Organicism

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Modernist organicism emphasizes the interrelatedness between the natural world and society and links socio-cultural changes with nature, biology, and aesthetic forms in imagining the human – and society – as an organic structure. Modernist organicist aesthetics follow the modernist organic principle of art, ‘form follows function.’ Crucial to the theory of modernist organicism are theories of biology and life such as those of Charles Darwin, Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Herbert Spencer. Importantly, modernist organicist aesthetics emphasizes a sense of place or region and ecological consciousness (e.g., the Garden City movement in Britain in the early 20th century and the cultural or anthropological turn of the 1930s). A list of modernist organicists might include D. H. Lawrence, and later Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Patrick Geddes, Ebenezer Howard, Richard Llewellyn, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Lewis Mumford, Willa Cather, Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and Louis Zukofsky, to name only a few. These artists viewed nature as a living force and showed the interdependence between nature and human-beings.

Organicism originated and flourished in the Romantic Movement in Germany, Britain, and America in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. S. T. Coleridge first used the term ‘organic form’ in an 1808 lecture on Shakespeare and explained it later in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). In fact, Coleridge borrowed this term from German Romanticism. Distinguishing the organic from the mechanical, imagination from fancy, he underscored the organic form of art that operates immanently or synthetically from within. The conception of organicism changed significantly in Victorian and modernist periods, but some of its underlying ideas persisted.

**References and Further Reading**

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