



Becoming Cascadian

Rainier Beach, Cedar River Watershed, on Lake Washington.
May 31–June 4, 2018

Living in Place with Peter Berg & Gary Snyder in Mind

Manifesto: “Reinhabiting California” by **Peter Berg** and **Ray Dasmann** first published in *The Ecologist* in 1977. Berg first heard the word *bioregion* from poet **Allen Van Newkirk** in Nova Scotia. This essay defines bioregion as “geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness.”

“*Reinhabitation* means learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation. It involves becoming native to a place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around it. It means understanding activities and evolving social behavior that will enrich the life and that place. Simply stated, it involves becoming fully alive within and with a place.”

“We know more about the property lines than we know more about the life that moves under, over, and through them.” First draft on difference between *invaders* and *inhabitants* quotes **Jack Forbes** (1934–2011): “Native Californians...felt themselves

to be something other than independent, autonomous individuals. They perceived themselves as being deeply bound together with other people (and with the surrounding non-human forms of life) in a complex interconnected web of life, that is to say, a true community.”

“Reinhabitants are as different from invaders as these were from the original inhabitants....Their...‘**future primitive**’ aims might include developing contemporary bioregional cultures that celebrate the continuity of life where they live, and new region-to-region forms of participation with other cultures based on our mutuality as a species in the planetary biosphere.”

Jeremiah Gorsline and **Freeman House** first write of the “Future Primitive” in Planet Drum’s Bundle #3 “North Pacific Rim Alive,” 1974.

Ray Dasmann (1919–2002) influenced by **Jimoh Omo-Fadaka** (Nigeria), **Theodore Roszak**, **Barry Commoner**, **E.F. Schumacher**, and **Gary Snyder**. He had a cabin on the San Juan Ridge in the Yuba River Watershed where **Gary Snyder** made his home in 1969.

Gary Snyder (1930–)

“More and more I am aware of very close correspondence between the external and the internal landscape” (1964 interview).

“To know the spirit of a place is to realize that you are a part of a part and that the whole is made up of parts, each of which is whole. You start with the part you are whole in” (1990).

A Place in Space (1995)

“In January 1969 [just back from Japan] I attended a gathering of Native American activists in southern California....I first heard this continent called “**Turtle Island**” there by a [Navajo] man who said his work was to be a messenger....He said that Turtle Island was the term that the people were coming to, a new name to help us build the future of North America. I asked him whom or where it came from. He said, ‘There are many creation myths with Turtle, East Coast and West Coast. But also you can just hear it.’”

Turtle Island with “Four Changes” (1974).

“A *Place in Space* could equally be called ‘Meeting the Oak’ I realize—seeing how it moves from the first sentence on the political and spiritual loneliness of America and ends with the sentence “meeting the oak.” The arc between the two is a complex account of finding a way to be at home in the world, without giving up larger perspectives either” (24 Dec 1995, GSJ).

“Walking on walking/ under foot, earth turns. // Streams and mountains never stay the same.” —*Mountains & Rivers Without End* (1996).



Peter Berg (1937–2011)

“Globalists versus Planetarians” (1978)

“It is becoming a more widely acknowledged idea [2001] that we all live in some life-place, and that maybe if we save those parts we can save the whole.”

“Learning to Partner with a Life-Place” (‘04)

“**Green City**”: “I think there’s a new urban settler, a new urban person who belongs in the ecological era, who is much more conscious of resources, what they use, what they require, what they provide for themselves, what they do with their time...”

“I think our working together to discover our own wildness, the wild homo sapiens being within us, is very liberating, very exciting. It is the future from my point of view, and it’s pivotal in terms of human civilization” (1989).

Future Primitive: “The phrase future primitives refers to human beings as Mutualist members of a species who in the future would ensure for themselves the full dimensions of consciousness that a regional identity would provide, a regional/planetary identity. It doesn’t mean wearing loincloths. It doesn’t mean trying to become Indians. It means ...[w]e are going to identify ourselves as part of a species in a bioregion on the planet. That’s actually a new place. We’ve never been in that consciousness terrain before.”

“The people in this book might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California.” — **Ursula Le Guin** (1929–2018), *Always Coming Home* (1985).



Resources

- “Raymond F. Dasmann : A Life in Conservation Biology,” interview by Randall Jarrell, Regional History Project, UCSC Library (2000), 165pp. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4j9397s9>
- Cheryl Glotfelty and Eve Quesnet, eds. *The Biosphere and the Bioregion: Essential Writings of Peter Berg* (Routledge, 2015).
- Planet Drum Foundation | planetdrum.org
- *Home! A Bioregional Reader*, ed. by C. Plant V. Andruss, J. Plant, E. Wright (New Society Publishers, 1990).
- Gary Snyder, *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (Counterpoint, 1995).
- Yuba Watershed Institute <http://yubawatershedinstitute.org>



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Peter Berg, Counterculture, and the Bioregional Impulse* by Gary Snyder

I got my start at matching my visionary and scholarly impulse to rethink North America with the actual landscape when I started snow peak mountaineering in the Pacific Northwest. One can't help but see large space of mountains, a few rivers, and think—there are no political boundaries on this, it is a matter of its own shapes and lineaments.

Later as a student at Reed, I came across A. L. Kroeber's "Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America" with its marvelous pouch of maps in the back (Tribal boundaries, four maps of differing Vegetation Areas, Native Cultural Areas, and Physiographic Areas of Native North America) and saw it as a guide to better understanding what North America was and could be. It also proved to be an introduction to a perspective on the entire planet. I ordered a copy, and still have it and use it, in spite of the magic of G.I.S. (U of Ca. Press, 1947).

Then I spent some years in East Asia, mostly Japan. In letters and a few essays my friends and I pursued this line of thought further, if lightly, and when I returned to the West Coast for good, in 1968, I was soon in touch with Peter Coyote, Jim Dodge, Jerry Martien, and Freeman House and soon met Peter Berg.

There was a large gathering, at Muir Beach early in 1969—when Sandy Stewart still ran a restaurant there—and I met Peter Berg then. I right away liked his sparky, funny, fiercely questioning streak and noted that he looked like Lenin.

Soon after (even while I was busy staging up to go to the Sierra Nevada and planning the building for the Kitkitdizze house), Peter spoke of his Planet Drum project, and though I was drawn into mountain carpentry and local community building labor for many years, I tried to stay in touch.

Peter's circle developed around him, his lovely wife, Judy Goldhaft, perfected her sinuous water dance, and they all began to do workshops from place to place—dances—games—and participating in sexy salmon drama. Raise the Stakes got started. And David Haenke and many others were holding bioregional gatherings in the Ozarks, in Kansas, and in various places—we had one in northern California—it was a lively time. Peter and I were once invited speakers up in Missoula, talking our watershed and community ideas to a host of scholars and counterculture people at the University.

Somebody else will have to do that history, but what I remember was that Peter himself was always at the core of so much. Other groups elsewhere flourished, but San Francisco remained the center of much bioregional thinking for many years. By the same token, my area got deeper into its own local work—the Yuba River watershed, forestry, wildlife, and water issues, and the return of a few larger animals like cougar and bear as well as the now ever-present wild turkey. I was less in touch with Peter and Judy in the last two decades but well-employed locally, as well as periodically visiting the burgeoning local bioregional groups in Japan. Peter Berg maintained his unique style, language, wit, and occasional critical probing, through it all and to everyone's advantage. A hardy, scrappy, super-smart and sardonic alpha, Peter provided leadership and made a contribution that has been immeasurable;

and what a guy.

3.III (Girls Day in Japan) 2012

* In Cheryll Glotfelty and Eve Quesnel, eds. *The Biosphere and the Bioregion: Essential Writings of Peter Berg* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 248–49.

Peter Berg (1 October 1937– 28 July 2011)

Mark Gonnerman

Peter Berg and Judy Goldhaft, 8 July 2011

Peter arranged for his 1 October 2011 memorial service to be a gathering of friends at the site of the Josephine Randall Museum in Corona Heights Park, San Francisco. Many came from all directions. Clearly it was Peter's intention that we should enjoy the panoramic view of San Francisco from atop the exposed terracotta red Franciscan chert bedrock.

(Josephine Dows Randall [1885–1968] was a Stanford graduate [BA, MA in Zoology, 1913] who was the Superintendent of Recreation for the San Francisco Department of Parks from 1926–1951, when she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of California.)

—Mark Gonnerman

REGENERATE CULTURE!

The bioregional movement is an educational exercise, first of all. Next, when you really get down to brass tacks, what it really means is that you have people who say: *I'm not going to move*. That's where it gets new. People say I'm going to stay here, and could count on me being here 20 years from now. What that immediately does is make a politically-empowered community possible. Bioregionalism has this concrete based that it builds from: human beings that live in place together for the long run. In North America that's a new thing!

Human beings who are planning on living together in the same place will wish to include the non-human in their sense of community. This also is new, to say our community does not end at the human boundaries, we are in a community with certain trees, plants, birds, animals. The conversation is with the whole thing. That's community political life.

The next step might be that you have an issue, and you testify at a hearing. You say: I speak as a local, a local who is committed to being here the rest of my life, and who fully expects my children and my grandchildren to be living here. Consequently, my view of the issue is a long-range view, and I request that you have a long-range view in mind. I'm not there to talk about 20 year logging plan. I'm here to talk about a 500 year logging plan. Does your logging plan address 500 years? If not, you are not meeting your responsibility to local people.

Another person by this time takes the stand, from your same group, and says: I'm a member of this community who also intends to live here in the long run, and one of my friends, Douglas Fir, can't be here tonight. So I'm speaking for Douglas Fir. That point of view has come to me by spending time out in the hills, and walking with the trees, and sitting underneath the trees, and seeing how it seems with them. Then speak a sensitive and ecologically-sound long-range position from the standpoint of the tree side of the community. We've done this in Northern California, in particular a character who calls himself "Ponderosa Pine." You can see how it goes from there. It's so simple. Such common sense. And so easily grasped by children.

—Gary Snyder, from the "Regenerate Culture!" interview in *The New Catalyst*, No. 2 Jan./Feb. (1986).

DON'T MOVE!

Without further rhetoric or utopian scheming, I have a simple suggestion that if followed would begin to bring wilderness, farmers, people, and the economies back. That is: don't move. Stay still. Once you find a place that feels halfway right, and it seems time, settle down with a vow not to move any more. Then, take a look at one place on earth, one circle of people, on realm of beings over time, conviviality and maintenance will improve. School boards and planning commissions will have better people on them, and larger and more widely concerned audiences will be attending. Small environmental issues will be attended to. More voters will turn out, because local issues at least make a difference, can be won—and national scale politics too might improve, with enough folks getting out there. People begin to really notice the plants, birds, stars, when they see themselves as members of a place. Not only do they begin to work the soil, they go out hiking, explore the back country or the beach, get on the Freddie's' ass for mismanaging Peoples' land, and doing that as locals counts! Early settlers, old folks, are valued and respected, we make an effort to learn their stories and pass it on to our children, who will live here too. We look deeply back in time to the original inhabitants, and far ahead to our own descendants, in the mind of knowing a context, with its own kind of tools, boots, songs. Mainstream thinkers have overlooked it: real people stay put. And when things are coasting along ok, they can also take off and travel, there's no delight like swapping stories downstream. Don't Move! I'd say this really works because here on our side of the Sierra, Yuba river country, we can begin to see some fruits of a mere fifteen years' inhabitation, it looks good.

—Gary Snyder
Upriver / Downriver No. 10 (1987).

Future Primitive

As I walk over the hill I'm paying attention to the trees and ground. The river comes into view and suddenly I'm stunned by the realization that I am not the same person who started the walk! I am transformed by a ceremony residing in the land itself. The place dictates the mandate for human activities there and that mandate can be perceived directly through a ceremony that lives in the woods like an almost tangible creature. I am transformed, transfixed....We have been awakened to the richness and complexity of the primitive mind which merges sanctity, food, life and death—where culture is integrated with nature at the level of the particular ecosystem and employs for its cognition a body of metaphor drawn from and structured in relation to the ecosystem. We have found therein a mode of thinking parallel to modern science but operating at the entirely different level of sensible intuition; a tradition that prepared the ground for the Neolithic revolution; a science of the *concrete*, where nature is the model for culture because the mind has been nourished and weaned on nature; a logic that recognizes soil fertility, the magic of animals, the continuum of mind between species. Successful culture is a semi-permeable membrane between man and nature. We are witnessing North America's post-industrial phase right now, during which human society strives to remain predominant over nature. No mere extrapolation from present to future seems possible. We are in transition from one condition of symbiotic balance—the primitive—to another which we call the *future primitive*...a condition having the attributes of a mature ecosystem: stable, diverse, in symbiotic balance again...a community of beings joined by rim and basin, air and watershed, food chains—ceremonies....We will be informed by earthworms and plankton. We will study that authority which resides in place and act out our lives accordingly. There is no separate existence.

—Jeremiah Gorsline and Freeman House*

(First published as one of the pieces in *Planet Drum's* Bundle #3 "North Pacific Rim Alive," 1974. Planet Drum originally put out bundles rather than books. Planet Drum Foundation, Box 31251, San Francisco, CA 94131)

* Quoted in Dolores LaChapelle, *D. H. Lawrence: Future Primitive* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1996), xix.

Gary Snyder on the Relation of Interior and Exterior Worlds

Fowler: Some time back you said your poems were exploring job and place; recently you said your poems were exploring the architecture of consciousness....

Snyder: In the statement you refer to, I almost used 'landscape' rather than 'architecture.'...More and more I am aware of very close correspondence between the external and the internal landscape.¹



The real work of modern man: to uncover the inner structure & actual boundaries of the mind. -- "Poetry and the Primitive" (1967)



The over simplism in Mr. X's dictum 'the exterior world is realer than the inner world' is the tragic flaw in the Western Tradition. This flaw is the root of most of the things going sour in America today. The inner world and the exterior world mirror each other—in a very real sense are one. As scientists know, measuring alters the thing measured. Perceivers alter the thing perceived. To distrust the inner world—instinct, visions, dreams—is to distrust animals, the wilderness, the sky. To let the inner life go to weeds and tin cans—as Americans have done—is to let our beautiful continent turn into a polluted trash heap. By all means, yes, beautify the exterior world! Tear down billboards, stop unnecessary freeway building; protect our remaining wilderness—show compassion to the Vietnamese, the Negro, the American Indian! This will only begin to happen when we know the beauties of our own minds and souls—and from that knowledge draw the power to transform ourselves, our societies, our planet (22 September 1967 GSJ).²



We need a broader sense of "monk"—as commitment, as a "critical attitude."—Gary Snyder (7 May 1974 GSJ)



I grew up in terms of planetary normal, which is to say growing up in close contact with the fabric of nature, rather than removed from it. I had a normal childhood. — Gary Snyder (1987)³

¹ "The Landscape of Consciousness," in *The Real Work: Interviews & Talks, 1964-1979*, ed. Wm. Scott McLean (New York: New Directions, 1980 [1964]), 5.

² Snyder's unpublished letter was prompted by a comment in a *Look* magazine cover story entitled, "America's Bad Trip: The Pot-and-Pill Kick that is Getting Out of Hand" (8 August 1967): 11-28.

³ Nicholas O'Connell, "Gary Snyder [Interview]" in *At the Field's End: Interviews with Twenty Pacific Northwest Writers* (Seattle: Madrona Publishers, 1987), 308.