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Organic

Poetry

(organismic      (holistic      (exploratory

Or to elaborate on Charles Olson's Projective Verse with special emphasis on "that stance toward reality which brings such verse into being" (Olson 239) and synthesize what Robert Duncan said in 1963 in two separate letters to Denise Levertov (who herself had some interesting thoughts along this line and no doubt whose field prompted Duncan):

the conventional poet =      universe and life are chaotic; the natural is formless (chaotic); the poet (the civilized or moral man) is given an order to keep against chaos. Every freedom is a breakdown of form. Freedom = (a) disorder or (b) sin.

free verse =      the universe and man are free only in nature which has  
(And we are reminded of      been lost in civilized forms. The poet must express his  
WCW's notion that no      feelings without the trammel of forms. The poem does  
verse is actually free, that      not find or make but expresses...Free verse just doesn't  
each takes on its own      believe in the struggle of rendering in which not only  
patterns & tendencies.)      the soul but the world must enter into the conception  
of the poem. Ginsberg's *Howl* is one of Duncan's examples  
of free verse.

the organic poet = the universe and man are members of a form. Freedom lies in the apprehension of this underlying form, towards which invention and free thought in sciences alike work. All experience is formal – We feel things in so far as we awake to the form. The form of the poem *is* the feeling (and where form fails, feeling fails.)

(Duncan/Levertov 405, 7, 8)

Duncan makes a distinction between these groupings and “linguistic” form which is, among other things, an acknowledgement of the intelligence of the language itself. One writing in the Open (organic) mode quickly begins to understand this. There is, in the act of organic poetry composition, a state of consciousness which the practitioner begins to recognize, cultivate, refine and apply in a system that may employ wordmusic (assonances, alliterations, etc.) repetition, or other methods to further the poem in the non-linear manner Olson suggested when letting the poem rip. (“...Speech where it is least careless and least logical” (Olson – 241)). This process emerges from a: “constellation of experiences ... (which) demands, or wakes in him this demand, the poem. The beginning of the fulfillment of this demand is to contemplate, to meditate; words which connote a state in which the heat of feeling warms the intellect” (Levertov 68).

Most notably in North America, Jazz musicians had long ago sussed out the power of creating in the moment. There is something remarkable in the moment, the only time in which (unfocused on outcomes) self-change can be realized. It is in attention to the moment, which refined, leads to the best of such verse. Form, then, as Levertov noted, is a “revelation of content” and in attention to this revelation as it is revealed, we are rewarded with the organic poem (Levertov 73). The stronger the fields of energy which enabled it, combined with the depth

and skill at attending to the moment and translating it through speech (as transcribed), the greater the energy of the resulting poem. And isn't free verse, or conventional verse (as described by Duncan above) a matter of cleaning up the areas in which one's attention to, or trust in, the moment had waned? This is what I am suggesting revision is, if not (worse) a lack of courage in sticking to the non-linearity suggested by the fields of resonance or (better) a lack of sensitivity that can be detected in the *tuning* process, as Gary Snyder has called it, which accompanies the process of typing out the organic poem, or when it is spoken upon the completion of composition (Snyder 130). The inability to stay on track in the moment, or the lack of trust in the impulses arising in the moment, will likely be stronger in the individual lower on the pyramid suggested by Abraham Maslow in which needs for safety, love/belonging and esteem have not yet been satisfied and have prevented self-actualization. We see this in the content of so many free verse poems when the need for acceptance, publishing credits or other such motivators dominate. Still, what I suggest here is a continuum in which the poet works. When it is perfect, the poem comes out without need for any revision. It is totally organic in that respect. When the attention has waned, and that same voice heard in composition recognizes it as so, a fine-tuning may be necessary. I am suggesting with organic poetry anything more than a fine-tuning constitutes a failing as described above or a lack of time for the impulse to be properly incubated as to be transformed into a high-energy construct. The poem can then be discarded until the content can come out in the moment more clearly.

### **Organismic vs. Mechanistic**

Despite the good Doctor's suggestion that the poem is a "machine made of words" (Williams 256), an organic poem is more like a ghost in the machine. Olson suggested in

Projective Verse that such verse suggested a stance toward reality that was counter to the modernism of his day. The stance Olson hinted at is known as a whole-systems (organismic) perspective which is not so much in opposition to the Newtonian/Cartesian paradigm, but goes beyond its limits. The limits suggested by mind being separate from body, person being separate from environment and so on. Reality is more than inert atoms, but atoms as aspect of patterns of relationship, events in a process of becoming. To go beyond the need for control and domination, we enact Partnership and its inherent interconnectedness. Beyond the merely rational, we get to the mythic. The organic poet understands and nurtures the mythic and the sacred nature of all reality which grows in its sacredness as the poet's trust in her process deepens. The content DOES change as the organic poetry practitioner quickly learns in verification of what Olson suggested. One reaches deeper levels of awareness, new teachers appear (including children, nature and other unconventional sources), and stronger fields of energy become available. Rather than seek to oppose evil, the organic poet can imagine it, see the capability for evil in herself, and move to compassion while yet creating a field of resonance that makes such evils less likely to succeed or even be attempted. Here I am thinking of the mindfulness of Gandhi and the field he radiated that ended British colonial rule of India, or that of Thich Nhat Hanh whose meeting with Robert McNamara led to the end of the Secretary's participation in the American war against Vietnam.

The organic poetry practitioner initiates (or a process in said practitioner is initiated) in which a homeostasis of consciousness begins to happen. Homeostasis is the property of open systems, organisms, to regulate their internal environment to maintain or create stability. Enacted by the organic poetry practitioner, the poem is written, a deeper state of consciousness is enabled, a new level of seeing (or being) is achieved, new teachers (sources) appear, new experiences had

(or reactions to old experiences begin to change) and trust in one's process leads to such qualities as optimism, willingness, acceptance, understanding, reverence and – ideally – serenity. I am suggesting here the organic poetry praxis is a kind of witnessing consciousness or mindfulness. Tibetan Bon Master Physician Christopher Hansard suggests that “Mindfulness is one of the qualities you are migrating towards throughout your life, whether you are conscious of this or not. It is the development of compassion and serenity” (Hansard 203). The praxis of Organic Poetry speeds up this homeostatic process in one's self, (this quest for balance), creates a field of resonance that those who are open may recognize and resonate with, and is the process by which the most powerful of the continent's poetry (Whitman, Williams, Olson, McClure, early Levertov, Hernandez Cruz, Waldman, Bowering, Blaser, Rothenberg, Kyger, Wanda Coleman and others) was written.

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