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CHARTING HUMANITY, HUMAN BY HUMAN

It seems fitting somehow to be transmitting a text about Morgan O'Hara by FAX. This remarkable machine, the latest plaything of the children of McLuhan, compresses time and space, sending information verbatim, across vast distances, in a matter of minutes. (Minutes this year, that is; next year it could be seconds). You could say that the computer modem does the same thing. And in fact I would admit that the modem is, if anything, yet more futuristic, as the information it sends is purely abstract, disembodied to begin with and received in a disembodied state. The FAX transmission is concrete, i.e., already in visual form -- at its outset, and is received as such, but is translated electronically into pure abstraction in order to travel around the world. That, rather than the realm of disembodiment in which modem transmissions stay, serves as the logical analogy to Morgan O'Hara's work. O'Hara's mapping and charting of peoples' lives, after all, takes place in a sensate realm. To begin with, the general acts of mapping and activity-charting render the imperceptible -- cyclical activities undertaken over long periods of time, topography too vast for the human eye to encompass (except, perhaps, from the air) -- perceptible, by establishing scaled coordinates. O'Hara takes the acts of mapping and of time-charting several steps further. Into mapping she incorporates not only the coordinate measure of space, but the measure of space over time -- the collapsing of the fourth dimension into the third, as rendered in the second. Into the charting of everyday activity O'Hara incorporates other keyed symbols and systems indicative of recurring determinants. Furthermore, all these dimensional measures are confined to yet

another determinant: the specific history of a human being. It is a history of a life being lived. Every life is a trajectory of sorts, through actual time and space and through the existential time and space of human consciousness. O'Hara depicts the trajectories of her subjects (herself not least) through actual time and space only; but, because we are human and we think in metaphors -- and because, once we know O'Hara's modus operandi, the forms it reveals "read" coherently -- such depictions resonate metaphorically on that existential plane. The specific identities of O'Hara's cartographic portraits are often enhanced with non-mapping devices, patterns or ciphers relevant to the portrait subjects, and often determined by them, which fuse with the mapping to provide a conflation of calligraphic indicators -- indicators that a man or woman has passed through life and left some sort of trace, some mark that asserts individual (and thereby the whole of human) existence against the vacuum. O'Hara's documents are the works of a modern -- even post-modern, perhaps even neo-modern -- calligrapher, aimed at the conceptual" but fleshing out that elusive context with ambitious networks of lines and tone or color. All of us see this and some of us (the patient, the clever) can interpolate the encoded information back into life as it is lived. Those networks, after all, derive from the systems, events, and documents which fill our lives. They have never filled our lives in this manner before, elaborated before our eyes in patterns which bespeak at once processes of standardization and of individuation. Indeed, the overarching message O'Hara transmits to us is that our humanity is fulfilled not by our individuality or by our commonality, but by the interaction of the two, the myriad points at which our identities correlate or contrast -- or, for that matter, correlate and contrast simultaneously. Each of us not only has a history but is a history, and each history is determined with regard to others not simply by its similarities or differences but by its parallels and its conjunctions. That is, we look at an O'Hara time-activity chart, with its meticulous record of specificities, and we think not only about how our quotidian patterns resemble the subject's, but about what we might have been doing at precisely the time that the subject was doing something else -- or doing the same thing. We look at the map patterns yielded

by the various subjects' travel histories and we think not only of the kinds of similarities our own travel patterns would show but the similarities the subjects' maps show to one another. In this way, Morgan O'Hara's efforts to adduce, systematize and customize the patterns of her subjects' lives neither reduces them to mere data nor aggrandizes them into abstracted fables. She renders those lives as individual cells, with their implied individual functions, in the body of our civilization and species.

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