

Melissa Denzer

Personal Poetics Paper

ENG 535 Studies in Contemporary Poetry

Dr. Debra Beilke

### Personal Poetics: The Path to Existence

The poet Anne Stevenson was known to defend “poetry’s weird tyranny and ungovernable need to exist” during her career as a critic and poet (Stevenson, 328). This commitment to the form is one I too idolize and aim to emulate in my own poetics. It is because of poetry’s relentless instinct to survive that it has evolved and continues to transform with each new generation. My own personal poetics has done the same over the course of my studies, not only by existing despite its differences from previous poetics but because of its similarities to past techniques and movements. By combining the raw and confessional movements with the philosophies of the beats and the New York schools of poetry, my personal poetics exists as a hybrid form for which new poetry can continue to grow.

Poets with similar instincts and ideologies as my own include Elizabeth Bishop, Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Anne Stevenson, Walt Whitman, Willams Carolos Williams, Lucille Clifton, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Frank O’Hara among others. These poets belonged to the spontaneous prose and confessional poetry movements, raw poetry movements, and the Harlem renaissance in their time respectively. My personal poetics uses an open approach to topics like spontaneous poetry, the ideologies and priority to sounds of the black mountain and the New York schools of poetry, and the themes and personal ties of identity poetry and confessional

poetry found in the confessional and the Harlem renaissance movements. Topics of gender and racial identities' relationship to poetry in "Writing as a Woman" by Anne Stevenson and Langston Hughes' "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", the spontaneous and confessional nature of "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara's "Personism: A Manifesto", Olson's "Projective Verse" and its relationship to the black mountain and beat movement, and Jake Kerouac's "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," all directly influenced my poetics heavily as I worked to identify its developing hybrid form.

In Frank O'Hara's essay, "Personism: A Manifesto" he describes the New York school of poetry as a form that must be witty, never boring, must communicate the spontaneity of imaginative creation, be effortlessly allusive, and convey a robust sense of personal immediacy and yet not be dully confessional (O'Hara, 1072). While Denise Levertov described the organic form of poetry in this era as one that adopts a semi-religious, semi-romantic vocabulary where poetic inspiration begins in a moment of awed contemplation in the temple of life, which works to remind poets that form is essentially never more than a revelation of content (Levertov, 1081). The most telling aspect of this era of poetry is the intrinsic "instinctive" nature of how a poem is formed. In projective verse within the black mountain studies, Olson describes the techniques in which a spiritual "trance" or "calling" of a topic or other motivation influences the poem, where the poet writes in an unedited and unscripted way, releasing the poem onto the page to vulnerably connect to the reader of the poem with a freedom that is different from the modern poets set before them (Olson, 1053). The techniques of organic form, projective verse, open verse, and its associated traditions informed my own poetics which establishes an imaginative and spiritual approach to writing poems that is both experimental and open-minded. Ginsberg's analysis of his own long-form poem, "Howl" dives into the way the movement evolved with its

poetic innovations, such as the practice of “wild phrasing” and “rhythmic buildup” combined with the use of breath units and exceptionally long lines to articulate the poetry effectively. (Ginsberg, 1074). My own poetry pays particular attention to these techniques with a focus on breath, the relationship to sound, rhythm, and its relationship to one another just as beat poetry follows. However, my poetry is often more confessional and does not deem it dull but rather essential to the connection for the poet to the reader like that of the Black Mountain and confessional poets. In Kerouac’s deep dive into the steps of spontaneous prose, Jake Kerouac articulates that writing poetry should be done “without consciousness” in an almost semi-trance, as Yeats later coined, “trance writing” to allow the subconscious to admit its own uninhibited “modern” language what conscious art would often censor (Kerouac). When writing my first drafts of my poetry, I make a point to utilize this approach to allow complete creative freedom before more intentional structures are upheld. An example of this is in my poem emulating Kerouac, in “Mower in the Night” which practices the steps of spontaneity for the art to form on its own. My first line for instance, is “Ruminating on the roaming of rhythm there is an awareness in the darkness of the night” there are poetic techniques engaged however they arrived from my subconscious as I practiced unedited or transcribed structure to the poem.

In addition to these techniques, my poetics incorporates the trends of confessional poetry and Harlem renaissance movements, by focusing on themes about personal identity and how it influences the poem and in return; society. Just as poets Anne Stevenson and Langston Hughes discuss in their essays on “Writing as a Woman” and “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” the personal aspects of the poet can directly influence an important topic of identity which ties into politics and larger universal themes (Stevenson 337; Hughes 964). Just as race and gender are topics of confessional poetry, I find my own work reflecting on autobiographical

events either related to my identity or tied to larger themes in some way. I follow Stevenson's ideology which says that she "doesn't believe you can write truthfully and entirely comfortable" (Stevenson, 340). Stevenson expands by saying that "Tension is the mainspring of imagination" (Stevenson, 340). An example of this is in my poem, "In the Attic" where I depict an experience of sexual assault I had as a child. In the poem, I emulate Sylvia Plath's poetry style to expose a personal truth for larger relatability. This is notable in the line, "Memories hazy like dreams/the suffering sister on the floor" as it is here that readers realize this is a real memory. However, it is a necessary confession for the larger lens of poetry. Raw poetry, confessional poetry, and identity poetry found in the confessional and black mountain and Harlem renaissance movements align most with my own poetics and inform my writing by how I interact with my reader, the choices I make in connection to the meaning of the poems, and the structure in which I write.

In contrast to these influences, some philosophies do not align with my poetics for which I plan to omit their practices entirely. In terms of spontaneous prose, I do not intend to take every step literally but rather pull from the effective aspects while incorporating more structure in further drafts of my poetry. Other techniques such as abstraction and personism in poetry, although they have a place in the canon, do not reflect effectively in my own personal poetics. Ginsberg noted in her essay "Notes Written on Finally Recording Howl" that this approach may be effective for some poets. He states that "Abstraction involves personal removal by the poet" where for instance: the decision involved is the choice between "the nostalgia *of* the infinite" and "the nostalgia *for* the infinite" which defines an attitude towards a degree of abstraction" (Ginsberg 1073). Whereas personism addresses itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity and sustaining the poet's feelings towards the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about

the person” (Ginsberg 1073). I cannot bring myself to create that removal entirely, as I feel inevitably connected to the poems I write. Another aspect of poetry that I do not plan to incorporate is metaphysical poetry. T.S. Elliot described the technique as one where “Poetic language became more refined as poetic feeling became clumsier and, consequently, thought and feeling became strictly segregated in poetry” (Ramanzi, Jahan, et al., 949). Metaphysical poetry involves a great deal of thought and intellectual strain, that feels counterproductive to the art form in my view. Poetry already has metaphors and hidden meanings behind every choice, repetition or sound, so the practice of further complicating the art makes it feel less accessible. I think accessibility is of the utmost importance to the next generation of poetry, including my own.

My personal poetics incorporates shorter stanzas, often with organic form or open verse approaches and projective verse techniques, relying on the spontaneous and spiritual nature of the process to create the poem of the New York and black mountain schools of poetry approach. I often incorporate a confessional autobiographical or identity-related element and write structurally in either free verse or with a loose rhyme scheme with the constant incorporation of alliteration, repetition, and the emphasis of sound to drive the poems like that of the Harlem Renaissance or Confessional eras. My poetry has inadvertently changed as I have studied poetry in depth in this course in addition to the poetry courses I had taken before it. I have realized that although it is important to grow and evolve poetry as generations continue to express the art, it is also imperative the traditions of past processes are not forgotten, underestimated, or taken for granted. T.S. Elliot states in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, “...’ tradition’ should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand, and the novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance” (Elliot,

942). In other words, tradition is informative and necessary to continue to evolve the canon.

When practicing my own poetics, I always use famous or well-known poets' poetry as a blueprint to draft my own poems in their earlier evolutions, to better understand the techniques and their effectiveness. For example, for my poem, "Those Summer Saturdays" I had used Robert Hayden's poem, "Those Winter Sundays" as my template for which to expand my own content from by letting the poem influence my form. I have learned it is important to continue to grow and not tie oneself down to a particular form, but to continue to play with the art like paint splatter onto a canvas. Poetry is meant to be accessible, effective, and reflective in nature. My personal poetics aims to convey exactly this.

My personal poetics exists so that new poetry can continue to grow, by combining the Raw and Confessional movements with the philosophies of the beats and The New York school with one another, a new hybrid of poetics is formed. Raw poetry, confessional poetry, and identity poetry found in the confessional and black mountain and Harlem renaissance movements align most with my own poetics and inform my writing by how I interact with my reader, the choices I make in connection to the meaning of the poems, and the structure in which I write. I feel poetry should be accessible, effective, and reflective in nature, for which metaphysical, abstraction, and personism do not often apply to my hybrid techniques. By respecting tradition to evolve it, my personal poetics can thrive when put into practice. Just as Anne Stevenson was a defender of "poetry's weird tyranny and ungovernable need to exist," I too defend my personal poetics as part of the next generation ready to influence the canon.

## Works Cited

- Elliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3d ed., vol. 1, Norton, New York, NY, 2003, pp. 941-947.
- Ginsberg, Allen. "Notes on Finally Recording Howl." *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3d ed., vol. 2, Norton, New York, NY, 2003, pp. 1074-1078.
- Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3d ed., vol. 1, Norton, New York, NY, 2003, pp. 964-967.
- Kerouac, Jake. "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" *Blackboard readings folder: Studies in Contemporary Poetry*. Concordia University St. Paul. 2023
- Levertov, Denise. "Some Notes on Organic Form." *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3d ed., Vol. 2, Norton, New York, NY, 2003, pp. 1081-1086.
- O'Hara, Frank. "Personism: A Manifesto." *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3d ed., vol. 1, Norton, New York, NY, 2003, pp. 1072-1074.
- Olson, Charles. "Projective/Verse" *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3d ed., vol. 2, Norton, New York, NY, 2003, pp. 1053-1061.
- Ramanzi, Jahan, et al. *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. 3rd ed., vol. 1 & 2, Norton, 2003.

Stevenson, Anne. "Writing as a Woman" *Blackboard readings folder: Studies in Contemporary Poetry*. Concordia University St. Paul. 2023, pp. 327–341.

file:///C:/Users/trepa/Downloads/Anne%20Stevenson,%20Writing%20as%20a  
%20Woma(1)%20(1).pdf