composition of this poem. Moreover, O'Hara himself explained: "where Mayakovsky and de Kooning come in, is that they both have done works as big as cities where the life in the work is autonomous (not about actual city life) and yet similar" ("Notes", 497).

The poem collaged a great number of influences and the two artists mentioned above are only a small point to start with. The poem includes as O'Hara indicate, several scenes and works of arts. In addition to the works of art, O'Hara puts a portion of his life in the form of short stories and the collaged images here includes the: "As I walked into the Dairy B & H Lunch, I couldn't remember/your other eye, I puked"(CP,147). Then, a newspaper clipping about his friend Bunny Lang's trip to the Caribbean that O'Hara happened to receive in the mail made its way into the poem. The piece is originally in French so O'Hara simply copied and pasted it into the poem's overall texture:

"Nous avons eu lundi soir, le grand plaisir de rencontrer à l'Hôtel Oloffson ou elle est descendue, la charmante Mlle. Anne R. Lang, actrice du Theatre Dramatique de Cambridge. Miss Lang est arrive à Port-au-Prince le mardi 24 fevrier à bord d'un avion a visite les sites de la Capitale et est enchantee de tout ce qu'elle a vu. Elle est fort eprise de notre pays."

(CP,140 )

Which when is translated into English reads:

"We had the great pleasure of meeting on Monday evening at the Hotel Oloffson where she stayed, the charming Miss Anne R. Lang, actress of the Cambridge Drama Theater. Miss Lang arrived in Port-au-Prince on Tuesday February 24 aboard a plane to visit the sites of the Capital and is delighted with everything she has seen. She is strong in love with our country. "

Creating a collage of various works of art and little personal stories and memories shows the immense influence of the contemporary art in the poem as it is on the New York School in general. After all, the interrelatedness of art and poetry is undeniable as the New York School of poetry has derived its name mainly from a school of art. This creates a sense that the reader is proverbially roaming a gallery of art while reading the poem. The surreal and abstract-expressionism have both left their imprints in the long poem. This juxtaposition of various collaged works of art made O'Hara feel some of the difficulties that prompted him later to provide few explanations to the reader who found it obscure. This explanation is written in a letter in which he identifies some of the scenes and artistic works including a



description of painter Hartigan at work, an anecdote in which he recounts the story of composing this poem. Moreover, O'Hara insists: "actually everything in it either happened to me or I felt happening (saw, imagined) on Second Avenue "even though the landscape is neither recognizable nor significant on its own terms" (Qtd in poetryfoundation.org).

O'Hara adds a sentimental description of de Kooning's portrait of a woman in the poem:

"You remained for me a green Buick of sighs, o Gladstone!  
and your wife Trina, how like a yellow pillow on a sill  
in the many-windowed dusk where the air is compartmented!  
her red lips of Hollywood, soft as a Titian and as tender,  
her grey face which refrains from thrusting aside the mane  
of your languorous black smells, the hand crushed by her chin,  
and that slumberland of dark cutaneous lines which reels  
under the burden of her many-darkly-hued corpulence of linen  
and satin bushes, is like a lone rose with the sky behind it".  
(CP, 147)

This above description refers to *WOMAN* a portrait by the Dutch de Kooning's, which O'Hara 'pasted' in his collage poem. He had seen the woman the previous summer before in the Hamptons. O'Hara maintained that the woman in "Second Avenue" began as a description of a woman he has viewed "leaning out of a window on Second Avenue with her arms on a pillow" (Qtd in Cran, 91), but soon blended with de Kooning's iconic portrait.

O'Hara collages two separate images side by side one of the painting itself and the other is of him remembering seeing it. He makes it clear that there are biographical instance in addition to the strange imagery that give the poem its form.

The collage of the poem at this point is an adaptation of the processes of surrealism of the juxtaposition of unnatural various episodes. This action of pasting a work of art is so much related to Abstract Expressionism, mixing together O'Hara the poet and the collage-maker. Hence, *Second Avenue* falls quintessentially into both Abstract Expressionism and surrealism in terms of form and techniques; the episodes of unrelated images, works of arts and anecdotes mean nothing to the reader *per se* but in their totality solely they completes a form.

The poem shows a myriad of cinematic of images, collaged hazily by the city's shapes and lights. So, when the poet looks from the window on Second Avenue, his eyes fall with speed so much that the mind loses track of them. To quote from the poem, these images are: "diced essences "sharply cut and full of chance. "Butter. Lotions. Cries. A glass of ice. Aldebaran and Mizar, / a guitar of toothpaste tubes and fingernails, trembling spear" (CPA, 149). Again the solidity of the image is questioned here as, like a real collage, taken independently no significance can be attached to the separate items. The poem keeps the mind and the eyes busy as it projects more and more images creating a moving collage.

'Second Avenue' is composed of fragmented images which are not closely related and cannot be broken down. As the reader tries to understand the fragment he finds himself losing the whole track of the poem. The various items, literary, journalist, aesthetic and otherwise, collaged in 'second avenue' is much a legacy of the social circle in O'Hara found himself in. being both an art critic and curator at the Museum of Modern Art, he moved swiftly between the different disciplines, cutting and pasting from all the spheres he was surrounded with. Collage in O'Hara's work is difficult to define precisely because it operates conceptually, that is, it is rarely possible to say that this or that fragment of text has actually been cut and pasted in from elsewhere.

### **Kenneth Koch's Avant-Garde**

Perhaps leaving Kenneth Koch as the last poet to be discussed is quiet odd taking into consideration his big contribution to the New York School of Poetry. Of all the New York School poets, Koch was the first to achieve fame and acknowledgment, but this arrangement is made based on the year in which his poem discussed here as an example of the use of collage was written. Jay Kenneth Koch (1925-2002) is another poet who is associated with the New York School of poetry. Koch's poetic works concentrate on the commonplace and comical aspects of language among other themes.

As a member of the New York School of Poetry, Kenneth Koch used to address issues of the contemporary American society, in addition to dealing with the process of writing poetry as one of the most important themes. Perhaps what sets Koch aside from the fellow New York Poets is that his themes are presented in a funny style without any loss in the value of interrogating them simultaneously. Like the other poets of New York School, Koch was extremely influenced by the contemporary movements of Surrealism and the Abstract expressionistic. David Lehman (1999) states that “[t]he aim was the liberation of the imagination [...] [and] the New York poets were the first to extend that new frontier” (6).

Koch is associated with the New York School of poetry for most of his career, and is also credited as the founder of the New York School of poetry. He used irony and satire, surrealism, as well as the ability of surprising his readers in many of his poems. The paper argues that his association with the New York poets had an immense influence on the style of his poetry. Art has been a major component of his works in terms of freedom of expression and in the use of artistic techniques like collage. The influence of art on Koch, however, is less evident in poems from across the spectrum of his work (compared to the other two poets discussed above).

The discussion of Koch's poem “One Train May Hide Another” gives us an example of the use of collage in the later poems of an early founder of the New York School of poetry. The poem was published in a collection with the same name in 1994 and the title of the poem refers to railroad crossing in Kenya the poets saw while being there. The poem is about the theme of what things literally and by extension metaphorically can be concealed inside other things. The simplicity of the poem hides behind one of Koch's most difficult poems. Although the tone of the poem is direct, many lines invite the readers to ponder beyond the metaphorical use of language and consider on their personal experience. All that is done while bringing a collage of references to various aspects of life, places and literature.

The very first line indicates that there is the likelihood in the railway crossing of one train is covering up another one while crossing. Thus, the poem's title projects on the figurative level the potential of things and words that have multiple interpretations and understandings. The signboard in Kenya is like a postcard the poet brought with him from one of his journeys collaged at the 'entrance' of the poem. Other places include "Appia Antica" old Roman appian way (16) and the "Valley of the Var" in France (33) and "Santa Maria Maggiore" church in Rome (57). Koch is able to bring together many issues that an ordinary person might encounter during his life. For instance, the lines, “In a family one sister may conceal another./So when you are courting, it's best to have them all in view” (CP, 8-9)<sup>3</sup> the poet poses the issue of having all sisters "in view" before courting one. The poem, like the other poems written in the apex of the New York School being a clever account of the interpersonal and social as well as the religious issues of the contemporary life.

For the purpose of addressing the American contemporary life of the early 1990s, the poem functions as a collage of a collective process as the poet adds to the narrative certain

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<sup>3</sup> - Kenneth Koch, *The Collected Poems of Kenneth Koch* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2005) Pp. 426-28. All Reference to the poem is to this source.

characters, events, situations and conditions in gradual manner. The poem, though written decades after the emergence of the New York School of poetry, shows traces of the rebellious attitude toward the language and the process of poetry composition. Lehman (1999) thinks that the poem “replicates itself like a benign virus, as if its linguistic structure itself defined the ‘hidden’ relation linking widely disparate phenomena” (226).

The simplicity of the language functions as a bridge to connect the various collaged images of the poem. Koch wants to endorse a rebellious attitude against the constraints imposed on life and language which he achieves through the use of facile, simple language and/or comedy that connect the distance between the poet and his reader. Koch's references to a collage of places, artists (Matisse) and works of literature (*Tristram Shandy*) and people give to the poem tone and the power to include everything in the world distrusting importance equally even to the tiniest of things. There is an apparent randomness in selecting the collaged images as if the poem wants to glue together unrelated ideas. But once the reader comprehends the intention of the poet, however, soon it becomes clear that the process of creating a collage of ideas and situations as well as the inclusion of works of art and literature and people is to make the message of the poem more clear and smooth.

In the lines “One idea may hide another: Life is simple \ Hide Life is incredibly complex” (*CP*, 27-28), there is a reference to use of critical investigation to decode the meaning of a simple poem. Koch uses the second person pronoun "you" as a more intimate way to address the readers “When you come to something, stop to let it pass/So you can see what else is there” (*CP*, 56-57). Here he wants to open the reader's eyes to all possible readings of poetry something he has also stated before in his poem "the Art of Poetry" in 1975. This piece of advice as how to read a poem creates a strong connection between the poet and the reader. Therefore the reader can be part of the poem and takes an active role in the poetic process.

The poem promotes in a comic manner the type of engagement and the reader can think further from the experiences and thoughts that the poet acquiescently partakes with him. Lehman (1999) believes that Koch wishes “to enlarge the sphere of the poetic [and] his work is like an amusement park of the imagination” (208) in his effort to support this broadening up of vision. Koch invites his readers to view things under new perspectives, that they get familiar with the hidden messages usually we overlook. Collage creates a linguistic pattern that is not compatible with the phrase “one thing that may be hiding another thing” which is repeated throughout the poem giving it solidity, causing an interruption in the process of reading fluency. The effect of this pattern is to hold this likelihood in a suitable manner as the language used does not cause any understanding problems; on the contrary, it is very clear, direct and comic at some points.

In general, the poem can be seen as an epitome of everything about Koch's poetics: directness, comic language and covert implicitness. The poem gives item lists that undermine the unity provided by the refrain (one thing is hiding another thing). The function of the items is to provide aesthetic energy in an otherwise tight-knit poem. Koch's collages validate the notion that tackling ordinary issues and situations puts him and the other New York School poets under the title of avant-garde poets, as their simplicity motivates the reader to overpass the offered input towards a multi-facets position and a more profound appreciation of these matters. Literary performance as an avant-garde experience becomes an open circle with which every reader may interact with the poem differently. For Koch modernism assimilates the avant-garde principles without losing its unique identity.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, collage, for the New York School poets, was the perfect means with which to free the creative impulse to pull the world apart in the name of aesthetic originality, liberty, and soul-searching. Art was a major influence on almost all the poets of all schools in the twentieth century, but it was especially influential on the poets of the New York School of the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties.

The so-called crazy fifties and sixties was a time of rapid changes which in most part was not favorable. This as a reason that poets like Ashbery created a dreamlike tableau of a poem by a collage of various unrelated stories stitched together. His juxtaposition of a number of different cuts into his poem, some of which are allusions to other literary works and others and personal experiences, indicates his own way to objecting the milieu in which he found himself.

For O'Hara, putting Surrealism and Dadaism in the context of a very facile poetry will produce a fascinating art typical for Modernism. The New York School poets found art a way to help their poems become more decipherable not vice versa.

The poets of New York School imitated the Abstract Expressionists in their rejection of figurative subject matter and their working completely in the abstract. This is why they resort to such art as collage. Like their counterpart Abstract Expressionists, they challenged conventional ideas about art.

Collage is used to give images and examples from the real world and that brings the poets closer to the essence of life and appreciation of the outside world. The small images whether an anecdote, a quotation or a painting pasted into the poem will be clearer when one moves away from the poem to see the full picture which always speaks of a finer purpose.

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