

Poetics as Cosmology

(Talk given to Cal State L.A., March 21, 2022)

We do what we know before we know what we do.

Charles Olson,
as quoted by Robert Creeley in
poets of the cities of new york and san francisco
1960-1965 (Dutton '74). p. 62

This subject is near and dear to my heart and has been shaped by my experience in interviewing poets, composing spontaneously, studying poets who compose spontaneously and via inner work through Zen and the Latihan Kejiwaan of Subud. As we have a short time available, I'm going to cover a lot of material and post this online so that those interested can go back to the materials and review them more in a more leisurely manner.

How is writing a poem (or making any piece of art) like how you can live your life? What capacity do you have for Negative Capability? Gelassenheit? The Great Doubt of Zen and the nihilism of Keiji Nishitani?

In other words:

- 1) How can the ego part of you be surrendered to the higher self and
- 2) How is the act of listening to the syllables as they occur to you in your own head and arranging them on a page as best replicates that activity a deepening of one's own perception that can be applied to other activities in one's life? Can it be a way of living? What is its relation to proprioception?

Poetics as Cosmology

Poetics means a stance towards poem-making. Cosmology is one's theory of how the universe works. Keats was right when he said the planet is a "veil of soul-making." Michael McClure was likely right when he said: "We are not born with a soul, but with the opportunity to make one." How does one make one's self of USE, transcend the ego self and commit one's self to a Saturation Job or a Multi-Decade Research Project?

I was practicing spontaneous composition before knowing about Charles Olson's 1950 manifesto Projective Verse. Michael McClure told me that was why I likely was interested in his (McClure's) work, because he wrote projectively.

(Have participants read bold sections of PV.)

Michael McClure elaborated on Projective Verse in a 1995 interview I did with him. LISTEN

Denise Levertov and Robert Duncan called their approach Organic Poetry and Levertov's essay "Some Notes on Organic Form" is very helpful.

(Have participants read bold sections.)

Duncan and Levertov's friendship happened largely via correspondence over several decades and one letter, in particular, exposes what Duncan believed to be the cosmology behind the three main streams of North American poetry in 1963:

<https://paulenelson.com/organic-poetry/organic-poetry/>

You can look at The Practice of Outside as Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser called it.

Impersonal verse, as Tim Dean noted of Gary Snyder's work.

(Read from that.)

Postcards

Jason Wirth on Ahimsa PLAY VIDEO

Now & Here

It's the foundation of peace. Spontaneous composition puts you in the now. Deep connection to place, or as the bioregionalists like Peter Berg noted, when you stop living like an invader on the land, is the other necessary component. SEE THIS presentation on Poems for Peace.

The received poem and the practice of seeing your poems on the page as a reflection of how they sound in your head. The prehension of place. These are for me the foundation of a cosmology that is now and here. Poetry is as valid a method of knowing as biology, psychology and philosophy. (Play Miriam Nichols quote here.) I hope though whatever inner life practices you engage in you receive at least this. I'll end with a haibun near the end of the new book that was written at The Lake, the final home of legendary artist Morris Graves.

97. Clues from Hell

Smoke rises to heaven when it ought to descend to hell.

- Ramon Gomez de la Serna

& a heaven's of yr making a home be it the Rock or Careladen, Woodtown or the Lake, Ka'gean or Cloud Nine, Slaughter or a little corner of Hillman City survivable by p-patch. Make it w/ enough care to notice *from the lichen to the day moon*. From the library to the Japanese Maple. From the giant sunflowers to the three steeped cedar points to better weather.

In it & in the chaos of the marked-up books, the three-toed vase, the empty Otokoyama bottles in the recycle bin, clues. To sift through the wreckage one day they'll want clues. Clues to how you ended up next to a fire (well-tended) & clues to the spiritual chase. Clues to the record & direction (for future seekers) & clues to where you hid the Humboldt Fog. Clues cd hide right in front of you as does the sponge plant by the duckweed drift which smears the morning Lake. Clues of cigarette butts & grief.

Old growth Redwood
800 years old
300 feet tall
heard its share
of prayers.

They were always there we'll say, prominent as miniature islands w/ salal, blue huckleberry & dwarfed spruce. Calm as the Lake ripples made by a coot flock landing. Subtle as the woodsmoke rejecting hell in the making of its new home as it courts the morning Cascadia fog. Sincere as autumn bouquets (*sweet little nosegay like*) for every dead stranger in the cemetery made w/ the spirit of *great cobwebs of geese in the sky* & mild-mannered hallucinations of reverse snow in September Olympic Fireweed or the hush of dropping fir needles w/ each new exhale from Blue Glacier.

So stock up on
cake mix & tequila, butter & turkey bacon. Mangoes y

pan de banana. Have handy jasmine rice & altar candles, fresh garlic & olive oil. Cashew bits & blush wine. Wool socks & binoculars. Photos of the loved ones & always the clue-enabling ancestors.

Decoding the sea
& the heavens
ain't for sissies.
Lend a hand
or stand back.

4:08p - N.8.13
The Lake, Loleta, CA
All quotes from Morris Graves