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**Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach**  
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Gabriela Marszołek

**The Community of Lookouts.**  
**Mountain Watching and Zen Mind**  
**in the Writings of**  
**Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry.**

**Praca doktorska**  
**napisana pod kierunkiem**  
**Prof. dr hab. Tadeusza Sławka**

**Katowice, 2011**

**Wspólnota Obserwacyjnych Wież.  
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Gary'ego Snydera i Wendella Berry.**

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## Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	
<i>Abbreviations</i>	
<b>Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Community. Extending the Notion, Tying New Cords.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.1. Community – the Transitory Term.</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.2. Ecotones, Watersheds. California Mosaics.</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1.3 Unplaced on Earth. On Displacement.</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>1.4 Wendell Berry’s Being-In-Place.</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>2. Civilization, the Primitive, and the Trails In-between.</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>2.1. Descent to the Primitive and Back.</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>2.2. “Civilization.”</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>2.3. The Palimpsest of Trails.</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>2.4. “Deer Foot Down Scree.”</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>3. Experiencing the Mountains.</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>3.1. „Long Ago When the Mountains Were People.”</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>3.1.1. Loowit.</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>3.2. Walking, Stalking, Circumambulating.</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>3.2.1. Temples Among the Ridges.</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>3.2.2. Circumambulating Mt. Tamalpais.</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>4. Lookout. A Study of a Cultural Phenomenon.</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>4.1 Background Information.</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>4.2. Lookout – the Imagery.</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>4.3. Lookouting in the Cascades (1952-1953).</b>	<b>144</b>

<b>4.3.1. The Changing Terrain.</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>4.3.2. No Importance Upon Words and Letters.</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>4.3.3. On a Spiritual Path.</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>4.3.4. Crater Shan Revisited.</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>4.3.5. Han Shan, a Place and a Poet.</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>4.3.6. The Laughable Path and a Sense of Place.</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>4.3.7. “Ever, Ever Be on the Lookout!” (Daito Kokushi).</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>5. Riprapping in the Sierras (1955).</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>5.1. Riprap, Cobbles and Words.</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>6. At Home in the World. Snyder’s Mind and Berry’s Window.</b>	<b>196</b>
<i>Conclusions: The Final Insight. “Mind Has Mountains.”</i>	<b>206</b>
<b>Streszczenie</b>	<b>209</b>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<b>211</b>
<i>Appendix: Photos</i>	<b>217</b>

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## Abbreviations

References to Gary Snyder's and Wendell Berry's volumes of prose and poetry as well as critical studies are cited parenthetically in the text with the following abbreviations. Other sources occurring sparsely in particular chapters are included in the footnotes.

### Gary Snyder's prose and poetry

- PW                    *The Practice of the Wild* (New York: North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).
- RW                    *The Real Work. Interviews and Talks 1964-1979*, ed. William Scott McLean (New York: New Directions, 1980).
- OW                    *The Old Ways: Six Essays* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1977).
- MT                    *Myths and Texts* (New York: New Directions Book, 1978).
- TI                    *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions Press, 1974).
- EHH                    *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (New York: New Directions Press, 1969)
- MRWE                *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1996)
- RCM                    *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004).
- PLS                    *A Place in Space. Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995).
- RGW                    *Regarding Wave* (New York: New Directions, 1970).
- BF                    *Back on the Fire. Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2007).
- DP                    *Danger on Peaks* (Berkeley: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).
- HSJ                    *The High Sierra of California*, poems and journals by Gary Snyder; woodcuts and essays by Ton Killion (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002).

- TOC Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, Carole Koda, *Three On Community* (printed and bound during the spring of 1986 by Rick and Rosemary Ardinger in edition of 800 copies).
- OM *Opening the Mountain. Circumambulating Mount Tamalpais. A Ritual Walk* (Emeryville: Avalon Publishing Group, 2006).

### Articles, Books, and Critical Studies on Gary Snyder

- NYH “Not Here Yet.” Remarks by Gary Snyder on Buddhism, Ecology & the Poetics of Homelessness in: *Shambhala Sun*, vol 2, no. 4 (March 1994).
- DTI “Gary Snyder’s Descent to Turtle Island: Searching for Fossil Love,” in *Western American Literature* (University of Iowa, Summer 1985, XV).
- PP *Poets on the Peaks. Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades* (New York: Counterpoint, 2002).
- GSPR *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim. Creating Counter-cultural Community* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006).
- PFW *A Place for Wayfaring. The Poetry and Prose of Gary Snyder* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2000).
- CE *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1991).
- EZB *Essays in Zen Buddhism. First Series* (New York: Grove Press, 1949).
- HCBC *Han Shan, Chan Buddhism and Gary Snyder’s Eco-poetic Way* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009).
- NKS *Nature’s Kindred Spirits. Aldo Leopold, Joseph Wood Krutch. Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, and Gary Snyder* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).
- FBUT “*Forest Beatniks*” and “*Urban Thoreaus*” (New York: Peter Lang Publishings, 2000).



SFR *The San Francisco Renaissance. Poetics and Community at Mid-century.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

GSM *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004).

### **Recordings**

DPCD *Danger on Peaks. A Recording.* The Cloud House Poetry Archives, San Francisco. Recorded by Stephen Kushner.

### **Wendell Berry's prose and poetry**

LHH *The Long-Legged House. Essays* (Washington, D.C., Shoemaker & Hoard, 1969).

CP *The Collected Poems 1957-1982* (New York: North Point Press: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987).

WP *Window Poems* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2007).

SEFC *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (New York, San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993).

### **Articles, Books, and Critical Studies on Wendell Berry**

WBLW *Wendell Berry. Life and Work* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

### **Other major works cited**

PTC *Pilgrim At Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988).

ISP *In Search of the Primitive. A Critique of Civilization* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007).

- SPS *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-than-human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).
- CSCM *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain* (trans. Bill Porter) (Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 2000).
- TMW *Thoreau's Morning Work. Memory and Perception in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, the Journal, and Walden* (Chelsea, Michigan: BookCrafters, 1990).
- SP *Sustainable Poetry. Four American Ecopoets* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

## Preface

### The Sacred Territory of the Mind

The territory that has long preoccupied Gary Snyder is that of the mind in the first place. The mind has myriads of expressions and impressions though. Its vast space is germane to the idea of wilderness, and “encloses a huge void”<sup>i</sup> of the world exterior, interconnected with the area reflected in the mind. Snyder’s conceptions of the mind have surfaced throughout his poems and encompass real places brimming with the spirits of their native grounds, the long-forgotten ghosts of *Turtle Island*—the old/new name for America. Since Snyder’s vision is non-dualistic, the outer world and the inner one interweave, which depicts “the human mind in an inquiring, outwardlooking mood.”<sup>ii</sup> The terra of the mind hides worlds aplenty, with particular niches for each individual existence. The sense of the mind, deprived of its constraints, places it within the imagery of lookout towers, whose mere presence in the land—cragged, enormously distant and impermanent, though lasting to some extent—includes something of the very idea of a community. The area of the North Cascades of Washington and Oregon, with the lonely lookout towers, envisages one’s path to that community, which is “the community of lookouts,”<sup>iii</sup> Gary Snyder belonged to in his early twenties. This niche is that of the Zen mind as well—“free and creative,”<sup>iv</sup>—whose space outlooks into the world of experience, the mundane, the real work, and into being that is intricately incorporated with seeing the relations one is supported by.

Nonetheless, as stated in a *Wilderness Journey*, indulging oneself in the metaphor and thus being carried a little further, there is another area, a “territory of civilization, or a little urban zone,”<sup>v</sup> which allows us to pursue our life in terms of standardized ways of expressing ourselves in the real world. The ground for understanding Snyderian conceptions of the mind can be found in the Zen Buddhist teachings of Hui-nêng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen in China, which reveals Snyder’s abiding interest in Oriental philosophy, religion and poetry. Since, “the mind is like space, yet without any notion of space,”<sup>vi</sup> this is where one begins to move from, across and deep down the poetics of

exploration, investigation and insight. Therefore, the point of departure is rather the *terra* of the mind in contradistinction to territoriality as social or human constructs.<sup>vii</sup>

### **The Sacred Territory of Observation**

. . . the sense that Buddhism brought to the world is that the mind, and the self, are natural territories of observation which we ignore at our own risk. Furthermore, and fundamental to the practice, is that on coming to understand the self, you also understand the phenomenal world.<sup>viii</sup>

Snyder's Buddhist mind is a dexterous means of intermingling inner and outer worlds at the moment of perception. According to Leonard M. Scigaj, it is "the place where inner and outer worlds interpenetrate."<sup>ix</sup> In Snyder's poem "Piute Creek" from his first volume of poetry *Riprap* (1959), the poet claims, "A clear attentive mind / Has no meaning but that / Which sees is truly seen."<sup>x</sup> Hence, perception is involving, "mutually-embracing," spinning the space, the living world, and making a world afresh, the world of replenished diversity and of fragments sewn out of the vast (perceived) field—seen, taken inside, and then set freely to the turning world. David Abram, in his study on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, speaks of perception as that which always involves, "at its most intimate level, the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which perceives."<sup>xi</sup> Therefore, the world—in its objective form—seems to be the space of "interconnected gazes," (the term introduced in the first chapter) the field reverberating with its energy, reclaiming its power to create something out of something erased, and called forth to become another part of the world experienced at the moment of looking. An individual is always fragmented to a certain extent so as to decompose his or her world of the objects being perceived, whose misty existence is but another layer of the interior freely recreating that which is seen. "The weathering land," "the wheeling sky,"<sup>xii</sup> can be read as relocating the spiritual and the physical in the realm of the living world, where the Mind – as understood in the Buddhist terms – comprises the entire field of the living world wherein the human mind/body complex is

involved. The landscape is thus seen as enveloping and encapsulating. A metaphor depicting the process of the active interplay of the perceiving and the perceived rests upon the assumption implicit in Snyder's lookout experience, when in his early twenties the poet was a fire watcher on Crater and Sourdough Mountains in the North Cascades. The literal "territory of observation", which is a lookout tower, becomes transplanted within the metaphors of the Buddhist mind. Ron Dart, in his study on Thomas Merton, Gary Snyder and Cid Corman, says that "the use of the mountain as a purgatorial symbol and its ascent to insight and truth was one thing. The use of a 'fire lookout' was yet another poetic, literary and spiritual way to approach the quest for meaning and inner insight."<sup>xiii</sup> For Snyder it was an experience of dwelling both in and outside the world, as long as we adhere to the conception of the Buddhist mind, or consciousness: "[t]he little cabin—one room—/ walled in glass / Meadows and snowfields, hundreds of peaks."<sup>xiv</sup> The huge vastness of the world seems to be encapsulated within the single room of the mind, which is itself like a vibrant pool of cool, translucent water reflecting the images and resonating with all that which goes with the living. Hence, the author of *Turtle Island* writes: "Now, we are both in, and outside, the world at once. The only place this can be is the *Mind*. Ah, what a poem. It is what is, completely, in the past, present, and future simultaneously, seeing being, and being seen."<sup>xv</sup> Thomas J. Lyon writes in "The Ecological vision of Gary Snyder" about the "wild integrity" and claims that the direct link between the two sides of the outer and inner wilderness is the ground of ecological values. The very concept of wild integrity must, by definition, involve the talk of a primitive mind and an ecological mind, which in fact paves the way to the "whole new mind"<sup>xvi</sup> The "whole new mind" would sew the torn territories which would now regain their rights to restore the lost balance. According to Snyder, "this integrity is what is meant by wildness; . . . it takes a consciously primitive sensibility to know it and respect it, that is, one not overlaid with the programmed covetousness our culture seems to demand."<sup>xvii</sup> This sensibility goes deep down our knowledge of the self, which is, simultaneously, our knowledge of the phenomenal world. Nonetheless, only when the self is forgotten, one becomes united with the ten thousand things. To quote the Zen Master Dōgen: "we study the self to forget the self."<sup>xviii</sup> In order to do that, one

needs to “come to the window, look out, and see” that windows, whether those literal ones or the doors of perception, are all frames of consciousness. Wendell Berry writes: “the window is a form / of consciousness, pattern / of formed sense / through which to look / into the wild / that is a pattern too, / but dark and flowing, / bearing along the little / shapes of the mind / as the river bears / a sash of some blinded house.”<sup>xix</sup> Therefore, the “blinded house” is a state of mind constantly on the lookout, and— like the lookout tower itself—“radioing back and forth,”<sup>xx</sup> sewing the outer and inner wilderness, the patches of inner land stretching far outside the horizon—grasps merely a tiny presence of the patterns Berry spoke of in the above poem.

The main teachings surfacing in Buddhist texts are those of impermanence of all the living. The incessant whirl of things is a process, never-ending and never the same, of acquiring and learning that “there are paths that can be followed, and there is a path that cannot – it is a path, it is the wilderness. There is ‘going’ but no goer, no destination, only the whole field.”<sup>xxi</sup> Therefore, speaking of wilderness means speaking of wholeness, though wholeness is an idea constantly falling outside, fleeting, evanescent and ephemeral. However, thinking of wholeness starts once a trail is abandoned and the ‘follower’ has been forgotten, which instantly aligns with the idea of meditation. According to Snyder meditation must bifurcate both in and out. Therefore, interior meditation examines the wilderness within, whereas exterior meditation is walking through the landscape. Still it is drifting and delving into the same notion in order to restore the balance. For Snyder, as for Thoreau or Dillard, walking is spiritual and meditative. In *The Practice of the Wild* Snyder attempts at conveying the message that walking is the right equipoise of spirit and humility. Moreover, it is a sacred relationship with the most physical; it is one’s adjustment to the awe and wonder at the terrain just newly walked over, and it is reminiscent of interdependence and interconnectedness, the two predominant truths of ecology, its constant flux, which issues from the *oikos*<sup>xxii</sup> (“household”) of the mind and goes outward, and elsewhere, “because no place is more than another, / All places total, / And our ankles, knees, shoulders & / Haunches knew right where they are. . . . / No path will get you there, we’re off the trail, / You and I, and we choose

it!”<sup>xxiii</sup> The “household” of the mind is yet another expression for the entire earth. In another poem we read:

Ever-fresh events  
scraped out, rubbed out, and used, used, again—  
the braided channels of the rivers  
hidden under fields of grass—

The vast wild

the house, alone.

The little house in the wild,

the wild in the house.

Both forgotten.

No nature

Both together, one big empty house.<sup>xxiv</sup> (*spacing original*)

The stars, like rocks and trails, lead further onward, whereas the land itself is an unfinished manuscript with all those meandering trails, paths, roads, with all that stretches beyond them. It all well comprises the universe as interconnected, as a vast interrelated network, or Indra’s net, with myriads of gems reflecting one another infinitely. On this instance, one’s belonging extends itself throughout the universe as well, which turns to be a “design of infinite belonging.”<sup>xxv</sup> Uncertain as the condition of a human being presents itself, there is more to this awe and wonder than to the doubt; more to the incessant process and to the rest than to apocalypse. Though thoughts are rocks placed “solid before the body of the mind,”<sup>xxvi</sup> transformations are forever going on “in an empty world which confronts us,”<sup>xxvii</sup> for ancient geological processes are ongoing. To come to the window, look out and see is to “recognize each thing as it is, yet not renounce the world,”<sup>xxviii</sup> as Snyder admits in one of his talks on the Vow, since “the Vow is a daily commitment,”<sup>xxix</sup> or in other words, it is to “awake, than ever before, yet [be] ready to leave.”<sup>xxx</sup> Snyder’s words are to awake the dormant human sensibility and sensitivity; to show the interlacing network of the energy common to the world and to the human. In *Philosophy on the Way to Ecology* David Abram claims, “my life and the world’s life are deeply intertwined. . . . when a haze

descends upon the valley in which I dwell, it descends upon my awareness as well, muddling my thoughts, making my muscles yearn for sleep. The world and I reciprocate one another. The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly a determinate object; it is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in turn.”<sup>xxxii</sup> In other words, it is an exchange of energy, an overflow of emotions that fill the field with experience and touch it with the lived experience along with perception which mixes colors and opens up the vaster, living field, a landscape, open and dynamic.

Snyderian conception of ecology is closer to the notion of *oikology*, though the notions are better described by the fusion of inner and outer energies, since it is the fusion of the human and the natural; of the within and the without; of the pathways taken, abandoned, retaken, then lost, regained somehow; “detritus pathways” to be uncovered while ascending a certain discipline of “growing with less.” If poetry is a tool to reestablish human bond with the earth, then the mind is the sacred space where the prime celebration of the world arises and calls for further angles of insight. It is the mind where the embryos of all things dwell for “all things are in our own minds.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> In Zen essays we read, “have your mind like unto space and yet entertain it in no thought of emptiness.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> To renew our reciprocity with the earth Gary Snyder, showing his contentment in everyday practice, proposes a vision that would be our way of re-visiting the earth by means of true insight into the long-lost trails. Learning a place, its very nature, its interrelations with the living, would mean enlivening the constant process of being and nonbeing together; of following the trail and going off the trail to have the whole view of the world turning, the world revolving, the world as process, which is never final.

Chapter I, “Community. Extending the Notion, Tying New Cords,” introduces the notion of community by presenting its transitory nature, its gradual interspersing with various areas of cultivating the sense of place and belonging. Therefore, the chapter proposes a reading of a place by means of recognition of ecotones, watersheds and bioregions, whose life is deeply interwoven with the lives of people as well as plant communities native to California. As place organizes the life of a community, it endows its members with a certain kind of mind that is able to perceive the lasting relationship



between man and place. Only then can one afford to look beneath the fixed relationship between words and their meanings. Hence, uncovering names that have been implicit in the land is where the process of reinhabitation begins. Community is a term rich in niches, thus offers divergent approaches to place, land and the mind as well. So too is it close to dialectics between house and the earth; place and unplacement, which are depicted in the chapter from the perspectives of Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry.

In Chapter II, “Civilization, the Primitive and the Trails In-between,” I focus discussion on rethinking the continent of America as a “palimpsest of trails” engraved in the terrain that is traversed by myriads of creatures. The title trails delve into the ground and make us re-think the concept of civilization from the perspective of native American beliefs, hunting magic where animals are those who speak for the “creaturely community” they belong in.

In the early part of chapter III, “Experiencing the Mountains,” I trace back the native American myths on the mountains whose presence Gary Snyder has experienced in his youth and later in his life. A substantial portion of these myths is carried over into his essays and poetry. Therefore, the “Loowit” part follows Snyder ascending Mount Saint Helens, which coincides with the time of “atomic dawn” in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Interweaving in this part are lessons on deep respect and empathy, humiliation and awe felt when confronting the acts of nature. A part of the chapter tracks the conceptions of walking, a form of outer meditation, the act of experiencing and learning a place and landscape; stalking, the skill of seeking animals and visions; circumambulating, a ritual of walking around a sacred mountain. All those ways of interpreting the movement upon the earth that is turning under human feet come to evoke something of the bygone days, like the Celtic beliefs concerning sun-wise and counter-sun-wise movements; Japanese mountain brotherhoods or the spirit of Yamamba, the “Old Woman of the Mountains,” whose counterpart in the European culture may be an evil witch.

Chapter IV is entirely devoted to a study of a cultural phenomenon of lookouting (occupying a surveillance post on top of a mountain in order to detect fires). Although lookouting is discussed in the American context of

Gary Snyder's experience in the North Cascades in 1952 and 1953, the practice was also known in Europe, especially in France. The term "lookouting" is brought to close observation and studied on the basis of perception, the mind and landscapes of the mind. It is a notion that involves diverse interpretations of seeing and being, human intricate relation between the inner and the outer world, and the dialectics of space/place that is implicit in the very idea of a lookout. Finally, it serves well as a metaphor of the mind in the Zen Buddhist contexts. I introduce some poems of the T'ang Dynasty poet, Han Shan, so as to illustrate the Zen mind as a bridge to one's understanding of the nature of the empty universe, the house un-walled and unrestrained to any Western ideas about the two.

My fifth chapter, "Riprapping in the Sierras," takes the reader south from the Cascades of Oregon and Washington toward the Sierras of California, where in the summer of 1955 Snyder enriched his idea of "the real work" by his trail crew work. The chapter therefore attempts to lay ground for the ephemeral nature of words, the spaces between them, in relation to literal rocks that form long and enduring trails.

The last chapter, "Snyder's Mind and Berry's Window," is a compilation of some of the motives and metaphors that have been reiterated throughout the thesis, such as perception, the mind and the house. It proposes a reading of Berry's window, the "Wind's Eye," through his *Window Poems*, and Snyder's conception of the mind depicted in his poem "As For Poets" (*Turtle Island*) along with its prose counterparts. The window frame, its unique pattern—forty paned window in Berry and a glass-walled lookout cabin in Snyder—come to represent the attributes of the Zen mind, the realm of insight, the sacred space, and each poet's private territory of observation.

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- <sup>i</sup> Gary Snyder, "On 'As For Poets'" in: *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1974), p. 114.
- <sup>ii</sup> Thomas J. Lyon, "Twenty years later-A Coda" in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1991), p. 47.
- <sup>iii</sup> John Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks. Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades* (New York: Counterpoint, 2004), p. 270.
- <sup>iv</sup> Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays In Zen Buddhism (First series)*(New York: Grove Press, 1949), p. 220.
- <sup>v</sup> "A Wilderness Journey with Gary Snyder," interview in *Inquiring Mind*, vol. 11, no 1, (1994), p. 15. Gary Snyder Archives. Special Collections, University of California, Davis.
- <sup>vi</sup> Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Sutra of the Hui-Neng Grand Master of Zen with Hui-Neng's commentary on the Platform Sutra* (Boston & London: Shambhala Dragon Editions, 1998), p. 262.
- <sup>vii</sup> For discussion of the concept of territoriality, see Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 30.
- <sup>viii</sup> "A Wilderness Journey with Gary Snyder," p. 15.
- <sup>ix</sup> Leonard M. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry. Four American Eco-poets* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), p. 271.
- <sup>x</sup> Snyder, „Piute Creek" in *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), p. 8.
- <sup>xi</sup> Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry*, p. 232.
- <sup>xii</sup> Snyder, *Riprap*, p. 9.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ron Dart, *Thomas Merton and the Beats of the North Cascades* (North Vancouver D.C., Prospect Press, 2005), p. 30.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Snyder, "August on Sourdough, A Visit from Dick Brewer" in *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions Press, 1968), p. 19.
- <sup>xv</sup> Snyder, "On 'As For Poets'" in *Turtle Island*, p. 114.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Thomas J. Lyon "The Ecological Vision of Gary Snyder" in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy, p. 40.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Dōgen, quoted by Snyder in "Ecology, Literature, and the New World Disorder" in *Back on the Fire. Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2007), p. 34.
- <sup>xix</sup> Wendell Berry, *Window Poems*, unpaginated.
- <sup>xx</sup> Snyder, "Lookout's Journal" in *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions Press, 1969), p. 9.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Snyder, "On the Path, Off the Trail" in *The Practice of the Wild*, 151.
- <sup>xxii</sup> The Greek *oikos* forms the main root of such words as 'ecology,' or 'economy' with the simple meaning of "household," as Snyder explains in his essay "Ecology, Literature, and the New World Disorder" in *Back on the Fire. Essays*, pp. 26-27.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry*, p. 279.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Snyder, *Back on the Fire*, p. 35.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Timothy Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim. Creating Countercultural Community* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), p. 123.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Snyder, „Riprap" in *Riprap*, p. 32.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Suzuki, *Essays In Zen Buddhism*, p. 198.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Patrick McMahon, „Mahasangha, a Great Sangha, a Boddhisattwa Sangha" in *Buddhist Peace Fellowship* (1984), vol. 6, NO. 2.
- <sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xxx</sup> Timothy Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, p. 125.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 33.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Suzuki, *Essays In Zen Buddhism*, p. 221.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

**Chapter 1**  
**Community. Extending the Notion,**  
**Tying New Cords.**

## 1.1. Community – the Transitory Term.

We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity  
For a further union, a deeper communion  
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of community explicated in the thesis does not refer to any particular grouping of people living in a fixed place; rather it bifurcates into the sub-notions of the term, the underlying areas where words' structures seem to melt and conjoin the dimensions that lie implicit in a community as such. The areas beyond to which it relates are literary, economic, social, biological, ecological and Buddhist. The examples which purposefully are place-specific, serve as points of departure whose aim is to follow the transitory nature of community as its works through time as well as the way a person comes to be defined within it. Therefore, "the community of lookouts" – a phrase that ends John Suiter's inspiring *Poets on the Peaks* – comes to stand for a chain of isolated lookout towers perched on tops of particular peaks in the Cascade Range of Oregon and Washington states, peopled by lookouts (fire-watchers) whose main tool was perception. This particular vision of community is to present a refreshed look, not prefabricated, not preconceived as a fixed human condition and a sheer fact of belonging, but as the one opening the shutters, windows and doors, and thus conflating with the outside—the world regained after having dwelt in too small a house for far too long.

A community can also be read as a condition of belonging when it is referred to as a process of true inhabiting the earth, or in other words, "being at home in the whole universe."<sup>2</sup> As Wendell Berry believes,

A community is not merely a condition of physical proximity . . . A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in

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<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Four Quarters* (London: Faber&Faber, 1979), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (New York: North Point Press, 1999), p. 104. Hereafter as PW and a page reference.

each other, their freedom with which they come and go among themselves. (“The Loss of the Future”)<sup>3</sup>

Thus, on an economic and social level, a community and house are interwoven by way of one’s relationship to them and to others; practice in a place; they form a mosaic of shapes, parts fitting somewhere into the whole scheme, or network of related objects, the relationship of households. Hence, the near-notion of community lies in the home/house, then ground, place, area, region, bioregion, watershed, land, and finally landscape. The landscape is seen through its links with the invisible as well—the world of the mind that has mountains and creatures, which issue into the real world of objects seen and experienced in a particular way.

Finding her standpoints in an ecological, place-specific approach, Carole Koda, Snyder’s late wife, adds a notion of ecotones to his talk of watersheds which are both essential in the discussion of a place. It is significant to highlight the idea of community that is non-nationalistic but based on one’s sensitiveness to places and natural “boundaries of climates, plant communities, soil types, styles of life.”<sup>4</sup> A community starts with one’s reading the landscape, its patterns and the life within its divergent life forms. Then it goes into meeting the neighbors to talk about local affairs. Snyder brings this practice closer by saying,

. . . our place was a mosaic of postfire manzanita fields with small pines coming through; an eight-acre stand of pure black oak; and some areas of blue oak, gray pine, and grasses. Also lots of the low ground-cover bush called *kitkitdizze* in a language of the Wintun, a nearby valley people. It was clear from the very old and scattered stumps that this area had been selectively logged once. A neighbor with an increment borer figured that some trees had been cut about 1940. The surrounding lands and the place I was making my home flowed together with unmarked boundaries; to the eye and to the creatures, it was all one. (“Kitkitdizze: A Node in the Net” PLS, 254)

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<sup>3</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Long-Legged House* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), p. 61. Hereafter as LLH and a page reference.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Snyder, “Coming into the Watershed” in *A Place in Space. Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), p. 220. Hereafter as PLS and a page reference.

The above practices brought forth the emergence of a community, “a group of people determined to live as natives [to the San Juan Ridge, California], seeking ways of “how to be.”<sup>5</sup> It is a notion which encompasses the place, the house, and the world. “Now it has become urgent,” says Berry “that the sense of community should include the world, that it should come to a realization that all men ultimately share the same place, the same nature, and the same destiny.” (“The Loss of the Future,” LLH, 62) A community, in Berry’s sense, is therefore equal with neighborhood; moreover, “in healthy community, people will be richer in their neighbors, in neighborhood, in the health and pleasure of neighborhood.”<sup>6</sup> His understanding of community is speaking of people – neighbors in a place, and also the place itself: “its soil, its water, its air, and all the families and tribes of the non-human creatures that belong to it.” (“Conservation and Local Economy,” SEFC, 14-15) It, therefore, entails a complex connection that transcends the relations between people, and goes into those “between people and place, their homeland; between human economy and nature, between forest or prairie and field or orchard, and between troublesome creatures and pleasant ones. *All* neighbors are included.” (Conservation and Local Economy,” SEFC, 15) For Berry, community is an indispensable term which itself ‘out-grows’ along with its relations and delves into the place and the land. Yet, this is only to be thought of, as Berry suggests, as the ideal community. Such “would include not just the living; it would include the unborn. It would be aware, with a clarity and concern which the best of us had hardly imagined, that the living cannot think or speak or act without changing the lives of those who will live after them. . . . And it would include the place, the land, itself. For man is not merely “in” the world. He is, he must realize and learn to say or be doomed, part of it. The earth he is made of he bears in trust.” (“The Loss of the Future,” LHH, 63)

Thus, a community which seems to be aspiring to be the whole cannot exclude the more-than-human-world as it is its integral part whose trails interlace the human ones with regard to that which lies off them. In doing so, it extends beyond the human-

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<sup>5</sup> Katsunori Yamazato, “How to Be in This Crisis: Gary Snyder’s Cross-Cultural Vision in *Turtle Island*” in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder* (ed.) Patrick D. Murphy (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1991), p. 231. Hereafter as title essay, CE and a page reference.

<sup>6</sup> Wendell Berry, “Conservation is Good Work,” in *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* (New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993), p. 40. Hereafter as title essay, SEFC and a page reference.

imposed constraints and stands close to the notion of the “wild integrity” when the integrating force is the human mind in an inquiring, outwardlooking mood. (CE, 47)

Thus, what surfaces as germane to the notion of community is a sense of contact and connection, kinship with the living, which immediately places the discourse within the entire world of “interconnected gazes.” The interconnected gazes is a term I will be using to denote the interrelatedness of experience, way of living, practice, ideology, which is common to people living in a community, and then to the poets – lookout poets – like Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Jack Kerouac. It is also a valuable shorthand term to designate the scope of perception encapsulating the world as issuing from the lookout tower and from the interior of one’s mind at the same time. Gazes interlace the dimensions one’s life is placed within, though forever flowing and drifting away with each seconds metamorphosing into another repetition of a moment in time.

Another way of referring to community is its literary dimension integrating poets dispersed throughout the West Coast of the United States. As Gary Snyder writes in his essay “North Beach”: “In the spiritual and political loneliness of America of the fifties you’d hitch a thousand miles to meet a friend,”<sup>7</sup> the community of lookouts— Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Jack Kerouac (photo 1), somehow drawn to the city, grows into the community of poets which gained momentum in the year 1955 when the six artists came to read their poems in the famous Six Gallery in Fillmore Street in San Francisco (photo 2, 3, 4) The others were: Michael McClure, a Mid-Westerner, who came to California a decade earlier; Philip Lamantia, whose reading was the only not to reflect a strong interest in nature, but dedicated to his deceased friend by presenting his poems; Allen Ginsberg, who chanted out his—now widely associated with the event— “Howl.” Invited to the Six Gallery was also Kenneth Rexroth, “a serious student of Buddhism and advocate for nature,”<sup>8</sup> a mentor to some of the Beats who arrived in San Francisco. Jack Kerouac, who did not read that night, recounts the event in his *Dharma Bums*,

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<sup>7</sup> Snyder, *The Old Ways: Six Essays* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1977), pp. 45-47. Hereafter as OW and a page reference.

<sup>8</sup> Rod Philips, “*Forest Beatniks*” and “*Urban Thoreaus*.” *Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, Lew Welch, and Michael McClure* (Peter Lang: New York, Washington D.C., 2000), p. 15. Hereafter as FBUT and a page reference.



I followed the whole gang of howling poets to the reading at the Gallery Six that night, which was, among other things, the night of the birth of the San Francisco Renaissance. Everyone was there. It was a mad night. And I was the one who got things jumping by going around collecting dimes and quarters from the rather stiff audience standing around in the gallery and coming back with three huge gallon jugs of California Burgundy and getting them all piffed so that by eleven o'clock when Alvah Goldbrook was reading his poem wailing his poem 'Wail' drunk with arms outspread everybody was yelling 'Go! Go! Go! (like a jam session) an old Rheinhold Cacoethes the father of the Frisco poetry scene was wiping his tears in gladness.<sup>9</sup>

The poetry reading was an extraordinary way for poems to "happen," for "the poem is embodied in the reading, not in the book."<sup>10</sup> Not words and letters but voice and vision spoke out loud filled the scene. It showed, as Snyder later on stated, that "poetry is a communal, social, human thing, and that poems aren't meant to be read in the quiet of your little room all by yourself . . . , but are something to be excitedly enjoyed in a group."<sup>11</sup> The communal thing that poetry eventually became, joined the minds of the generation by a performance of spiritual, political and poetic awareness with which they have struggled and from which they have drawn.

However, bearing in mind how divergent the branches that community extends itself are, it cannot be discussed without yet another scope of relatedness which is network. In *The Real Work* (1980), a book of interviews and talks, Snyder writes:

There are two kinds of human sets that we all relate to. One is our network and the other is our community. Some peoples don't have communities to relate to and only relate to the network. The network is like: all the dentists in the United States have a magazine and they have conferences and they all talk the same lingo and don't talk to anybody else. That's a network. There's a poet's network. And I correspond with poets all over the U.S. and other parts of the world. . . . There's a network of intellectuals, university professors, students, graduate students, ecological radicals, and so forth that I'm connected with. That gives me a certain sustenance and part of my work lies with that. Like the Ananda people connect with a Paramahansa Yogananda network all over the world.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Penguin, 1986), pp. 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine McNeill, *Gary Snyder: A Bibliography* (New York: Phoenix Bookshop, 1983), xi.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Snyder, quoted in *On Bread and Poetry: A Panel Discussion with Gary Snyder, Lew Welch & Philip Whalen*, ed. Donald Allen (Bolinas, CA: Grey Fox, 1977), p. vii.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews & Talks 1964-1979*, ed. Scott McLean (New York: New Directions, 1980), pp. 89-90. Hereafter as RW and a page reference.

Networks then work more within mind and language than place and home. Juxtaposed with community, they are selective on a larger scale, whereas communities engage inhabitants to correlate to the land, to know it, learn its flora and fauna, the food chains and all the energy flow, the ecological dependencies. Networks, with all their virtual life and sometimes occasional abeyance, correspond to the linguistic area of interest, predilections; to mental life with its taut links going from word to word, always describing, connoting, denoting, explaining, making familiar. Snyder says,

I find for my work and my own spiritual growth that the kind of life that happens in a community is, if anything else, more valuable than that of the network. Because the network really does encourage you to think that you're important, but the community doesn't. (RW, 90)

From *Interviews and Talks* collected in 1964-1979, there appears the direction that Snyder has been going towards, which is mainly his connection with real people, his need as a poet to identify with them, not with a “faceless audience.” (RW, 5) Hence, poetry, is (apart from other forms) a form of identification with the real, with the living, with those belonging to the community of San Juan Ridge, but also those inhabiting any other place on earth, who seem to be an “extended community,” working and living in a place, in the same wild universe whose patterns no one can ever possess or live long enough to know entirely, like knowing the place one has come to live. The “extended community” may be read as an outcome of the preconception that all places are connected, yet the life—which is healthy, stable and sustainable—grows out of, and encircles communities standing in opposition to modern noncommunities. Since the conception of community is for Berry the agrarian one, that which is one's true and proper connection to the earth is, in his opinion, “good work.”

Good work is always modestly scaled, for it cannot ignore either the nature of individual places or the differences between places, and it always involves a sort of religious humility, for not everything is known. Good work can be defined only in

particularity, for it must be defined a little differently for every one of the places and every one of the workers on the earth. (“Conservation is good work,” SEFC, 35-36)

Berry’s “good work” corresponds with Snyder’s “real work” as both are measures of man’s proper connection to the earth; both—grounded in a particular and unique way of experiencing the living earth—reveal a sense of mutual belonging, that is living with the awareness that “the world that environs us, that is around us, is also within us,” since “we are made of it; we eat, drink, and breathe it; it is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.” (“Conservation is Good Work,” SEFC, 34) The conception of the good work and the real work conjoins with the notion of community that emerges from the Mahayana Buddhist outlook and zen Buddhist experience which “extends the real work to the boundless garden.” The metaphor of the garden, used by Snyder’s Zen teacher, Oda Sessō Roshi, was brought by him from Japan to the United States and applied as his credo when building his house in the Sierra Nevada foothills and taking care of the land there. It was Oda Roshi who advised him to

—become one with the knot itself,  
til it dissolves away.  
—sweep the garden.  
—any size. (“Four Changes”)<sup>13</sup>

In the Zen Buddhist context the knot is the koan – the “theme of Zen practice” – whereas, “its dissolution is the experience of seeing into the true nature of things: evanescent, interdependent, and creative.”<sup>14</sup> Reduced to the practice of one’s proper care of the land, one’s homestead, and freed from the Buddhist entanglements, the idea is close to Berry’s in his agrarian approach to community—his development of “habits of accurate memory, patient attention, careful examination, and reverence; [his] practice of fidelity to community and place . . . learn[ing] the arts of homemaking and home care, do[ing] good work that is durable and beautiful and that honors the sources and recipients of the work, [his becoming] responsible for other human beings;

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<sup>13</sup> Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 91. Hereafter as TI and a page reference.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Aitken, “The Toku of Gary Snyder,” in *Gary Snyder. Dimensions of a Life*, John Halper (ed.) (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), p. 294.

learn[ing] the art of the minimum.”<sup>15</sup> The so called “economy of gratitude” (WBLW, 142) is certainly based on the compassionate, sympathetic mind which, in Snyder’s writings, underlies such expressions as, the “heart of compassion,” “non-harming” (*ahimsa*) to all animate world, and is certainly present in his “winning hearts and minds” saying, when approaching the talk on ecology and interconnections between humans and the sentient world. On a deeper level, Snyder’s and Berry’s vision of community touches upon and explores the meanings of the notion which are common to Zen practice and farming. Berry’s agricultural idea of community where each person makes an effort to connect with the local people and with the natural world, is in fact conceptually close to what zen practitioners do through their gardens. In an interview with Patrick McMahon, Snyder recalls his stay at the Daitoku-ji Temple in Kyoto, Japan,

At the Daitoku-ji monastery . . . the back gate opened onto the gardens, where we had our vegetables, pickle sheds, firewood sheds. Through the back gates the farmers came, all the time. They were completely at home—they didn’t knock, didn’t ask if it were alright, they’d just come in and look around and talk about what you were growing. They knew all the monks by name, and would laugh and joke, sit down and light a cigarette. A lot of information was exchanged there all the time about gardening and growing. They would comment on or criticize what we were doing, or sometimes we would be doing something that excited them—because the monks were really good farmers. The tradition in the monastery is as highly refined an agricultural tradition as that of the farmers that were farming outside the gate—they were equally good at it.<sup>16</sup>

What lies at base of monastery tradition is the “good work” and the “real work;” farming and gardening which have long given way to community’s life. In the garden “everything is equalized,” explains Snyder; therefore, there were ceremonies and feasts when the farmers were invited to monasteries, or the monks would go to the farmers’ houses for a meal. It all goes back to the zen (Chinese *ch’an*) life in China as it shows the old tradition of interconnection, and in this way, Snyder alludes to the Far Eastern and Indian traditions to say that “temples and cathedrals were often just groves

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<sup>15</sup> Norman Wirzba, “An Economy of Gratitude,” in *Wendell Berry. Life and Work* (ed.) Jason Peters (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2007), p. 143. Hereafter as WBLW and a page reference.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick McMahon, “A Mahasangha, a Great Sangha, a Bodhisattwa Sangha” interview in *Buddhist Peace Fellowship*, newsletter, vol. 6, no. 2, (April, 1984).

of trees, or a little hut in a clearing.”<sup>17</sup> Part of the Hindu-Buddhist tradition is to go to the woods, pick one’s own fruit, and grow food, though “the Buddhist community itself, [which] was not agricultural for a long time, was closely connected with village culture. In China Buddhist communities became self-sufficient agrarian communities. That connection with the farming world has been kept ever since.”<sup>18</sup> Such connection brings “mindfulness,” “joy” and “energy” to the work; moreover, it brings a model of a community (*sangha*)<sup>19</sup> work. This connection reaches beyond the gates and thus states that those in front of the yard are parts of the sangha as well. Timothy Gray relates to sangha by saying that Snyder has “promoted the idea of inclusiveness,”<sup>20</sup> which speaks for his intimate experience of nature. Therefore, a community—like a growing and expanding circle on water—expands and enlarges the sangha by starting from the mahasangha (the great one) to the bodhisattwa sangha which holds all beings, since “the beings of this world are the sangha.”<sup>21</sup> However, a proper understanding of such community lies in one’s awareness and a sort of ecological understanding of other creatures’ place in the interconnectedness of all beings, their interdependence and uniqueness. Yet, this is where a modern man cannot see, for

Part of our modern problem is that we are insulated from the living presence of other creatures. Awareness of our interaction with and dependence on other life forms is something that people . . . in urban societies, alienated as they are from the way food is produced, have got to make a special effort to gain. This awareness would include ecological understanding—that creatures which you might think of as troublesome also have a place, that coyotes play a role even though they eat your chickens. You can even come to turns with mosquitoes if you get a sense of their life cycle and where they fit into things.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> McMahan, “A Mahasangha....”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Aitken clarifies the term sanga in his essay „The Toku of Gary Snyder,” (*Gary Snyder. Dimensions of a Life*) and says that sangha is a key Buddhist term, „traditionally the kinship of the Buddhist clergy, but metaphorically the kinship of all beings,” p. 295.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim. Creating Counter-Cultural Community* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), p. 281. Hereafter as GSPR and a page reference.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick McMahan, “A Mahasangha....”

<sup>22</sup> McMahan, “A Mahasangha....”

As the notion of community subdivides it is only to provide connection with the wild, the life “outside the gate” of a monastery, a window or door, where no insulation separates humans from that which has been referred to as environment. For Snyder, community has been a transitory notion, a process of belonging to places and connecting with people. From a lookout, which can be read as his initiation to the varieties or niches a community may take on, Snyder experiences one more type of community before settling down on his one-acre homestead in the Sierra foothills: a community on a volcanic Suwa-no-se island, called by fishermen “Yake-jima”—Burning Island. In his “Suwa-no-se Island and the Banyan Ashram” from *Earth House Hold* Snyder and Masa Uehara’s wedding is described, which instantaneously marks a new perception of a family, a tribe, and a community. It is there, on the island, where these conceptions interlace and provide a new understanding of community which Snyder establishes after his return to America in 1968 on his own land in the Sierras. A profound sense of place that emanates from the essay joined with the wedding ceremonies, traditions, cooperativeness among the Banyan people, a sense of work to be done, all speak for those first interpretations of the ashram, a prerequisite for a healthy community to be transplanted on the American ground.

The main part of the island is mountainous and uninhabited, but there is a kind of plateau about 400 feet above sea level that makes a southern extension, with several good streams running through it. . . . A great pasture . . . to the east, and some pine and Tabu forests on the flanks of the mountain. Banyan trees and other large subtropical plants follow in the watercourses. . . . The houses are clustered toward the west, which is closest to the little harbor; each house separate and enclosed in a wall of bamboo. . . . In the open pasture twenty-three head of black beef cattle at large, and on the edge of the pasture the abandoned farmhouse that became our headquarters. Up the meadow a way toward the mountain is a magnificent banyan on the edge of a ravine—we cleared out a meditation ground within its hanging roots—finally called our whole place “Banyan Ashram.”<sup>23</sup>

Having arrived in the United States Snyder bought a piece of land on San Juan Ridge, with Allen Ginsberg and Dick Baker, and—as David Padwa writes—“his great

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<sup>23</sup> Gary Snyder, “Suwa-no-se Island and the Banyan Ashram” in *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 139. Hereafter as EHH and a page reference.

contribution to the evolution of an American Buddhist *sangha* was beginning.”<sup>24</sup> The first zendo was the meadow, and it was “for householders, manual laborers, skeptical intellectuals, families with children, professionals, dropouts of every description, American Indians, scientists, scholars, bums, and lucky folks who had never heard the word.”<sup>25</sup> It was a sort of gathering of “tribes,” whereas Zen was not “an esoteric cult practice,” as James Laughlin notes, but “teaching and discipline for a good life.”<sup>26</sup> It is Zen that is embedded in his notions of house care, the real work, and it “interpenetrates his concepts of tribalism and ecology,”<sup>27</sup> as Laughlin puts it. Interconnected with the notion of community is the “tribe,” which was part of Snyder’s transformative process back in the 1967 when the famous Human Be-In movement—“A Gathering of the Tribes”—took place in San Francisco. The concept appears in his essays “Passage to More Than India” and “Why Tribe.” Snyder writes, “[t]he tribe proposes a totally different style: based on community houses, villages and ashrams; tribe-run farms or workshops or companies; large and open families; pilgrimages and wanderings from center to center.” (“Why Tribe,” EHH, 113) It stands for that which is mutual support, care and harmony with nature, and it joins Buddhist concepts of oneness and uniqueness, one’s perception and role in this “type of new society emerging within the industrial nations.” (“Why Tribe,” EHH, 113)

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<sup>24</sup> David Padwa, “What’s the Sanskrit word for Coyote,” in *Gary Snyder. Dimensions of a Life*, John Halper (ed.) (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), p. 306.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> James Laughlin, “Notes on Gary Snyder,” in *Gary Snyder. Dimensions of a Life*, p. 246.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## 1.2 Ecotones, Watersheds. California Mosaics.

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older  
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated. . .<sup>28</sup>

William Carlos Williams stated that in place is the true core of the universal, which instantly brings out the notion of recollecting. This recollecting is a means of our contemporary self-discovery, as Snyder claims in his essay “The Place, the Region, and the Commons” (PW, 28). The ground for understanding the idea of recollecting is implicit in the etymology of the word “human,” which is something like “earthling.” At the same time, Snyder refers to the notion of ‘grounded-ness,’ which was also undertaken by the English poet Ted Hughes. People are grounded in places, constitute part of places they inhabit, more than that, they are bearers of illusions of heaven—a sphere separate and divine, different from what is at their feet; throughout their lives they re-constitute places themselves, where illusions clash, collide in man to form abstractions, to keep him even one step farther from the actual earth, or closer to the imaginary sky. Illusions—mere points where ideas and desires collide—have their roots in the mind, and like trees—clamber up, though never reach anything else than the experience of drifting away. The clash is, in fact, the result of the encounter of the inner and the outer world; moreover, it is an outcome of the split between the two. Nonetheless, “how could we *be* were it not for this planet that provided our very shape?” (PW, 29) Snyder recollects our beginnings in terms of his place-bounded discourse.

Two conditions – gravity and a livable temperature range between freezing and boiling - have given us fluids and flesh. The trees we climb and the ground we walk on have given us five fingers and toes. The “place” (from the root *plat*, broad, spreading, flat) gave us far-seeing eyes, the streams and breezes gave us versatile tongues and whorly ears. The land gave us a stride, and the lake a dive. The amazement gave us our kind of mind. (PW, 29)

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<sup>28</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Four Quarters*, p. 27.



Hence, Snyder shows how a dynamic landscape, while undergoing various metamorphoses, makes humans intertwined in its moods. The lives of humans and the world are therefore deeply interlaced, which refers to David Abram's study on the place of humans in the open landscape, a living field, where the life of man and of the world reciprocate each other.<sup>29</sup> The place is more than is seen, and man is never out of sight. With all that has been happening before the beginning of man, the world has been subject to divergent metamorphoses whose outcomes made it possible for human being to co-exist on earth, amidst all things. Therefore, the world ultimately is an ambiguous realm, made of places, wild and tame which is all, in fact, a reflection of the inner world of the mind's architecture.

Among themes Gary Snyder has been preoccupied with, that of a place has a significant role in understanding one's place on earth, when all abstractions and delusions are in abeyance; where the actual earth is all that is left, too vast and unknown, replete with its diversity and wonders, and fears to dream of yet another realm. Instead of transcending the here of the present moment, Snyder proposes another re-collection of a place. Therefore, his own part of the world is described with post office zip code: Third Planet out from the Sun, Turtle Island, Shasta Bioregion, Kitkitdizze; or "western slope of the Northern Sierra Nevada, in the Yuba River watershed, north of the south fork at the three-thousand-foot elevation, in a community of Black Oak, Incense Cedar, Madrone, Douglas Fir, and Ponderosa Pine." (PW, 47) Place is here closer to one's process of re-inhabiting the deeper community stretching down the vertebrae of past ages, where dark ghosts of the past restore their names to places stolen by strangers. In this way, to call the continent "America" is to use stranger's names, inaccurate and covering its true origins. The old/new name for the continent is Turtle Island,

based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millennia, and reapplied by some of them to "North America" in recent years. Also, an idea found world-wide, of the earth, or cosmos even, sustained by a great turtle or serpent-of-eternity. (TI, unpaginated)

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<sup>29</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-than-human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 32-33. Hereafter as SPS and a page reference.

Re-naming America Turtle Island is going backwards forty thousand years, to a time when

human people came with basket hats and nets  
winter-houses underground  
yew bows painted green,  
feasts and dances for the boys and girls  
songs and stories in the smoky dark  
(“What Happened Here Before,” TI 79)

before the white man came with hoses to toss up trees and boulders, to grasp the land, to tame it, to impose new names, to familiarize the unknown. Charles Molesworth in his essay “The Political and Poetic Vision of Turtle Island” explains that the name serves Snyder for a physical environment and a utopian vision. The continent floating on the back of the giant turtle serves as a cosmogonic emblem of archaic knowledge and future hopes. (CE, 145) Snyder calls for harkening to the roots and ancient solidarity of being together, which extends far beyond North America, to the earth, cosmos whose existence is sustained by the serpent-of-eternity, or the *uroboros*. Turtle Island opens human awareness to the idea of space stretching far beyond here and now, beyond the visible and the tangible, and touches upon the archaic roots of being in the world. It is therefore not only a place, habitat, but vastness of relations to those who lived before, and – at the same time – to the planet as a living being, a breathing body of the mother earth. Snyder’s vision touches upon the holistic vision of the entire planet, the world made of places, existent or extinguished, but still encompassing the earth with all her metamorphoses now lying on the bedrock of our ancient awareness, knowledge of our beginnings.

Shasta Bioregion is another name that Snyder uses to connote his place. Max Cafard said that “the region is elsewhere of civilization,” and therefore regions seen according to natural criteria are sometimes called bioregions, (PW, 28) which is why Snyder replaces “northern California” which adheres to political divisions, and is the old Alta California territory. Perception of place seems to be visualized as a net itself, placed on other nets, some natural, others political. In “The Place, the Region, and the Commons” the poet visualizes the West territory as it is seen according to natural borders, which is to prepare people to be at home in that landscape, and shows how

human experience of a fluid, indistinct, but genuine home region was replaced by arbitrary, often violently imposed borders. (PW, 37) Renaming entails reinhabiting but is preceded by discovering one's home, as it was in the case of Edward Abbey, an easterner who discovered that his home was the American West. Gary Snyder, like Abbey, has created his home, both spiritual and literal one. Renaming and thus recovering a place's history is also close to Aldo Leopold, who recounted the story of Illinois which had "no genesis, no history, no shoals or deeps, no tides of life and death,"<sup>30</sup> and made a sand county his spiritual home. Snyder's one-hundred-acre homestead, north of San Juan Ridge near Nevada County, is referred to as *Kitkitdizze*. The word is derived from a Wintun tribe name of a Sierra shrub, native to the land, commonly known as bear clover. Place is defined according to natural patterns, is it very often a floristic one by means of which the poet distinguishes the land, learns its climatic patterns and what is taught by plants and weather, which allows him to feel truly at home. (PW, 38) In this vein Snyder follows Cafard saying that regions are "interpenetrating bodies in semi-simultaneous spaces." (PW, 37) Snyder, brought up on a farm between Lake Washington and Puget Sound, always found Douglas firs as part of his surrounding. Douglas Fir is an example of this floristic outline, the definitive tree of the Pacific Northwest, found west of the crest through Washington, Oregon, and northern California. (PW, 38) Only by knowing ecological and anthropological histories one's learning the wisdom of the terrain and of the native peoples to come to learn that the spirit of a place is in the field's forces, and to know the spirit of a place is to realize that you are "part of a part and that the whole is made of parts, each of which is whole. You start with the part you are whole in." (PW, 38)

Reinhabiting a place is a kind of disclosure of who we are in relation to the land, since "the first wholeness is wholeness within nature." (RW, 172) It is our way to know how we practice the wild, learn the old ways, abandon our "little selves" and interrelate with the vast, breathing body of the earth, all human and more-than-human world; it is finding

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<sup>30</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 127.

our way to seeing the mineral cycles, the water cycles, air cycles, nutrient cycles, as sacramental – and we must incorporate that into our own personal, spiritual quest and integrate it with the wisdom teachings we have received from the . . . past. (OW, 63)

One of the poems composing the volume *Turtle Island* retells the story of the West slope, starting three hundred million years ago, introduces the reader to his conscious grasp of the past, revisioning the terrain nearly in its archaic form, while forming out of other forms in the course of millions of years. Going through its earliest geological history, the reader revisions the vast land's eons of change:

First a sea: soft sands, muds, and marls  
-loading, compressing, heating, crumpling,  
Crushing, recrystallizing, infiltrating,  
Several times lifted and submerged.  
Intruding molten granite magma  
Deep-cooled and speckling,  
Gold quartz fills the cracks- (TI, 78)

to the formation of the western mountains, the sedimentation of gold:

sea-bed strata raised and folded,  
granite far below.  
Warm quiet centuries of rains  
(make dark red tropic soils)  
Wear down two miles of surface,  
Lay bare the veins and tumble heavy gold  
In streambeds  
Slate and schist rock-riffles catch it –  
Volcanic ash floats down and dams the streams,  
Piles up the gold and gravel – (TI, 78),

to the formation of waters, three thousand years ago, the present major rivers within the watershed of Nevada County:

flowing north, two rivers joined,  
to make a wide long lake.  
and then it tilted and the rivers fell apart  
all running west  
to cut the gorges of the Feather,  
Bear, and Yuba.

Ponderosa pine, Manzanita, black oak, mountain yew,  
Deer, coyote, bluejay, gray squirrel,  
Ground squirrel, fox, blacktail hare,  
Ringtail, bobcat, bear,  
All came to live here. (TI, 78-79)

As Michael Castro says “Turtle Island is thus presented to us as a vital thing, vaster and long-lived than many or any of its species.” (CE, 118). This deer and acorn land, the grounds of the Nisenan – native people who inhabited Western Sierra County plus some part of Yuba County and northern Nevada County, killed or driven away by the gold rush miners (PW, 47) – belongs to itself, as the poet notifies in the same poem, whereas

Turtle Island swims  
In the ocean-sky swirl-void  
Biting its own tail while the worlds go  
On-and-of  
Winking (TI, 80)

By the end of the poem the reader is consciously grasping the setting of the poet camping with his sons, sitting “near the diggings in the forest” (TI, 80) by the fire, when they ask a question “who we are.” What the poem excavates is the answer that goes directly with the place for such a question cannot be answered without rethinking the place, the land, where human beings are mere “earthlings.” Therefore, the state of being is defined by one’s habitat; however, the answer, as the land itself, does not belong to anyone, even meeting the challenge is beyond human capabilities when detached from the place one inhabits. Hence, a person is not enclosed within oneself since one is part among other parts, a fragmented space filled with experience of time and land. The human is thus a bearer of „here” opened towards „there.”

“Who are we?” is an integral part of “where are we?” Living and dwelling is coming to meet one’s responsibilities towards the land and other living beings, human and more-than-human ones. Bearing in mind that nature is not only a place, but it is home, this constitutes part of the ethics Snyder is calling on in his essay “What’s meant by “here.”” The floristic and watershed patterns give way to understanding, compassion and integrity of being together on the “continent of watersheds and life-communities –

plant zones, physiographic provinces, culture areas; following natural boundaries.” (TI, unpaginated). “Here” is a category stretching from the nearest to the vastest of the land; encompassing being in the world, dwelling in the world as well as one’s relationship with the land. For Snyder, what is meant by “here” is,

crackly grass and Blue oak, the special smells of pungent sticky flowers, give way, climbing, through Digger pine and into Black oak and Ponderosa pine; sweet birch, manzanita, kitkitdizze. This is our home country. We dig wells and wonder where the water table comes from. . . . We wonder where the deer go in the summer heat, and where they come from in the fall. How far into the high Sierra. (TI, 111) (*emphasis mine*)

“Here,” which seems to be a no-category at all, but a mere, loose designation of the surroundings one lives in and knows to an extent one needs and exploits due to those needs, is admittedly far more important for the poet, since “here” – like place – connotes belonging, dwelling, even staying. Its closest opposition of “there” designates something of the intangible and inconspicuous rather than of the less essential because “there” is deprived of our intimate presence. “There” standing as opposition can also be attracting because of its presupposed otherness, uniqueness, freshness, and all-enhancing openness of what it offers to its visitors. However, the way from “here” to “there” can be broad, with vastness transcending human notion of space; it can be space itself, an area travelled over, entered then left behind, whereas spaces we daily go through would be read as those which are provided by locations.<sup>31</sup> In “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” Heidegger reflects on the nature of the relationship of space and man.

When we speak of man and space, it sounds as though man stood on one side, space on the other. Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them space.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, „Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (trans. Albert Hofstadter), (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), p. 156.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Yet space is fluid as places are in that they do not form anything outside of man, but rather, conflate man's being among things and dwelling among things, and relate humans with things distant.

James McClintock, in his *Nature's Kindred Spirits*, refers to a geographer—James Houston—in the context of place itself as well as human relationship to place. Houston maintained that “mere space is not place”<sup>33</sup> since

[s]pace . . . has no meaning other than a mathematic one . . . Place, on the other hand, has a human context: space with historical associations where vows are made; encounters and obligations met; commitments fulfilled; limits recognized. Place implies belonging. It establishes identity. It defines vocation. It envisions destiny. Place is filled with memories of life that provide roots and give direction. (NKS, 112)

Space, with its intangible vastness, grasped by the human eye only from a relevant height, appears as cartographic network, as patches of lands which, in a sense, have grown out of their places to form a greater design, more unknown and unexperienced in a direct way. Space can only be measured in a linear way. Its endless formation in front of our eyes renders it less than a sentient body; rather a massive construction of the natural, the elemental forces that have brought it to its current shape and pattern. In contrast, place—providing an opening to space—stays local and communal. It is easier to look within a place to see the meandering lives implicit in its history. In place, the natural is existent next to the human, often interwoven with each other, thus hiding “memories of life.” Place allows for belonging to it, whereas space allows for traversing it across. Place is more individual in character, space – more national, with borders and dividing lines it tells where the established lines go. Place emanates with forces that are centripetal; whereas space is dominated by centrifugal ones.

Nevertheless, place is not constrained to the human sphere, but it encapsulates the living; moreover, recognizing the limits must be done in an outwardlooking manner. In other words, one must “dress up and stay home;” (PW, 24) knowing that “home” is as large as it is made. (PW, 24). Therefore, with “here” begins the

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<sup>33</sup> James I. McClintock, *Nature's Kindred Spirits. Aldo Leopold, Joseph Wood Krutch, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, and Gary Snyder* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), p. 112. Hereafter as NKS and a page reference.

responsibility to the land, recognition of home(land) as a part amongst other parts. In the Snyderian ethics of “here” is involved a category of the watershed as a noteworthy designation of place, or more broadly, of bioregion with the whole mosaic of California in the background. In Thoreauvian terms, “here” would be an area twenty miles in diameter, which is enough to occupy a lifetime, and one will never be able to exhaust its details, as Thoreau says in “Walking.” This is how one starts learning a place and then region, which – at the same time – becomes part of human awareness, and prepares to live awarely in place. In *Three on Community* Snyder writes,

The vast area called “California” is large enough to be beyond any one individual’s ability (not to mention time) to travel over and to take it all into the imagination and hold it in mind clearly enough to see the whole picture.<sup>34</sup>

Knowing that there is no wholeness without the whole self, Snyder pays attention to place. In “Gary Snyder: Posthumanist” McClintock says that “ideally, place, in the here-and-now, is where nature, social community, and spiritual achievement are brought into balance with one another.” (NKS, 111) It is therefore where one learns commitment to place, or – in Kirkpatrick Sale’s terms – one becomes a dweller in the land and joins in the all-encompassing task of understanding “*place*.” (NKS, 114) In *The Real Work* Snyder notes that one’s understanding of the land involves knowing it with “one’s body, commitment, time, labor, walking.” (RW, 23) Therefore, Snyder proposes an approach to place which is moving from the nearest to the vastest, deepest, truest. Crucial in his California ethics is an idea of a watershed.

A watershed is a marvelous thing to consider: this process of rain falling, streams flowing, and oceans evaporating causes every molecule of water on earth to make the complete trip once every two million years. The surface is carved into watersheds – a kind of familial branching, a chart of relationship, and a definition of place. (TOC, 19)

“So, the ridge and the river,” (TI, 112)—San Juan Ridge and the Yuba River—says Snyder ending his dispute on the meanings of “here,” spotting that “here,” as well as “place” are also modes of experience; areas he has become familiar with due to his

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<sup>34</sup> Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, Carole Koda, *Three on Community* (Linotype Garamoud: printed and bound in 1986 by Rick & Rosemary Ardinger), p. 11. Hereafter as TOC and a page reference.



life-long practice in his place. Dōgen said “when you find your place where you are, practice occurs.” (PW, 25) Hence, in place is the integration of concepts such as: living, dwelling, belonging, cultivating, protecting, learning, recognizing as part while learning to be whole. Place is therefore, “next to kinship the oldest organizing principle,” (TOC, 22) whereas the watershed sets itself beyond all “dichotomies of orderly/disorderly, for its forms are free, but somehow inevitable. The life that comes to flourish within it constitutes the first kind of community.” (PLS, 230) But so is the human, shaped by experience, by where he stops and what he takes with him, by what is taken away from him, and where he stays, by what parts he chooses to integrate with as each place is distinguished by its own integrity, (“Many colors of the land, many colors of the skin.” PLS, 235) The moment people realize that space is inseparable from them, and they are not enclosed within their bodies, they come to realize how new all the people are on the earth when compared with all the land constantly metamorphosing and taking different moulds, dispersing, vanishing, appearing again in a kind of “non-exclusive community, integrity of close ties, shared values, recognizable cycles,” as Carole Koda admits in “Dancing in the Borderland. Finding our Common Ground in North America.” (TOC, 51-58)

This kind of non-exclusive community [where] life is an open door for newcomers. Personal circles overlap and the new ecotone buzzes with heartfelt public work and play. (TOC, 58)

I remember a moment a few years ago, on a climb in the Sierra Nevada. Looking down from 12,000 feet at the landscape below, I had the sudden understanding that my adult body and mind had shaped by walking, climbing and bushwacking through these mountains. Contemplating the granite extruded, uplifted and sculptured over millions of years, I felt how new we all are to this still stunningly beautiful land. . . . except for the indigenous people, we are all like wet babies on this continent. (TOC, 60)

Seeing how multi-faceted, multidimensional and multi-cultural a place can be, human – as part of the mosaic forever reordering itself due to ecological, geological, social processes among others – is also an unstable part of those processes and becomes somehow multi-cultural on the ground; forever clashing with other parts, with different communities: that of animals, plants, rocks, water and people, existing right where he/she comes to live. Carole Koda sees a notion of the ecotone as an important one in describing California “multi-cultural curriculum.”

I think of California as a mosaic of cultural ecotones.” Ecologically speaking, the ecotone is a fertile zone along the meeting edge of two larger ecosystems. Culturally speaking, it is a place where people of different races and tastes come together in a landscape that’s still new to many. The cultural ecotone is vibrant, alive with the creative spark of confusion and interbreeding. It’s a place of powerful tensions – you can feel that you’re neither here nor there, in neither the savannah nor the forest. (TOC, 51)

In other words, ecotones are “transitional areas between two different communities,” as Barry Lopez depicts in *Arctic Dreams* when talking about how radically different regions interact with one another. Lopez describes them as “exciting edges,” (NKS, 123) as he walks those boundaries between human and more-than-human world. Ecotones introduce and balance on the notions of cultural, social, ecological areas, and allow human beings to integrate and spot their place within those areas, which all makes to our understanding of who/where we are. As Snyder holds it:

You should really know what the complete natural world of your region is and know what the interactions are and how you are interacting with it yourself. (RW, 16)

Hence, being-at-home and being-in-the world are concepts interweaving “place,” “home,” “region,” “bioregion,” and the living. Being can never exist separately from the world, for what is far from any dichotomies is an understanding that there is not any permanence in claiming a place ours. Staying does not necessarily involve belonging since any belonging is a mere process of transformation. Places, which are forever subdued to elements also other than human, are preserved in memory; therefore the human and place are compiled with each other from the very beginning when as children grasping the little territory around them, learn about impermanence and change. These ideas are grasped with a certain image of home, place, which is gradually growing vaster and overwhelming, and ungraspable then.

All of us carry within us a picture of the terrain that was learned roughly between the ages six and nine. (It could as easily be an urban neighborhood as some rural scene.) You can almost totally recall the place you walked, played, biked, swam. Revisualizing that place with its smells and textures, walking through it again in your imagination, has a grounding and a settling effect. (PW, 26)

Since place is an “oldest organizing principle,” the world is studded with places, each bearing some traits of something once familiar, yet kept in imagination as a vivid picture of fragments one used to know as being the living part of that place’s life. Each place itself has a vivid life of its own, transformed within the course of time,

Our place is part of what we are. Yet even a “place” has a kind of fluidity: it passes through space and time – “ceremonial time” in John Hanson Mitchell’s phrase. A place will have been grasslands, then conifers, then beech and elm. It will have been half riverbed, it will have been scratched and plowed by ice. And then it will be cultivated, paved, sprayed, dammed, graded, built up. But each is only for a while, and that will be just another set of lines on the palimpsest. The whole earth is a great tablet holding the multiple overlaid new and ancient traces of the swirl of forces. Each place is its own place, forever (eventually) wild. A place on earth is a mosaic within larger mosaics – the land is all small places, all precise tiny realms replicating larger and smaller patterns. (PW, 27)

Place can therefore be read as a “collective landscape” (SPS, 37) of “interconnected gazes;” an area cut and bruised, of lines stretching in all layers of its life. A map of a place is thus a profound well of what once formed its structure, bearing all transformations that now come to shape it; a mosaic of long-lost spirits of the earth, water and sky with all that came with the white man. Interlacing with the present are the eons of evolution, “the swirl of forces,” the whirl of changing patterns, of rivers, mountains, valleys, plateaus, oceans and ice. It is an interactive place where the first human apprehension starts with the home being the heart of a place, and firepit being the heart of home,

the heart of a place is the home, and the heart of home is the firepit, the hearth. All tentative explorations go outward from there, and it is back to the fireside that elders return. You grow up speaking a home language, a local vernacular. Your own household may have some specifics of phrase, of pronunciation, that are different from the *domus*, the *jia* or *ie* or *kun*, down the lane. You hear histories of the people who are your neighbors and tales involving rocks, streams, mountains, and trees that are all within your sight. . . . As you grow bolder you explore your world outward from the firepit (which is the center of each universe) in little trips. (PW, 26)

### 1.3 Unplaced on Earth. On Displacement.

The concept of place permeates Snyder's work. His volumes are abundant in various areas, regions, bioregions; they speak of place as a living, breathing organism labeled with many names due to its many lives, also those dormant and latent under the surface of remembrance and care. His Pulitzer Prize winning *Turtle Island* (1975) opens up with the "Manzanita" section initiated with the poem "Anasazi," where Snyder turns to their balanced way of living. Anasazi, who preceded the Hopi, were cliff-dwellers at Mesa Verde National Park, and are depicted as though curled back in the clefts in cliffs in Mother Earth's deep rock wrinkles, which in fact drifts on the notion of dwelling the "rock lip home" (TI, 3) –Turtle Island enclosing itself within the land and its stories and songs. Since manzanita is a bush that reemerges after fires, the whole "Manzanita" section points to reperception of home and inhabitation; regeneration and return. The last two notions are depicted in the third poem in this section, namely, "Without," which in a way treats the issue of "proper inhabitation in abstract terms."<sup>35</sup> The imagery seems to be indebted to Buddhism and connotes total interdependence of all natural processes with all entities existing in the world.

Playing on the notions of "within" and "without," Snyder approaches the idea of "infinite belonging," which at the same time, relates to human reconsideration of home as something deeper, multifaceted, multilayered and interwoven with the "power within" and "the power without." These concepts seem to be playing roles of "what is here" as applied to North America, and opposed to what was and what will be on that continent. Being in the presence of ever changing processes causes the condition of displacement in the United States. Dis-placement, as Snyder claims, is a phenomenon close in range to homelessness, and it still reflects other aspects of questions of "who we are," and "where we are," raised earlier in this thesis.

The two questions aren't separate – they are the same question, just from a different angle. Zen master Dogen says, "When you find your place, practice begins." The population on this continent will become grounded, will find their place, by slight change of mind that says, "I'm here."

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<sup>35</sup> Patrick D. Murphy, *A Place for Wayfaring. The Poetry and Prose of Gary Snyder* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2000), p. 106. Hereafter as PFW and a page reference.

This has not yet happened for the American population. This is a homeless nation; the whole population of North America is homeless. This is not to take away from the reality and the pain of actual homelessness, but with the exception of the Native Americans, who have been displaced in a different way, we are all homeless. We are not yet here. We have not yet found our place, so we cannot yet begin our practice.<sup>36</sup>

The poet claims that Americans are *almost* there, which makes them less detached but still not placed, not grounded enough to know and learn, to practice, or to grasp the intellectual knowledge of place along with the directly experienced surroundings, the “immediate, intuitive, deep sympathy with the natural world.” (NKS, 115) This condition is said to go beyond any realization of homelessness which is a larger metaphor of being “unplaced” – without a place, as Snyder explains. (NHY, 23) However, Snyder ponders on different sense of the word “homelessness,” as grounded in Asian and American thought. The first Buddhist traditional sense of the word involves the phrase “the homeless brothers and sisters,” and it is taken to depict those who have entered into *sanhga*, community. As Snyder continues:

*Homelessness* in that context means leaving the ordinary bonds and obligations of caste, kin and society, and entering into another context of obligations and associations, which is the work with the dharma. So that kind of homelessness means stepping outside of the usual obligations of your society. (NHY, 23)

Another sense entails thinking of being unplaced or displaced. Being displaced, in other words, dispersed on the land but never belonging anywhere is a condition that Snyder ascribes to the American society. Americans do not live long enough in a place to “feel a sense of obligation and commitment.” (NHY, 23) From an ecological perspective it means being nature-illiterate, or irresponsive to the world one lives in. Conversely, homelessness in Asian societies stood as a chance to step outside, free from deeply settled, very conventional societies; whereas, in America there is a prevailing mode of not knowing where one comes from, having no sense of place but a destitute remnant of it. Asian “abide nowhere” could be transformed into American “Be at home right now, right here. Right now, be at home.” (NHY, 24) It cleaves to

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<sup>36</sup> “Not Here Yet. Remarks by Gary Snyder on Buddhism, Ecology & the Poetics of Homelessness,” in *Shambhala Sun*, vol. 2, no. 4, March 1994, p. 23. Hereafter as NHY and a page reference.

the idea of home that is large as its maker destined it to be, and simultaneously, goes on to the very awareness of being, living and practising. As Snyder reiterates, such ongoing presentation of values and of living in the moment continues in poetry that calls on to value the ordinary world before us. (NHY, 24) This valuing is done by the change of mind, or in other words, by reconfiguration of perception as “we lead a quality life by the quality of our perception and the quality of our consciousness.” (NHY, 24)

Homeless, unplaced, displaced or dispersed are all conditions of constant processes one is to undergo when the relationship between man and land has been broken. However, “without place” is not a prerequisite for not belonging. The dispersed seem to be in a constant move amidst myriads of places becoming gradually blurred by other places encountered. It is part of our knowledge of becoming a fragment among fragments; a part exposed to the wonder at the new and a fear of it, and finally adjusting to the newness now taken as a beginning of being familiar, as well as getting to know how vast and overwhelming space is. However, bearing in mind the mosaic of places one is free to quest for a place where one wants to “become native,” since citizenship is also concerned with learning nature’s pathways apart from politics. Therefore, being in place is an expression that echoes the art of living in a place, as well as the ideas of reinhabitation and building a community, knowing that all that leads that far is an old American quest, which Snyder discusses in *The Old Ways*,

Our sense of the West is changing from a history of exploitation and westward expansion by white people, into a sense of place. . . . Poets who have lived in the West all their lives, teaching in universities, can only speak of the urban world, some of them, and they’re not *paisanos*, you see, *Paisanos* in the sense of knowing where we are, the old American quest, which I share with all of you, for an identity, a sense of place. To know the place well means, first and foremost, I think, to know plants, and it means developing a sensitivity, an openness, an awareness of all kinds of weather patterns and patterns in nature. (OW, 23)

The notions of place and home with all the call for cultivation and preservation seem to be floating upon the very realization that places have their fluidity which renders the familiar a category of incessant changes, sometimes invisible to the eye, but still underlying man’s belonging. Belonging in a place is knowing and accepting its

changes and our changes within them, and being aware of impermanence is openness towards the changes regarded as something inevitable yet wondrous, since “knowing that nothing need be done, is where we begin to move from,” (TI, 102) which in a way carries the dispute beyond the personal.

## 1.4 Wendell Berry's Being-In-Place.

“All the lives this place  
Has had, I have.”<sup>37</sup>

Wendell Berry, a Kentuckian poet, essayist, and novelist, has been engaged in restoring a proper relation between man and nature throughout his life in his writings as well as by choosing a certain agrarian lifestyle. The ground, the land, the hills and the woods in the vicinity of his house in Kentucky came to nourish a rich metaphor of a house as a particular and a very unique space of the encounter of the past that filled it and the present that goes through it, and a man as husband in truest sense of the word, connected with the land and the house in a sacramental way. It is a space of remembrance, a quintessence of being which is embedded in that which is surviving and existent within nature's infinite cycles and man's impermanent stay among things.

The house is therefore a space of the encounter, a space of a vision despite the dark encapsulating its surroundings; a part whose roots are entangled with the nearest land. Berry describes the history of the house in his book of essays *The Long-Legged House*. The title essay opens a particular field of forces, of energy vibrating in a place whose history is a combination of Berry's ancestors, names given to the house, and its location near the Kentucky River. It goes down to its beginnings as a cabin in the twenties, and refers to the metamorphoses the cabin was subjected to under the Kentuckian latent sky.

Between the Kentucky river and the road Curran Mathews, Berry's grandmother's bachelor brother, built a cabin of two rooms. Curran Mathews was known by Berry as “a sort of wanderer visiting the family households, an inspired tinkerer with broken gadgetry and furniture, a man of small disciplines and solutions without either a home or a profession, and a teller of wonderful bedtime stories.” (LLH, 108) His best reason to build a cabin there is, according to Berry, due to his nature “to have a house in the woods and to return now and again to live in it for there

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<sup>37</sup> Wendell Berry, *Collected Poems 1957-1982* (San Francisco: North Point, 1984), p. 174. Hereafter as title essay, CP and a page reference.



was something deep about him, something quiet-loving and solitary and kin to the river and the woods.” (LLH, 110). In a sense, there might have been a motif of a deliberate life in the woods, where only a few hundred yards down the river was the port of Port Royal, Lane’s Landing, where Berry resides. The cabin, which seemed more isolated and remote those days than now, was “a place where a man, staying by himself, could become deeply quiet. It would have been a quiet that grew deeper and wider as the days passed, and would have come to include many things, both familiar and unexpected.” (LLH, 111) Since it must have been one of the first houses in that area, as Berry claims, its tranquil surroundings of an old wood somehow foretold its peculiar purpose, which apart from contemplative life was filled with work, as part of one room Curran used as a workshop which “smelled of varnish, and was filled with tools and objects of mysterious use.” (LLH, 109) At the very beginning of his essay, Berry redirects his attention to a certain interplay between the interior and a use of the cabin, and its exterior and the land; hence, the “home-land” interplay of these two realms makes the cabin a space of endless bringing together and dissolving; building and “building back again,” (CP, 191) which comes to light with the descriptions of the house and that which stretches out of it and beyond. Berry writes,

I sat in the open doorway there one afternoon, a rich plot of sunlight on the floor around me, Curran quietly at work in the room at my back; I looked up at the ridge beyond the town, the open, still sunlit country of the summer afternoon, and I felt happiness I will never forget. (LLH, 109)

The single act of sitting in the doorway makes it clear at once that a boy Berry was at that time is a sort of intermediary between the old and the new; the finishing and the ripening; the history and stories being told once again. It grasps the picture of a place as medley of forces dictated by time and changed by it, whereas, the open doorway stands there as a gesture of sharing that which is slowly withering into memories and stories, and that which is looking forward, into the re-composition of elements which are familiar, to their remnants in time. Therefore, the picture functions as a praxis, an intersection reconnecting people and places, a newly gained fresh but dusted definition of home. Reading Berry’s essay is embarking on a journey towards this definition which, when grasped, slowly and intangibly sneaks out, blurs and redefines itself on the ground of what is left. The richness of the world surrounding the boy is an offering

to him, a daily sharing. A world now partitioned to Curran, who is silently working in the room at the boy's back, is re-opening its bonds and unfastening its lines, and lighting the land, embracing what the land has to offer. It is simultaneously an act of forgetting the house itself and joining the land, and *being* long after the very idea of the house, as well as its real shape, are gone. In this way, the house is no longer a place that can be measured and stepped into, but rather a vestige of man's entrance not into the house but into the world as it is. The house, perennially subdued to different forces, is – in the final outcome – the familiar transfixed into human being among things, being-in-the-world, in the house, but vaster and greater, less familiar and more unexpected. It becomes a space of man's retreat, a hiding place, and its direction is natural. In another passage Berry continues,

Now there is nothing left but the stones of the chimneys piled up, and the well. The lot where it stood is still known, though, as the Old House Lot, and it is a lovely place, looking out over the woods into the river valley. Some of the old locusts that stood in the yard are still there, and in the spring the little white starry flowers of old-time dooryards still bloom in the grass. It is a place I like, and like to go to and sit down. I am not oppressed by it as I would be by an ancient and venerated family seat, full of old records and traditions and memories. . . . and the house itself is gone. (LLH, 112)

In a sense, “a very pleasing resurrection” (LLH, 112) is all that surfaces when the vestiges are raised from the bygone days. Seeing on how the vision of those days and their stories, some of which may be doubted, creates a certain passage of the flow of memories and words written down by Berry, adds on to the palimpsest that the world composes. The boy sitting in the doorway is—to borrow Henry David Thoreau's phrase—“to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe the line,”<sup>38</sup> It is the act of staying among all the going ceaselessly changing and whirling both the immediate and the distant. It is spinning the present while borrowing from the past, knowing that the going never upholds and waits, forever turning the turning world. Later in the essay Berry admits,

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<sup>38</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), p. 15.

I have no memory of the cabin as it stood on its original site. Before I was three years old, the flood of 1937 picked it up from where Curran had build it and carried it several feet downriver and up the bank, where it lodged against some trees, and was then anchored and given new underpinnings. But I knew it early, and my first memories of it, trivial as they are, involve a delight that I associate with no other place. (LLH, 114)

House is for Berry a place for gatherings and a place for solitude, but mostly it was the “family’s wilderness place,” (LLH, 115) and the relation was more of the mystical, rich and profound, with a bond going down into the meddled alleys of the place’s history. The cabin was known as the Camp, and after the second flood in March, 1945, it came to be a flooded house, “endlessly fascinating,” (LLH, 116) and mysterious due to “one world being supplanted by another.” (LLH, 116) As Berry writes in “Travelling at home,”

Even in a country you know by heart  
It’s hard to go the same way twice.  
The life of the going changes.  
The chances change and make a new way.  
Any tree or stone or bird  
Can be the bud of a new direction. (CP, 217)

Berry’s perception of the country is embedded in the metaphor of a palimpsest which corresponds with the Snyderian conception of place that at the same time grows into a larger metaphor of places interconnected with one another and thus envisaging the entire world. However, while Snyder depicts places as parts of what humans are, and his description touches upon the natural processes into which all places are entangled, Berry sees the land as marked with human presence in the main.

I think of a country as a kind of palimpsest scrawled over with the comings and goings of people, the erasure of time already in process even as the marks of passage are put down. . . . the ritual marks of neighborhood – roads, paths between houses. . . . domestic pathways from house to barns and outbuildings and garden, farm roads threading the pasture gates. . . . the wanderings of hunters and searchers after lost stock, and the speculative or meditative or inquisitive “walking around” of farmers on wet days and Sundays. (LLH, 185)

Berry’s country is therefore the “spiraling geometry” (LLH, 185) constituting lines and scratches made by people, plows, endlessly intertwining the shapes and moulds on

the surface of the earth, whose structure is also bruised by bad farming, worn out and given up, left with gullies, cairns of stones, forgotten roads, stone chimneys of houses long rotted away or burned. (LLH, 185) Nonetheless, much consideration is given to the impermanence of a house as confronted with the natural processes within nature herself, where human lines on the palimpsest are but mere engravings among other, greater ones, left by nature. As part of belonging “willingly, gladly and with some fullness of knowledge to a place,” (LLH, 166) Berry – like Snyder – considers it vital to learn about the natural history of a place, since human life is only a part of the living, whereas its relation is rather superficial, and nothing that man has “built or done has the permanence, or the congeniality with the earth.” (LLH, 167) Berry, as well as Snyder, reconsiders the idea of belonging and extends its meaning from living upon the place to living within the place, as one among many, and one kind among many kinds. (LLH, 149) Seeing on how little on the earth is of human origin, Berry retreats himself from the crude and destructive conceptions of man as the owner of land or the master of it, moving towards the Snyderian “infinite belonging” which transcends the notions of stability and permanence, and comes to include changes that are inevitable and unavoidable in the encompassing cycles of life and death, and thus of the earth forever turning and whirling one life after another. The idea of belonging enforces a certain reconsideration of who and where we are, which is essential to Snyder as well as to Wallace Stegner, Berry’s mentor. Belonging within a place is belonging in the infinity of changes.

The Camp with its strip of riverbank woods, like all other places of the earth, stood under its own widening column of infinity, in the neighborhood of stars, lighted a little, with them, within the element of darkness. It was more unknown than known. It was populated by creatures whose ancestors were here long before my ancestors came, and who had been more faithful to it than I had been, and who would live as well the day after my death as the day before. (LLH, 149)

Erasing the idea of permanence and replacing it with one’s acceptance of impermanence involves a certain reduction of fear connected with the passage between the forces of life, death and rebirth. Knowing that home is not constrained within walls and windows but stretches farther beyond, we come to understand that *dwelling* is expressed more truly by existing under the faintly twinkling stars, amidst what is

“more unknown than known.” Hence, belonging is existing within other native things and at this moment, Berry admits, his nativeness began a renewal of meaning,

I saw that if I belonged here, which I felt I did, it was not because anything here belonged to me. A man might own a whole country and be a stranger in it. If I belonged *in* this place it was because I belonged *to* it. And I began to understand that so long as I did not know the place fully, or even adequately, I belonged to it only partially. . . . perhaps my governing ambition, was to belong fully to this place, to belong as the thrushes and the herons and the muskrats belonged, to be altogether at home here. (LHH, 150)

Berry continues his discussion of belonging by saying that wild creatures belong to places by nature, whereas man’s belonging is of understanding and virtue. Berry’s sense of nativeness is therefore based on long and lasting devotion to a place, his cultivation of it, deep understanding of its natural cycles along with all creatures inhabiting the land he feels part of. It is studded with grace and “spiritual ambition,” (LHH, 150) humility and harmony with the life of a place itself; “decent, open and generous relation between man’s life and the world.” (LHH, 122) Berry shows that each person is only a part of a succession, a fragment in endless cycles of comings and goings, and each place will eventually “survive us, bearing the results,” (LHH, 142) despite our periods of neglect or simple abandonment along with all returns to the place and familiarizing, or – in other words – reinhabiting it, “refamiliarizing ourselves with the physical environment.”<sup>39</sup> The house, which was carried some distance from the old site due to the floods, was subdued to weather and time changes, thus “revealed its kinship with the earth,” (LLH, 152) and this made it the one that more than ever belonged to the riverbank; the house whose special “fluidity” made it incessantly something of a drifting, distant and dear memory of the old house, a relic of forces ruling it. In these regards perhaps Berry ponders on his understanding of all houses, which are “the failed or failing, vehicles of some alien element; of wind, or fire, or time,” (LLH, 146) gradually diminishing the very idea of permanence.

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<sup>39</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination. Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 108.

The more the illusion of permanence fell away from it, the easier it fit into the flux of things, as though it entered the fellowship of birds' nests and of burrows. But as a house it was a failed boat. As a place to sit and work, it was a flimsy, slowly tilting shelf. As a shelter, it was like a tree. (LLH, 153)

Altogether, the house is "something we are always in the process of finding," to borrow Lawrence Buell's phrase in his reference to place, "and always perforce creating in some degree as we find it." (EI, 260) In a way, the old house, the flooded house, or the river house endows Berry with a certain sense of place, or home place that the spot has begun for him and continues to be, while the houses come to supplant each other, becoming somehow descendant houses, thus recalibrating the familiar land on the Kentucky river. Berry finally rebuilds the Camp, so the new house becomes a true descendant of the old one, as the old came to supplant yet older one. Ultimately, "a house is not simply a building," as Berry explains, but "it is also an enactment," (LLH, 126) which fits into Buell's statement that "without novelty, place would lapse into banality," (EI, 163) however, some tinge of repetition, opening or clarity is a necessary approach in one's return to a home place.

As muskrat houses resembled Thoreau's cabin, the riverbank conditioned the mere presence of Berry's house, which "standing on its long legs, . . . had a peering, aerial look, as though built under the influence of trees. But it was heron-like, too, and made for wading at the edge of the water." (LLH, 156) It was a house conditioned and transformed with the course of time and weather, which made it a place, whose very idea of any beginning or end was barely a matter. Since "places are by definition bounded," as Lawrence Buell claims in his chapter on "Place," then "human-drawn boundaries usually violate both subjectively felt reality and the biotic givens." (EI, 268) Conversely, Berry's place, or country is "that which is within the range of his love, his understanding." (WBLW, 28) His home place is not constructed on the ground of walls, fences, boundaries, but takes shape after long years of his commitment to the Kentuckian land and the earth, which is dictated by his "belonging willingly and gladly," with the doorstep and the planet as quintessential landmarks of his stay among things. Hence, the geography of his place is

airy and starry as well as earthy and watery. It has been arrived at from a thousand other places, some as far away as the poles. I have come here from great distances myself, and am resigned to the knowledge that I cannot go without leaving it better or worse. Here as well as any place I can look out my window and see the world. There are lights that arrive here from deep in the universe. (LHH, 163)

Melted and abstract seem all human imposed boundaries in the face of all encompassing universe shifting its light indifferently and making “the details rise up out of the whole and become visible.” (LLH, 160) Out of the palimpsest, there surfaces a house, interrelated with all the living; a truthful house embedded in care meant to survive only by luck, to outlive floods and appear as a stoical house where life continues to grow along with wrens under the porch roof and the phoebes. As Berry says:

Like all river houses, it had become a stoical house. Sitting in it, I never forgot that am within the reach of an awesome power. It is a truthful house, not indulging the illusion of the permanence of human things. To be here always is not its hope. Long-legged as it is, it is responsive to the natural vibrations. (LLH, 158)

Berry’s commitment to place does not only derive from the fact that he was fated by birth to the Kentuckian landscape on the banks of the Kentucky River, as he admits, but was also his choice to return to it after two years as a Stegner fellow at Stanford, a year in Italy and teaching for two years at New York University. Choosing his hillside farm, Lanes Landing, Berry showed that the world was of more importance to him than the literary world, which met with the general contempt of his literary friends, “the urban intellectuals.” (LLH, 175) However, his return was the opening, a clarity, and reenactment that Berry spoke of in his essay “The Long-Legged House,” which brought on a significant change in seeing. Berry began to *see* the place “with a new clarity and a new understanding and a new seriousness. . . . the real abundance and richness of it.” (LLH, 177)

I walked over it, looking, listening, smelling, touching, alive to it as never before. . . . I began more seriously than ever to learn the names of things – the wild plants and animals, the local places – and to articulate my observations and memories. My language . . . sent my mind into the place like a live root system. . . . My mind became the root of my life rather than its sublimation. I came to see myself as growing out of the earth like the other native animals and plants. I saw my body and my daily motions

as brief coherences and articulations of the energy of the place, which would fall back into the earth like leaves in the autumn. (LLH, 178)

The place sense seems to be gradually evoking through the sensual experiencing it, growing into its details, part by part uncovered yet not defamiliarized but preserved in its very nature, acquired as distinctive and rooted within the place. To a great extent, Berry resembles Thoreau in his attempts to establish place-sense through “Sounds” reverberating and inherent in the Walden area. They both are inquisitive walkers entering “the externality of the world” (EI, 168) or the neighborhood of nature.



## Chapter 2

### Civilization, the Primitive, and the Trails In-between.



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<sup>40</sup> The Hump-backed Flute Player. “The hump-backed flute player / walks all over. / Sits on the boulders around the Great Basin / his him is a pack.” An image used by Snyder throughout his Pulitzer-prize winning book of poems entitled *Turtle Island* (1975). “Ancient rock art – petroglyphs – of a walking flute-playing figure, sometimes with a hump on his back, are found widely in the Southwest and into Mexico. These images are several thousand years old. There is a Hopi secret society that takes the Flute-player as its emblem. Some of the figures have an erect penis, and some have feelers on their heads that look like insect antennae. It has been suggested that the hump is possibly a pack, and that the figure may represent Aztec or Toltec wandering traders, who once came up into the Southwest with trade items. In Peru even today you can see young men with a sort of sling-pack on their backs, carrying a load and playing the flute while walking.” For a more detailed study see: Gary Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1996), pp. 81, 162-163.

## 2.1. Descent to the Primitive and Back.

Ancient, world-old Elk paths  
Narrow, dusty Elk paths  
Wide-trampled, muddy,  
Aimless . . . wandering . . .  
Everchanging Elk paths.<sup>41</sup>

Gary Snyder has claimed that “human culture is rooted in the primitive and the Paleolithic,” adding that “our body is a vertebrate mammal being – and our souls are out in the wilderness.” (PW, 182) These words best fit with the poetry of archeology – “hunting among stones,” human search for lost origins, which has been a growing mode, an oft-taken path in the U.S. poetry throughout seventies and eighties, a descent – not to the mythical underworld, but to the land, underground. Exploring and investigating the detritus pathways of the American Northwest, Snyder goes down Native myths and legends, leaves off names imposed by strangers to tear off the surface and descend to the long-forgotten layers of human existence on earth, and in his case, on the continent. Conversely, the Whitmanian poem that America was meant to be appears as just another layer with myriads of other layers covered with ashes of neglect and oppression spread over the lines on the land made forty thousand years ago when,

human people came with basket hats and nets  
winter-houses underground  
yew bows painted green,  
feasts and dances for the boys and girls  
songs and stories in the smoky dark.  
(“What Happened Here Before,” TI, 79))

Snyderian metaphor for the continent is that of the palimpsest, whose porous structure is being gradually inscribed with different lines imposed by different social orders turning the land bruised and beaten, but it is only then that “the image becomes clear; we are part of an immense palimpsest; the U.S.A. is but a superficial layer, the most recent (and damaging) inscription over a series of earlier texts.” (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 119) “The land,” Snyder says “is also a living being – at another

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<sup>41</sup> Gary Snyder, “Elk Trails” in *Left Out in the Rain* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005), p. 5.

pace.” (DTI, 107) Due to the plurality of points of intersection between the human and the more-than-human world, “civilizations east and west have long been on a collision course with wild nature.” (PW, 6) Only when we allow ourselves to know that “wildness is not just the “preservation of the world,” as Snyder says, but “it is the world,” (PW, 6) can we afford to think what civilization we actually need, namely, the one that can “live fully and creatively together with wildness,” (PW, 6) for much information is taken from deep inside civilization, from wildness, the biological and social sciences. By this very act Snyder leaves off the conception of the frontier, thus re-energizing mountain ridges, rivers and plains, re-discovering the land by taking a great effort of the imagination to retreat from the civilization into the wilderness; an act of re-opening the frontier contradictory to what, over a century earlier, Frederick Jackson Turner called the closure of the frontier.

Re-opening the frontier becomes a sort of an attempt to dissolve a dichotomy between the civilized and the wild. It looms as erasing the imposed and heading towards what is given; it involves untying the cords once stated as final and fixed, and loosening the social order on behalf of the natural order; it means replacing greed with humility. As Snyder admits in his inspiring essay entitled “Poetry and the Primitive,”

much has been said about the frontier in the American history, but overlooking perhaps some key points: the American confrontation with a vast wild ecology, an earthly paradise of grass, water, and game – was mind-shaking. (EHH, 119)

Therefore, Snyder – with his deep interests in cultural anthropology and prehistory – speaks on behalf of the natural order, and presents himself as a critic of the type of “social organization called civilization, adding that human beings are not to be particularly fearful in regard to nature, though they have reasons to be fearful of civilization”<sup>42</sup> for “civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Correspondence with the author, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive. A Critique of Civilization* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), p. 11. Hereafter as ISP and a page reference.

Snyder's critique of civilization always touches upon and interpenetrates the vestiges within the more-than-human world after its collision with the human; it deeply involves the relation— lurking somewhere in the ancient times, myriads of layers underground—of the human and nature. The source for his many comments upon the nature of civilization is found in a book of poems entitled *Regarding Wave*, where in the “Long Hair” section, the poet introduces the civilization theme with the notion of revolution. However, the revolution, which underlies all conquests and its oppressive apparatus, here involved in a play on a Trotskyist slogan, is now turned inside out. Namely, it is “the revolution in the revolution in the revolution,” where the very word comes to lose its power when reiterated all over again as in mantras, since finally there are no boundaries that separate the pre-conquest and the post-conquest land but all is inscribed within one single, though many-layered, palimpsest. (“& POWER/ comes out of the seed-syllables of mantras.”)<sup>44</sup> The only revolution this can be is the revolution of the unconscious which is to be found beyond the class-structured society or mass ego.<sup>45</sup> Snyder says,

Class-structured civilized society is a kind of mass ego. To transcend the ego is to go beyond society as well. “Beyond” there lies, inwardly, the unconscious. Outwardly, the equivalent of the unconscious is the wilderness: both of these terms meet, one step even farther on, as *one*. (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 122)

To go beyond the ego is to go beyond the self for “it is ultimately man’s self that is imperialized as the civilization spreads and deepens.” (ISP, 10) “Revolution in the Revolution...” surpasses political boundaries and strives for true Communionism beyond all nation-states, for each part of the land is surrounded by another larger area

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<sup>44</sup> See Gary Snyder, “The Voice as a Girl,” *Earth House Hold*, p. 123. Snyder explains that “certain emotions and states occasionally seize the body, one becomes a whole tube of air vibrating; all voice. In mantra chanting, the magic utterances, built of seed-syllables such as OM and AYNG and AH, repeated over and over, fold and curl on the breath until – when most weary and bored – a new voice enters a voice speaks through you clearer and stronger than what you know of yourself; with a sureness and melody of its own, singing out the inner song of the self, and of the planet.”

<sup>45</sup> In “Wondrous Figures and Forms” Robert Schuler in his discussion of “Burning” (the third section of the volume *Myths and Texts*) says that “Force, whether supplied by mind or body, cannot make a change. The only revolution is the revolution of the spirit. . . . It is important to note that the spiritual revolutionary, the model for Snyder’s poetics, is a determined character with firm values. He will not use force, but he will also not back off from executing what is spiritually correct in: *Journeys Towards the Original Mind. The Long Poems of Gary Snyder*, eds. Peter Lang, Peter Baker (N.Y.-Washington D.C.: 1994), pp. 53-54.

interlaced with yet other layers of life, where the masses – the standing people, the creeping people, the swimming people, the flying people – lead their lives in desperation, though no longer quiet. The Sioux’s other people became “the masses” — among trees, water, air and grasses—necessary to the state, just as “native communities were the ground out of which the earliest, class-structured, territorially defined civilizations arose.” (ISP, 8) Therefore, the ground with all unique patterns, lines, scratches, forming up drawings, depicting ways of living; trails, then finally roads, directing and redirecting individuals in their life-long travels upon the surface of the earth, already engraved with eons of lives and deaths, tinged with emotions issuing from songs and poems, dances, rituals of rebirth – the entire palimpsest, used and used up, again and again, becomes re-created and re-imagined by Snyder’s descent to the ground in search for some authenticity, the right balance, real values. Such opening - which lies in contradistinction to progress and civilization with its race towards that which is almost sterile in its perfection, final, immaculate, automatized, and distant in its heavenly abstract form – is a tremendous task of digging through projections of civilization, the imposed and the rejected, the scratches violently carved both in the land and in the minds of those pushed to the frontiers, then down, underground.

However, to withdraw from the society half-bent on its destructive, though highly-efficient lifestyles, would suggest an analogous retreat in some utopian vision reverberating with tribal passions and archaic values.<sup>46</sup> Instead of any retreat and replacement Snyder adheres to the conception of a modern man as being contemporary with all periods.

Part of our being modern is the very fact of our awareness that we are one with our beginnings – contemporary with all periods – members of all cultures. The seeds of every social structure or custom are in the mind. (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 126)

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<sup>46</sup> Snyder says, “as a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the late Paleolithic; the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth; the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe.”

Therefore, the Snyderian descent is never without return, it draws on the work of the anthropologist Stanley Diamond who has said that “the sickness of civilization consists in its failure to incorporate (and only then) to move beyond the limits of the primitive;” (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 126) it is concerned more with our awareness of the process of countless cross-fertilizations of cultures and languages, where the human is part of this network of related parts, tiny fragments absorbing and absorbed heading towards transformation. While drawing on the primitive, Snyder calls on to harken to the roots and reconsider our beginnings as some whirls in the knot, forces blooming, bursting and scattering of seed throughout the continent and the entire planet. Therefore, the thought implicit in his notes on the primitive revolves around “the power to move away from the self-imposed limitations of small-minded social systems.” (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 127) Snyder writes,

Today we are aware as never before of the plurality of human life-styles and possibilities, while at the same time being tied, like in an old silent movie, to a runaway locomotive rushing headlong toward a very singular catastrophe. (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 126)

As humans live within skin, ego, society, species boundaries, they tend to ignore that “consciousness has boundaries of different order,” and that “the mind is free.” (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 127) Moreover, “imagination, intuition, intellect, wit, decision, speed, skill, were fully developed forty thousand years ago,” (DTI, 104) which reverses popular misconceptions about the primitive, as Folsom says. Humans, cognizant of the destructive industrial and technological growth, the addiction to fossil fuels, are not the ones to hold the wisdom, techniques and attitudes that would allow them to live, continue to live on earth for long periods. The time we live in is anomalous, devastating the old traditions, “the old ways” neglecting the wisdom, losing the balance along with sane, healthy existence, a symbiosis with other lives. Hence, part of our being modern is to witness the extinction of species, and the uncovering of boundaries; it is to be exposed to the growth of greed; it means fighting the old myths and stories and searching for relief in abstractions—cleansed, white, immaculate, intangible beliefs of a better place, while hiding ourselves in the Metropole, easily sliding in loveless schemes and forms, societies of our

contemporaries. Being modern entails indulging in comforts and easy solutions; however, on deeper levels it is experiencing isolation and “placelessness,”<sup>47</sup> while the place of elders is often taken by books; whereas, the local, kin-based, or tribal populations are slowly absorbed by the Metropole, smoothed out to integrate, only to wither away with the all-devouring now.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For a more detailed account on “placelessness” see: “Not Here Yet. Remarks by Gary Snyder on Buddhism, Ecology & the Poetics of Homelessness,” in: *Shambhala Sun*, March 1994, vol. 2, No. 4. Hereafter as NYH and a page reference.

<sup>48</sup> Stanley Diamond, quoted in Gary Snyder, RW, p. 115.

## 2.2. “Civilization.”

At the root of the problem where our civilization goes wrong is the mistaken belief that nature is something less than authentic, that nature is not as alive as man is, or as intelligent, that in a sense it is dead, and the animals are of so low an order of intelligence and feeling, we need not take their feelings into account. (“The Wilderness” TI, 107)

In Pueblo Indian societies there was a strong sympathy between humans and animals. Through certain dances and rituals animals were given a place and a voice in the political discussions, which was a kind of “ultimate democracy.” (TI, 104) Animals, plants and a variety of wildlife were therefore the “people” of the land (the swimming people, the flying people, the creeping people and the standing people) (TI, 108) Nonetheless, a line was drawn to separate primitive peoples and civilized peoples. The line which divides our lives into authentic and inauthentic; forested and stoned; wild and tame; balanced and imbalanced; compassionate and enclosed in one’s own self, is the line sieving the old teachings, cleansing them of the natural human-nature relation and of the western pre-white history concealed by the history written by the conquerors and discoverers. Perhaps “civilization has something to learn from the primitive.” (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 120) There is

[s]omething to be learned from the native American people about where we are. It can’t be learned from anybody else. We have a western white history of a hundred and fifty years; but when we look at a little bit of American Indian folklore, myth, read a tale, we’re catching just the tip of an iceberg of forty or fifty thousand years of human experience, on this continent, in this place. (DTI, 107)

Drawing on from the uncivilized side, while scrutinizing the native American trails, Snyder delves into the depths, the soil of his continent and pans for wisdom like miners panned for gold in mid-nineteenth century in the land where he now resides, Nevada County. Panning for wisdom is a struggle to find “common human elements;” it is to re-discover the world in its nakedness, authentic, fundamental elements like birth, love, death; “the sheer fact of being alive.” (EHH, 118) It is to re-configure perception so as to approach in a sense the Blakean seeing “with the eye,” which here would mean to eye the world more sensitively, to see the beautiful along with the



terrible, to reconstruct the “seamless web of man and nature, the enveloping silence of their primordial relationship, that long originally shattered.”<sup>49</sup>

A number of essays and poems was emerged in relation to the civilization theme among which the poem “Civilization,” written by Snyder during his Japan years, looms as medley of voices issuing from the scratched land, from the silenced people of the land.

Those are the people who do complicated things.  
they'll grab us by the thousands  
and put us to work.  
World's going to hell, with all these  
Villages and trails.  
Wild duck flocks aren't  
What they used to be.  
Aurochs<sup>50</sup> grow rare.  
Fetch me my feathers and amber.<sup>51</sup>

As history has always been written by the conquerors, so has been the history of civilization. As writing was itself “an instrument for the recording of official histories,” (ISP, 3) then the use of symbols became explicit, they lost certain richness whereas writing became “an ideological instrument of incalculable power.” (ISP, 4) Diamond continues in this vein,

Man's word was no longer an endless exploration of reality, but a sign that could be used against him. . . . For writing splits consciousness in two ways – it becomes more authoritative than talking, thus degrading the meaning of speech and eroding oral tradition; and it makes it possible to use words for the political manipulation and control of others. Written signs supplant memory. (ISP, 4)

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<sup>49</sup> Philip Jay Lewitt, *Kyoto Review*, No 23., Spring 1990.

<sup>50</sup> Aurochs: “Aurochs are from earlier and prehistoric Europe, huge wild cattle (*Bos taurus primigenius*). The word aurochs is of itself singular. Plural is aurochses. It has been extinct for many centuries now, but was still around in small numbers in Roman times. It may be the ancestor of contemporary cattle species -- all Bos. It was also in North Africa. I'm sure it roamed about in what is today Poland. It is not the same as the European bison. Sometimes it was referred to as the Urus. It is very elegantly represented in SW European cave art, especially Lascaux. The word is apparently from Old High German.” Correspondence with the author, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Snyder, „Civilization” in *Regarding Wave* (New York: New Directions Press, 1970), p. 84. Hereafter as RGW and a page reference.

Snyder in his counter-cultural approach to the nature of civilization reverses the purpose of writing and speaks on behalf of those who remained silenced, the “ruthlessly exploited classes” for there are no conventional ways of knowing unless facts are written down or created anew. Diamond concludes that in this way “achievements of civilization are reduced to their proper proportions.” (ISP, 2)

In ritual dances of the Pueblo Indians animals were speaking through people to make their point, they seized an individual and then he danced as deer would dance, or impersonated a squash blossom; “they were no longer speaking for humanity, they were taking it on themselves to interpret, through their humanity, what these other life-forms were.” (TI, 109) Therefore, the spokespersonship for the rest of the world pervades the first part of the verse, and makes it clear that in order to become conspicuous one needs to be useful; in order to be audible one’s history needs to be cleansed of complexities and reduced to the written word before it is told out loud. Here the silenced are given a voice and a place to articulate the unarticulated, to describe the non-describeable. Like in mantra chanting, “expiration, “voiced,” makes the signals by which species connects,” (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 123) endowing human beings with an intrinsic capability of “interpreting the inwardness of the acts of others.” (ISP, 212) Only by changes in consciousness are we able to communicate *par excellence*, to “empathize with what we do not directly share.” (ISP, 212) To communicate with others is to assume that they are as we are, somehow in a way that people of the primitive cultures appreciated animals as other people off on various trips. (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 121) As paths and trails came to be covered and crossed with concrete, asphalt, thus pushed down beneath the layers of the American present, the native animal-people’s earlier ways have tended to disappear, mutilated and torn, as the palimpsest itself gradually became enriched with multitudinous layers of man’s culture; but undeniably, the poem leaves us with the presupposition which is forever drifting in our minds, and winding through deeper levels of understanding, namely, “civilized man cannot know what has been gained until he learns what has been lost.” (ISP, 121) Thus, the poem seems to be weighting human deeds on earth; balancing the trails lost and gained throughout time, both in the sky and on the land, indicating the present intolerable condition of gradual displacement and finally, disappearance of species, their trails, the primal kinship of

man and nature. Snyder reaffirms archaic values which he juxtaposes with the “current aberration of human society called civilization.” (PFW, 103) Therefore, “fetch me my feathers and amber” is a focus on that which is non-existent in its palpable form since it belongs to songs and stories, sung and told, and dying along with natives of that land. Amber, so rich in symbolism (healing properties, general protection, a charm against evil spirits) is in the native American context the sunstone of creation and new beginnings; in the Scandinavian context—a sea-stone, or in Greek myths—a solidified sunshine taken away from heavens and sunk down into the sea. Conjoined within the fossilized resin are the sky and the sea. “Feathers and amber” can be read as emblems implicit in the native American beliefs, in the whole oral tradition, which now appears to be waning in the overwhelming entanglement of artificially glowing roads offering divergent forms of freedom and comfort. “Fetch me my feathers and amber” looms as a “puzzled search,” to use Diamond’s phrase, “for what is diminished.” In other words, it is “the search for different ways of being human,” (ISP, 120) underlined with interrelatedness with more-than-human world. Moreover, it is a caring, considerate look at particular layers of the palimpsest where lives of others continue and end as ours. In the second stanza of “Civilization” Snyder beholds a small cricket occupying a tiny part of his typescript page.

A small cricket  
 On the typescript page of  
 “Kyoto born in spring song”  
 Grooms himself in time with *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.  
 I quit typing and watch him thru a glass.  
 How well articulated! How neat!  
 Nobody understands the ANIMAL KINGDOM. (“Civilization,” RGW, 84)

A close and careful, though momentary attention is paid to the cricket that landed on a piece of paper with Snyder’s poem from Regarding Wave’s second section. The cricket looms as attuned with the rest of creation, and with world’s recognizable music such as *The Well-Tempered Clavier*—“well articulated” and “neat.” Although the cricket’s simple form is harmoniously integrated with the living world and thus reminds us of nature’s own intrinsic, complex tunes, its own music issuing from the very authenticity of being alive is neither recognized nor understood and unheard by many. Implicit in the poem is its link with poetry in general, since

“music, dance, religion, and philosophy . . . have archaic roots – a shared origin with poetry;” (“Poetry and the Primitive,” EHH, 118) emphasizing the fact that poetry must sing or speak from authentic experience. Therefore, Snyder ends the poem with a short reflection: “When creeks are full/ The poems flow/ When creeks are down/ We heap stones.” (“Civilization,” RGW, 84) The image of a riverbed is suggestive of his individual lifelong practice – an integration of intellectual and physical work, the flow of poems as well as placing stones to build trails are acts that Snyder refers to as the real work that nourishes community. Words read as stones laid down in the real world are fragmented remnants of that which is the past projected upon the future with ‘civilization’ being the middle term. (ISP, 208) Gathered in it are all lines of the palimpsest we step on, with cave drawings, petroglyphs, hieroglyphs, mounds, mazes, tombs.

Heaping stones, or hunting among stones, or panning for wisdom and writing poems are all acts to search for human identity, and common human elements. Nevertheless, this is the positive direction, but – as Snyder maintains – in the prose and verse it is frequently described as a “non:” non-Western, non-Christian, non-white, non-capitalist, non-national, non-military, non-civilization. The struggle and tension it incorporates is to create a mind purified of the lusts and greeds of history. Therefore, the restoration of the primitive, viewed as common human elements, would permit the inclusion of ritual that gives way to the ecstatic, the passionate, the physical.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Gary Snyder Archives, Interviews, Special Collections Library, University of California, Davis, California.

### 2.3. The Palimpsest of Trails.

“One moves continually with the consciousness  
Of that other, totally alien, non-human:  
Humming inside like a taut drum. . . .  
Intricate layers of emptiness  
This only world, juggling forms  
A hand, a breast, two clasped  
Human tenderness scuttles  
Down dry endless cycles  
Forms within forms falling  
clinging  
 (“Second Shaman Song,”) <sup>53</sup>

Panning for wisdom takes the searcher far out into the regions whose abundance is to be sieved carefully, looked through, subtly touched and gathered, preserved and learnt. It does not suffice to know the surface, whose porous structure holds vestiges of lives and deaths of millions of other life forms. Crossed with plenitude of trails and paths, the palimpsest’s beauty and terror are within its visible patterns as well as deep down its permeable niches and layers. Before the white man stepped onto the land, marked the continent of America with divergent ways by means of cobbled alleys, concrete drives, lanes or asphalt roads, long-distance highways, the land was already rich in trails taken by deer, bison, bears, birds (“Geese, ducks, swallows, paths in the air.” MT, 28). With the advent of the white man the trails were gradually covered by other ways serving people, making their lives presumably organized, ordered, easier by giving more opportunities, physical and moral comforts, conveniences. Though patterns interlace, interweave their forms and shapes, entangle their destinations, transfix crossings. The old deer trails intersecting roads with log trucks that “run on fossil fuel.” (“The Dead by the Side of the Road, TI, 7) make for very peculiar, yet moving encounters with fawn, doe, skunk, red-tailed hawk, ringtail, stopped somewhere at points where the old ways come too close to the new ones, thus mix the patterns; even the Coyote – Native American trickster figure – is left perplexed and overwhelmed by the imbalanced confusion of roads. In *Turtle Island* Snyder gives examples of this brutal imposition of concrete roads on the natural paths taken by the native animal-people finally left “dead by the side of the road.” A Red-tailed Hawk, “all stiff and dry,” with “Her wings for dance fans;” a skunk “with

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<sup>53</sup> Snyder, *Myths & Texts* (New York: New Directions, 1978), p. 38. Hereafter as MT and a page reference.

crushed head;" fawn "hit by truck on highway forty-nine;" "the Doe apparently shot/ lengthwise and through the side-/ shoulder and out the flank/ belly full of blood." (TI, 7) are all potential "pouch for magic tools." The old knowledge of connection and responsibility seems to be lost within the darkened layers of the native wisdom of handling animals, of spiritual and moral ties between the human and animals, bonds torn and disfigured, like "our ancient sisters' trails" laid across with roads that kill them; dismembered bodies filled with present horror, like "a belly full of blood." The trails, forever humming with the perennial song of the planet, interlace with hills, roads, grasses, water; they narrow, widen and split; fade and wither, but eventually – embedded in human sense of belonging to the land – they are entangled in human bodies, hair, veins; grounded in hearts and minds. This message issuing from "Long Hair" is an attempt to follow deer trails, whose imprints left on the continent, the palimpsest of trails, come to quest for the ancient knowledge of hunting magic; to uncover and enliven the unique spiritual bonds that humans and animals long shared. Following does not mean tracking down, or forcing the animal to escape from the hunter, since in the end the hunter and the animal become one. Following is re-thinking the spiritual journey that the hunted animal must go till its final reunion with the spirits of his kind and with the hunter himself, which is best depicted in 'Hunting Season,' the first part of "Long Hair."

Once every year, the Deer catch human beings. They do various things which irresistibly draw men near them; each one selects a certain man. The Deer shoots the man, who is then compelled to skin it and carry its meat home and eat it. Then the Deer is inside the man. He waits and hides in there, but the man doesn't know it. When enough Deer have occupied enough men, they will strike all at once. The men who don't have Deer in them will also be taken by surprise, and everything will change some. This is called "takeover from inside." (RGW, 65)

The total entanglement of lives and flesh, the human and the deer one, conveys a message of a life that is not lost since it enters the food chain. The deer's life is thus rich in dimensions, the sacred or the one that is transferred in legends, hunting magic, and the relationship with the human who is endowed with yet another life. Hunting magic reverses the universal idea of death and renders it a process of re-entering the cyclical life changes. The human, under the spell of the hunted deer, is a container of

lives turning and tumbling, whirling and a-wandering the ancient human-animal trails. However, at the same time, the deer dies to the exterior world in a way that is conventional, it withdraws itself from being seen, yet, like memory or dreams, the deer stays inside the human hunter.

The second part of “Long Hair” weaves and subtly balances the trails whose barely visible imprints, as if grown into the ground, like veins within a body, seem to swell and brim as the follower detects them and wanders through the terrain already tinged with the blood of the prey. The trails become the veins of the animal shedding its own self that it has to offer.

Deer trails run on the side hills  
Cross county access roads  
Dirt ruts to bone-white  
Board house ranches,  
Tumbled down.

Waist high through Manzanita,  
Through sticky, prickly, crackling  
Gold dry summer grass.

Deer trails lead to water,  
lead sidewise all ways  
narrowing down to one best path–  
and split–  
and fade away to nowhere.

Deer trails slide under freeways  
Slip into cities  
Swing back and forth in crops and orchards  
Run up the sides of schools!  
Deer spoor and crisscross dusty tracks  
Are in the house: and coming out of the walls:

And deer bound through my hair. (“Long Hair,” RGW, 65-66)

Deer (en)trails, are now *en* trail, wandering along with the human, brought back home carefully and with perseverance, come to be read as “a medium of interchange between [the human] and the empowered world.”<sup>54</sup> The deer flesh, skin and bones are

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Nelson, *The Island Within* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) , p. 267. Hereafter as TIW and a page reference.

prepared to become something more than the flesh of the dead animal. Serving man in his home as various domestic implements, their dismembered bodies re-enter the life of man, enter his house, become useful, and sometimes are hung on the walls. Bound in human hair, they grow out of the fixed and stable, and retreat into the natural, as long hair spread and grow freely.

Moreover, deer trails slide further down, into the time and space unknown to man, untouched by his presence, back 3 million years (“deer, coyote, blujay, gray squirrel,/ ground squirrel, fox, blacktail hare,/ . . . / all came to live here.” (TI, 79) Then the trails go even farther than the continent of America, some twenty million years ago, into the temperate woodlands of Europe and Asia, where the first true deer appeared. Over the next few million years, cervids (the deer family: *Cervidae*) diversified and spread into North America, crossing the Bering Strait during one of several periods when lowered sea levels opened a corridor of dry land.<sup>55</sup>

The paths become interconnected by means of rituals, Native legends and stories of creation, thus saving the spirits and utilizing the voices of hunters and their prey, by enduring reverence to deer. Interlaced here are both historical and mythical records, which brings reverential insight, and, simultaneously, alters the primitive into a “metaphysical category, an ideal of immediacy that has been lost to modern society.”<sup>56</sup> Michael Davidson describes the intersection of trails in the following way: “the hunter, in silent pursuit of the prey, must project himself into the animal and take on its soul. It is an act not of violence but of empathy.” (SFR, 106) It is the empathy that enables to exchange thoughts and emotions, to feel oneself projected upon the animal who has heard the hunter’s song, witnessed his sincerity and out of compassion found itself within his range. (EHH, 120) This empathy is a complete entanglement of the hunter and the hunted animal, whose connection aspires to be viewed as sacramental. Nonetheless, it is the perception and sacrament that do not belong elsewhere outside the shamanistic rituals, which are scattered across Americas, northern and eastern

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<sup>55</sup> For further, more detailed information on deer see Richard Nelson’s *Heart and Blood. Living with Deer in America* (New York: Random House, 1997), where the author expresses his deep reverence to this magnificent, amazing, and elusive creature. Nelson claims that “to know the deer is to glimpse the hidden heart of wildness itself.” The other source is his award-winning *The Island Within* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), where Nelson examines the complex relationship with deer, with the natural world.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Davidson, “Spotting that design,” in *The San Francisco Renaissance. Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 109. Hereafter as SFR and a page reference.



Asia, but also Africa, Oceania, Australia, and northern and eastern Europe.<sup>57</sup> While digging in various Northwest cultural traditions, Snyder brings to the foreground some unique elements of human perception in regard to the natural world and its ties with the human. Davidson calls it “a frame of values” which extends itself to the upper Paleolithic. Within this frame are found: “the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power of vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe.” (SFR, 108-109) The frame of values, neglected outside its context, appears as a bridge to the native beliefs, shamanistic journeys, or the primitive; whereas poetry is “the ground as well as the expression of these values.” (SFR, 109) While maintaining his interpretation in this vein, Davidson attempts at presenting the germination of voice in Snyder’s poetry as “the agency through which those spiritual and epistemological orders speak.” (SFR, 109) Hence, both the vision and voice become vehicles to move beyond the ordinary into the realm of the “communal unconscious,” (GSPR, 78) which is based on a sacred compact, mutual understanding and respect, deep sympathy in which the union of souls becomes possible. The ground for depicting the complexities of the interrelationship is found in “Hunting,” the second phase of *Myths and Texts*, originally published in 1960, where the poet gathers voices from various sources to speak for the animal-people of the land through immersing the poems in different cultural traditions, like Native American, Buddhist, and frontiersmen. “Hunting” uncovers those trails of thought and attention dormant in modern man, whose perception no longer involves a careful, considerate look at the inner ties and bonds between the human and more-than-human. It is, in fact, a gathering of voices leading to “creaturely community,” (GSPR, 78) in which hunting itself is a promise of restoration rather than killing. As Gray concludes, “hunting an animal is never to be equated with the kind of wholesale slaughter that is the unfortunate legacy of Anglo-American frontiersmen.” (GSPR, 78) To communicate with the “creaturely community” is to listen to the inwardness of their thoughts and actions, “the inwardness of the acts of others;” it is to articulate the communal unconscious by “reference to typical animal behaviors,” (GSPR, 78), animal miming that Snyder explains in his *East-West* interview,

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<sup>57</sup> Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices. A Survey of Visionary Narratives* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), p. 3.

You learn animal behavior becoming an acute observer – by entering the mind – of animals. That’s why . . . rituals and ceremonies that are found throughout the world from ancient times, the key component of the ceremony is animal *miming*. The miming is a spontaneous expression of the capacity of becoming physically and psychically one with the animal. (SFR, 108)

Hunting stands close to panning for wisdom, since both of them are attempts to rejoin a consciousness which is not dependent on material goods, comforts and conveniences, nor any aesthetic beliefs of a mind detached from the ordinary world. Both hunting and panning for wisdom force to rethink the condition of man and nature by leaving off the precepts placing man above other life forms. When hunting is restored to its native, original dimension, then all the wantonness, the desires, the aggression give way to patience, humility, and sympathy. Therefore, the original, the first, the primordial is given much attention in Snyder as the one endowed with wisdom, skills, acute perception, deep sympathy. As the subtitle of “Hunting I” is *first shaman song*, the hierarchies of modern world become dispersed, whereas the speaker “sit[s] without thoughts” (MT, 19) in a “village of the dead,” (MT, 19) which becomes his place of solitude, distanced from the civilized and nearer to the time-space of a new myth being hatched. “Hatching” immediately places him within the realm of animal-people whom, as a shaman, he hunts for their wisdom. As Gray puts it, he grows into his role of a “creaturely caretaker,” whereas animals appear as the haunting critters dwelling the space of creation myths and legends, and it is from them that one is to draw the knowledge of interconnection. Thus, Gray’s interpretation of “Hunting” revolves around the long-distanced relation of a man and wildlife. By exemplifying the trails, both the literal ones and those dwelling in the space of imagination, and by gazing carefully at the paths and diverse patterns engraved by all the living, “Hunting” poems uncover trails silently trodden by animals in the spirit of their communion with the human. One of the last lines in “Hunting 1” ends with Snyder’s saying “I sit without thoughts by the log-road/ Hatching a new myth/ watching the waterdogs/ the last truck gone,” (MT, 19) which instantly serves as a transition to the styles of hunting beginning the second poem. “Hunting 2” starts in the following way,

Atok: creeping  
Maupok: waiting to hunt seals.  
The sea hunter  
Watching the whirling seabirds on the rocks  
The mountain hunter  
Horn-tipped shaft on a snowslope  
Edging across cliffs for a shot at goat. (MT, 20)

This simple revivification of hunting styles contrasted with wanton killing in later parts of the “Hunting” section is a vision whose light is shed on humility and reverence, the basic tenets of hunting in the Native American context. Veiled within the lines of the poems are also such tenets as detached observation and a practice that requires to use every part of the animal, to make implements of parts that cannot be used for food. An example of that practice is depicted in “Hunting 5,” where according to the Kwakiutl instruction “the head of the mountain-goat is in the corner/ for the making of the horn spoon,” (MT, 23) the second line being the subtitle.

The black spoon. When fire’s heat strikes it  
turn the head  
Four days and hair pools loose  
horn twists free.  
Hand-adze, straightknife, notch the horn-base;  
Rub with rough sandstone  
Shave down smooth. Split two cedar sticks  
When water boils plunge the horn,  
Tie the mouth between sticks in the spoon shape  
  
Rub with dried dogfish skin.  
It will be black and smooth,  
A spoon. (MT, 23)

With the introduction of the implements made with high aesthetic care, as in the case of the horn spoon, we get an early indication of the primitive art, surfacing somehow when leafing through pages of the “Hunting” section. In the second poem we read

‘Upon the lower slopes of the mountain  
On the cover, we find sculptured forms  
Of animals apparently lying dead in the  
Wilderness’ thus Fenollosa  
On the pottery of Shang. (MT, 20)

Snyder, conversant in anthropology and mythology, depicts animals as primary foodstuffs and carriers of spiritual wisdom, or holders of powers transcending the category of prey and, as Robert Schuler states in his *Journeys Towards the Original Mind*, “giv[ing] to man, not only flesh, but soul.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Schuler, *Journeys Toward the Original Mind. The Long Poems of Gary Snyder* (eds.) Peter Lang, Peter Baker, vol. 2 (New York: 1994), p. 34.

## 2.4. “Deer Foot Down Scree.”

Among poems dedicated to birds and bears, “Hunting 8” is prefaced by an epitaph “*this poem is for deer.*” Underpinning the entire mosaic of trails engraved or barely marked on the land, is the knowledge of interconnection and interrelatedness that Snyder incorporates in most of his poems. The knowledge of interconnection correlates to extended compassion stretching from humans to animals and to the more-than-human world. As strings of this compassion may be broken, the palimpsest of trails uncovers itself to the readers, opening its mythical hides and spiritual bonds, relationships shattered and bleeding through the vast, implicit terrain of the past years. Deer claimed to be able to keep the human soul from care, majestically sliding in spaces within the poems dedicated to them by the author, seem to be shedding its “essential humanity” (SFR, 107) when we approach the passage:

I dance on all the mountains  
On five mountains, I have a dancing place  
When they shoot at me I run  
To my five mountains. (MT, 26)

As trails intermingle in the network of paths taken and dispersing in divergent directions, voices in the poem invoke Northwest hunting songs swelling with sympathy, and as if interrupted and interspaced with a hunter’s acts of violence. The aroused violence is ascribed to a situation when empathy fails, which corresponds with the interpretation of these poems by Davidson. Moreover, the persona of the hunter is not the one who belongs in the context of Northwest hunting magic. It is rather a man exiled from nature, whose methods of hunting keep him endistanced and detached from the natural world, since the deer is shot from a car after having been blinded by the car’s headlights.

Home by night

Drunken eye

Still picks out Taurus

Low, and growing high:

Four-point buck

Dancing in the headlights  
                    On the lonely road  
A mile past the mill-pond  
With the car stopped, shot  
That wild silly blinded creature down.  
Pull out the hot guts  
                    With bare hands  
While night-frost chills the tongue  
                    And eye  
The cold horn-bones.  
The hunter's belt  
                    Just below the sky  
Warm blood in the car trunk.  
Deer smell  
                    The limp tongue. (MT, 27)

The unnamed hunter, unaware of the shamanistic context of hunting songs, deer's celebratory dancing movements, a need of empathy and humility inbuilt in the relationship of a hunter and the hunted, observes only fear, fright and surprise when the blinded deer falls prey to his wanton hunt, whereas his "drunken eye" still manages to perceive the hunt going on in a realm of stars by distinguishing Orion, the hunter. However, his perception only lets him spot objects due to their presence among things; it reaches their surface but is not capable of deeper insight into the nature of things; it does not make him read the relationship between the hunter and his prey. Moreover, as Patrick D. Murphy claims, "such a relationship is absolutely essential for any kind of hunting magic to bring a hunter game." (PFW, 33) Thus, the relationship is a sacred unity, which grows into acts claimed sacramental by Snyder, and agricultural by Berry. Therefore, "eating is a sacrament," says Snyder in his "Song of Taste;" whereas, it is an "agricultural act," according to Berry who reminds us that "eating ends the annual drama of the food economy that begins with planting and birth." Such a relationship inscribes man in a network of things co-existing, being multiplied and diminished. The sacramental aspect intermingles here with the sacred

traditions of the native peoples and goes on to search for ways of healing this relationship and regaining the humility, which does not put man before other living beings but allows for healthy symbiosis, or to envisage it in a culture where animals are no longer visitors from a divine realm, but they are interchangeable targets for our misplaced aggression. (GSPR, 81) From many voices surfacing in “Hunting 8” and brimming with contrasting emotions, Murphy points to a certain loss depicted by the end of the aforementioned part, that is a “limp tongue” symbolizing the deer’s singing voice. The vanishing animal, shedding itself in the natural world when treated with reverence, and now deprived of respect, ceremonies and rituals; blinded and taken from the wild where it belongs, becomes a subject of misplacement of beliefs, an empty body torn out of one world and placed into another. “Warm blood in the car trunk” like a “belly full of blood” foretells contamination and diminishment, loss of the native American heritage, which is the hunting magic and, at the same time, corresponds well with the perception of this heritage, which looms as an attribute of fear in man. Hence, fright and surprise come to depict the deer, but in fact, it is the man they dwell in as if the circle has been closed now that deer have caught human being. Those emotions aroused in the human become indistinguishable features of his existence in a world contaminated with awe and fright, trodden down the scree of all the nativeness and belonging, down where deer paths meet paths taken by men, and penetrate the lives of humans.

The deer poems stretch out to grasp something from the American life, since their trails intersperse vast areas of the continent, except for the far north of Canada and Alaska. A detailed account can be found in Richard Nelson’s *Heart and Blood*, where traces of the relationship between man and deer relate to Berry’s agricultural act of eating. Although Nelson’s account is also uncovering “disquieting realities and unexpected dilemmas,” of farmers cultivating their land, in which much attention is paid to hunting as a necessary means by which deer populations can be kept near acceptable numbers, there is some space for long-lost hunting magic which uncovers itself when we approach a passage about a relationship between deer and man, which these days is itself a part of the food economy sustaining lives on earth but also, at the same time, keeping numbers on a respectable level.

Deer are not merely a part of the scenery, not just works of natural artistry carrying on lives remote and disconnected from our own. We are bound together with deer in an intricate biological relationship centered around cultivated crops. As a consequence, everyone in modern North America who lives each day on agricultural foods belongs to an ecological network that necessary involves deer hunting. White-tailed deer, mule deer, and black-tailed deer are a fundamental part of our personal ecology. In this sense, the blood of deer runs through our veins...<sup>59</sup>

Hence, people—hunters, non-hunters, and anti-hunters—all belong in the chain of the food economy; however, now that the source of food appears unknown, distant and detached, so does the hunting magic which, deprived of its sacredness, becomes part of the mythic past of those who were the first to know the continent of America along with the natural richness it offered. Nonetheless, on the simplest level, man is a hunter and gatherer, but the knowledge of connection and reverence does no longer equally relate to the way humans live in civilized times. The condition of being distanced from the very nativeness of being a man, the one uprooted from the land that sustains and nourishes him, and – as a result – cramped within the room packed with abstract data and information rather than knowledge, renders a man less than full, as Stanley Diamond claims in his critique of civilization. “Hunting 8” juxtaposes the realities man is cast into when depicting the two hunters, different in their attitudes and skills, their lore and humility. The notion of the distance becomes the one that connotes human condition and his relation to lives of others. The distance between the deer and the hunters sitting in a car appears to be vast and profound in regard to where in hierarchy the human really locates himself. If enclosed within an artificially secure space, such as a car in “Hunting 8,” then the man happens to be a witness to lives taken away by his own choice thus limiting their freedom. This is where Diamond’s words loom as germane to the problem of civilization and the distance that human traversed throughout centuries. If the sickness of civilization is caused by man’s lack of incorporating the primitive, and then moving beyond it, then the distance is even more immense because of its dearth of faith, and overwhelming idleness. Snyder comments upon Diamond’s statement by saying that “civilization is so to speak a lack of faith, a human laziness, a willingness to accept the perceptions of others in place of your own – to be less than a full man.” (EHH, 126) The common denominator implicit

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<sup>59</sup> Nelson, *Heart and Blood. Living with Deer in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p. 311. Hereafter as HB and a page reference.



in the above statement is the notion of the distance. Being enddistanced involves being beyond the primitive, yet not having incorporated the values considered as rich, affluent in possibilities of coexistence on earth causing least possible harm. The subject of hunting apparent throughout the ancient times, and preserved in the primitive art, steps forward to a contemporary man opening before him the regions of empathy among species. Moreover, these regions—buried by the pressure of moving forward and leaving things behind—have long been anaesthetizing man heading towards a “singular catastrophe” to which Snyder refers to in his critique of civilization. The distance makes the human think it is his freedom, however, the immense space of his actions collides with lives of others traversing the same trails. Since the circle of his actions and deeds makes him relaxed and elated within the space, broad and claimed his own, the need of distance makes him daring and fearful at the same time. “Hunting 8” shows man hunting drunk at night as representative of dark emotions coming to surface when violence and frustration prevail along with lack of faith and laziness that shows itself in ignorance to maintain the lives of others and consider them sacred and their own. Instead, the deer is described as “a silly creature,” who—attracted by headlights—is provoked to approach the hunters hidden in the relative safety of their car. The laziness to incorporate the native lore is the idleness that keeps people within the comfort of society they belong to. The comfort of being enddistanced, also in the sphere of food economy, where a man does not know where his food comes from, is considered as part of consumerism that has penetrated the lives of men. Yet the distance involves anaesthetization to that which environmentalists find alarming and devastating. Stagnation and inertia are therefore forms of the laziness that Snyder uses to confront society with its values, those vanished, vanishing, and renamed to adjust to the needs of society. By contrast, the voices from “Hunting 8,” coming from different backgrounds, seem to be destined to crash within the lines of the poem, and then in the reader, to provoke emotions yet other than sentimental and naïve. The hunter, though purified before going hunting, can be depicted as a carrier of emotions which he needs to release with the help of the deer that will come to release them. In his pages devoted to Snyder’s deer poem, Robert Schuler claims that “Hunting 8” “reveals the emotional price one must pay for failing to treat an animal with proper spiritual respect,”<sup>60</sup> defending, at the same time,

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<sup>60</sup> Schuler, *Journeys Toward the Original Mind*, p. 39.

the native reaction from extreme sentimentalism and naivety that a modern reader may see in the last lines.

Deer don't want to die for me  
I'll drink sea-water  
Sleep on the beach pebbles in the rain  
Until the deer come down to die  
In pity for my pain. (MT, 28)

Passionate admiration for animals renders the scene an – uncommon for a white man – image of spiritual bonds joining a shaman with his prey. The hunting itself, preceded by long preparation, becomes a tranquil process. Snyder endeavors to approach the theme in his essay “The Wilderness,” when he describes a hunt from the perspective of his friend, a Pueblo Indian.

The Pueblo Indians, and I think probably most of the other Indians of the Southwest, begin their hunt, first, by purifying themselves. They take emetics, a sweat bath, and perhaps avoid their wife for a few days. . . . They go out hunting in an attitude of humility. They make sure that they need to hunt, that they are not hunting without necessity. Then they improvise a song while they are in the mountains. They sing aloud or hum to themselves while they are walking along. It is a song to the deer, asking the deer to be willing to die for them. They usually still-hunt, taking a place alongside a trail. The feeling is that you are not hunting the deer, the deer is coming to you; you make yourself available for the deer that will present itself to you, that has given itself to you. (TI, 109)

Richard Nelson describes this process of hunting very meticulously in his novel, *The Island Within*. The passage, quoted below, focuses on the inconspicuous details happening in the hunter's mind which go into play with the objects perceived. Mental and perceptual experiences seem to be melting to transform the passage of hunting in the maze of “windfallen trees,” “clear discs of frozen ponds,” into the destined place where the hunter, who simultaneously becomes the witness, is finally gifted with an animal coming to shed off its life in front of him, as according to the beliefs of the

Koyukon elders, whose words are drifting in the hunter's mind, the deer "come to those who have shown them respect, allowing themselves to be taken."<sup>61</sup>

The long, quiet, methodical process of the hunt begins. I move deeper into the forest, ever mindful of treading the edge between protracted, eventless watching and the startling intensity of coming upon an animal, the always unexpected meeting of eyes. A deer could show itself at this moment, in an hour, in several hours, or not at all. Most of hunting is like this – an exercise in patient, isometric endurance and keen, hypnotic concentration. I lift my foot, step ahead, ease it down, wait, step again. (TIW, 259)

It is the "hypnotic concentration" that makes hunters move "like eagles cleaving between tumbled columns of cloud." (TIW, 260) After long periods of perseverance, the "gift of the deer falls like a feather in the snow;" (TIW, 262) easily, calmly down, the gift is given away; a burden it is - in terms of death that opens up a vacant body; a gift of sharing the life that is left to continue. As Snyder carries on his description of the Pueblo hunt (quoted below), Nelson provides an examination of the steps a hunter must go through in order to pay relevant respect to the animal.

After you shoot it, you cut the head off and place the head facing east. You sprinkle corn meal in front of the mouth of the deer, and you pray to the deer, asking it to forgive you for having killed it, to understand that we all need to eat, and to please make a good report to the other deer spirits that he has been treated well. One finds this way of handling things and animals in all primitive cultures. (TI, 110)

Both Snyder's as well as Nelson's description serve as a sharp contrast to the lines from the poem for a deer ("Hunting 8") ("With the car stopped, shot/ That wild silly creature down./ Pull out the hot guts/ with hard bare hands. . . . Warm blood in the car trunk./ Deer smell,/ the limp-tongue.") The thorough, lengthy examination provided by Nelson in his *The Island Within*, touches upon the rituals and beliefs that the native people of North America, and specifically the West Coast, sacralized and handed down from generations. Furthermore, it is the source a man can ever encounter of the knowledge of interconnection/ interconnectedness, symbiosis, rich relationship

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<sup>61</sup> Richard Nelson, *The Island Within* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 261. Hereafter as TIW and a page reference.

between the spheres long dichotomized as either spiritual or those related to the body. However, Nelson does not intend to conjoin them, though he seems to be doing this unconsciously when interweaving the mental with the bodily; the unavoidable with the spiritual.

I walk to the deer, now shaking a bit as accumulated emotions pour through me. . . . I whisper thanks to the animal, hoping I might be worthy of it, worthy of carrying on the life it has given, worthy of sharing in the larger life of which the deer and I are apart. Incompatible emotions clash inside me – elation and remorse, excitement and sorrow, gratitude and shame. It’s always this way: the sudden encounter with death, the shock that overrides the cushioning of the intellect. I force away the sadness and remember that death is the spark that keeps life itself aflame: the deer we eat from, and the fish, and the plants that die to feed us. (TIW, 263)

His encounter with a deer is a clash of emotions, which relate to the last lines of “Hunting 8.” (Deer don’t want to die for me/ I’ll drink sea water/ Sleep on beach pebbles in the rain/ Until the deer come down to die/ in pity for my pain.”) Probably this is the moment that some readers of Snyder take his Hunting poems as too emotional and, by this fact, naïve, when considering the hunter’s reaction to death, which – at the same time – corresponds well with Nelson’s description of spiritual respect toward the hunted animal. The lengthy, detailed passage from Nelson needs to be quoted in its entirety to endow the reader with feeling of the burden that the gift imposes, as well as its range of relatedness with man and the natural world.

It takes a few minutes before I settle down enough to begin the other work. Then, I tie a length of rope onto the forelegs, run it over a low branch, back down through a loop in the rope, and up over the branch again like a double pulley, so I can raise the animal above the ground. This done, I cut the dark, pungent scent glands from its hind legs, to prevent their secretions from tainting the meat. Next, I make a small incision through the belly skin, insert my hand to shield the knife blade from the distended stomach, and slice upward to make an opening about a foot long. Reaching inside, I loosen the stomach and intestines, then work them out through the incision, pulling carefully to avoid tearing the thin membranes and spilling stomach contents into the body cavity. The deer’s inward parts feel very hot, slippery, and wet . . . Finally, the viscera slide out onto the ground: soft, bladderlike stomach and flaccid ribbons of intestine; a grey, shining mound, webbed with networks of veins and lacy fat, steaming into the cold, saturating the air with a rich odor of plant mulch and body fluids.

Next I roll up my jacket sleeve and thrust my arm deep inside the deer, until I feel the diaphragm, a sheet of muscle that separates the abdomen from the chest. When I slice through it, a thick, hot rush of blood flows down my arm and sloshes into the vacant

belly. There is a hollow, tearing sound as I pull the lungs free; and reaching up inside the chest, I can feel the firm, softball-sized muscle of the heart. The lungs are marbled creamy-pink and feel like so soft, airy sponge. As I lay them beside other organs, I whisper that these parts are left here as food for the animals. . . . Koyukon elders say the sensitivity and awareness leave an animal's remains slowly, and there are rules about what should be eaten by a dog.

The inside of the deer is now empty, except for the heart and the dark-purple liver, which I've left attached. I tie a short piece of cord around the end of the lower intestine to keep the remaining blood from flowing out when I carry the animal on my back. Then I poke a series of holes in the hide along either side of the belly incision and lace it shut with another cord. After lowering the deer onto the ground, I cut through the "knee" joints of the forelegs, leaving them attached by a stout tendon, then slice a hole in the hock – a space between the bone and tendon of the hind leg – and I toggle the forelegs through these openings. This way I can put my arms through the joined legs and carry the deer like a pack. (TIW, 263-264)

In hunting, like the one presented by Nelson, neither false dominance, nor pride can be traced, but the slow ongoing process of teaching and learning from elders now seems to be issuing when preparing the body of the dead animal to be taken by the hunter to hang it in a cabin, skin it, and in so doing to reveal the "inner perfection of the deer's body." (TIW, 266) Preparation that is long, and demands ultimate knowledge of the deer's body, and how it should be done, undeniably, is the "deeply engaged process of learning about animals from the inside out." (TIW, 267) The process is an unending transformation of lives and becomes possible and inevitable by traditional patterns such as techniques of butchering making all parts usable, as well as ways of respect toward an animal. In Nelson, as in Snyder, we find sacraments as indistinguishable from the quotidian world, the daily work sacralized and passionately preserved. Sacraments such as preparation of an animal, sharing it with others, keeping it for winter days, eating, all belong in community of the human and more-than-human world. Meat, treated as a sacred substance, becomes a "medium of interchange" (TIW, 267) Hence, the meticulous preparation of the food, delivered in the long passage from Nelson, reads as both activities and prayers; work and impeccable skill, and also reflection upon the nature of all transformations whose sacredness is merely mental, traditional, learned, and preserved well in a "right mind," where no pride and arrogance dwells. The "right mind" would be a balanced condition when all senses join the inner flux of power and spirit as during hunting or butchering a dead deer as practiced among the Koyukon elders, described by Nelson, or the Pueblo – in Snyder's account. As food is part of the living process, it incorporates the bodily and the

spiritual; moreover, it flows far beneath the demand and consumerism of the now, where human dominance and authoritative rules prevail. Societies seem to have lost their communal character, bathing in the comforts and conveniences of the contemporary world, or its moral poverty, and often reveal no intimacy with the natural world that in fact sustains them; nor gratitude for the gifts torn away from others before they are given away or simply obtained. Reading Nelson as a prolongation of the Snyderian theme of compassion extending to other life forms, and interrelatedness, there is a certain correspondence, a peculiar meeting of paths where such notion as sacrament turns to sacredness and nativeness of acts. The intimacy lies in “living directly from nature,” (TIW, 268) and it is at this juncture that deer paths “slide under” human veins, as Snyder writes in “Long Hair,” or as we read in Nelson, “we eat the deer, its flesh becomes our flesh,” (TIW, 268) or in a fragment from *Heart and Blood*, “the blood of deer runs through our veins as surely as we take bread and wine at our table.” (HB, 311) Multiple examples matching the metaphor of trails are found on the pages of *The Island Within*, where Nelson’s themes of hunting and belonging are intertwined in the island itself. When words become frail and empty, the sheer fact of being within the island and the earth that sustains all the living feels more profound and rooted in that place. Nelson admits, “perhaps just being here is enough, becoming wholly engaged with this place, touching it, eating from it, winding my life as tightly as possible into it.” (TIW, 269) The distinctive intimacy of trails from “Long Hair,” as well as passages from Nelson’s novel strive for different readings of the land, and human and animal presence there, whereas the land and the man become as if turned inside out: “The island and I, turning ourselves ever more inside out,” (TIW, 269) entwined in one another’s presence, the way as hunting magic reverses the order of hunting and becomes a chain of inter-related-ness of ideas, skills, beliefs, and actions.



**Chapter 3**  
**Experiencing the Mountains.**

### 3.1. „Long Ago When the Mountains Were People.”<sup>62</sup>

For Gary Snyder the earliest views of mountains embedded in the land as well as in his memory were those of Mount Baker and Glacier Peak, the beamers of his childhood years on the outskirts of Seattle. In his essay “Ancient Forests of the Far West” included in *The Practice of the Wild*, Snyder says:

We had a tiny dairy farm between Puget Sound and the north end of Lake Washington. . . . The snowpeaks were visible from near our place: in particular Mt. Baker and Glacier Peak to the north and Mt. Rainier to the south. To the west, across Puget Sound, the Olympics. Those unearthly glowing floating snowy summits are a promise to the spirit. (PW, 116-117) (photo 5)

The Pacific Northwest, abundant in rich native myths, is believed to be the country of rivers and mountains, which have become a distinctive part of Snyder’s peculiar personal geography of place, and his own place in the whirl of changing landscapes. The part of northwestern Washington state is called by bioregionalists the “Ish” country after the suffix in the names of the rivers that flow into the Puget Sound: the Snohomish, Skykomish, Samamish, Duwamish, Stillaguamish, where the suffix itself means “river” in Salish (photo 6) According to native beliefs, the Puget Sound originated due to the Cascade range made by the father Ocean in response to the greed of people to whom he had sent his children, Clouds and Rain. The people, whose dry land was filled with moisture anew, did not let Clouds and Rain return to their mighty father. Therefore, Ocean asked the Great Spirit to punish the selfish people, who were not satisfied with the plenty they received. After the Great Spirit heard his prayer, he leaned down from the sky, scooped up a great amount of earth, and made the Cascade Mountains as a wall between Ocean and the dry land to the east of the range. The long and deep hole left where the earth had been, Ocean soon filled with water. Today people call it Puget Sound.<sup>63</sup> However, tribes from Oregon and northeastern Washington maintained that the creation of the Cascade Range was due to the rock bridge that spanned the Columbia River and fell into the river forming Cascades in it.

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<sup>62</sup> Ella E. Clark, *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), p. 8. Other quotations will come from this edition and will be marked as IL with a page reference.

<sup>63</sup> For a thorough account of the legend see: Ella E. Clark, *Indian Legends...*, pp. 25-26.



The fall was accompanied by the quarrels between Mt. Hood and Loowit, who threw fire at each other. Therefore, mountains and water; ranges and rivers; the presumably fixed and the forever flowing, paved the way to Snyderian personal geography stretching from the Columbia River and the Cascade Range of the Northwest, through mountains in Japan, and back to the Yuba River and the Sierra Nevada in Northern California.

Long ago, when the world was very young, as many of the Indian legends start, mountains were human beings, and the peaks of the Cascade Range had wives and husbands, daughters and sons, since everything had life or spirit: the earth, the rocks, trees, ferns, as well as birds and animals, and everything was moved by the spirits dwelling in them. There were spirits on the tops of highest peaks. Mt. Baker, the most northern of the Cascade Peaks watched by the young Snyder, was believed to have been inhabited by an angry spirit that one time fell a big piece down the mountain, which made a big fire and a lot of noise. The Nooksack and the Lummi name for the mountain was *Komo Kulshan*, a “white shining mountain” or “great white watcher,” that watched over the waters of Puget Sound. In myths recounted by Clark, *Komo Kulshan* had two wives, Clear Sky and Fair Maiden. In an act of jealousy Clear Sky left her husband and children in hope that *Kulshan* will call her home, which he did not do due to his strong pride. Hence, Clear Sky went far away, stretching herself among hills and mountains in order to be able to see her family. Fair Maiden left some time later to meet her mother, who was an island. Since Fair Maiden decided to stay near her mother’s place, she was also transformed into an island. *Kulshan*, abandoned by his wives, was left with the children in the northern mountains, forever stretching upward to see his wives. So did his children, and eventually they were all transformed into high mountains, among which *Kulshan* remained the great watcher for what was never to be regained. In 1792 the mountain was named anew in honor of Capitan George Vancouver’s lieutenant, Joseph Baker.

Another glowing landmark of the young Snyder’s terrain was Mt. Rainier, the highest peak in the Cascade Range. The northwest Indians called it *Takkobad*. Since “ko” means “water” *Taccobad* took care of the Sound Country by supplying water.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> For a detailed account see Ella E. Clark, pp. 27-38. In several stories Clark gives her account of different myths of the mountains, among which there are: “Indian names for Mount Rainier,” “Mount Rainier and the Olympic Mountains,” “Mount Rainier and the Great Flood,” “The Lake on Mount Rainier.” Nevertheless,

A Puyallup Indian included Mt. Rainier as one of the five sisters before the world was changed, and in effect, the sisters became transformed into mountains. These were: *Takkobad* (Mt. Rainier), *Komo Kulshan* (Mt. Baker), *Pahto* (“standing high,” the Klickitat and Yakima name for Mt. Adams), *Loowit* (Mt. St. Helens), and Mt. Hood.

### 3.1.1. Loowit.

Mount St. Helens, Loowit, from Sahaptin /lawilayt-Lá/ “Smoker, Smoky”

Mt. Saint Helens, “Loowit” (said to be the “Indian name”) – a perfect snowcapped volcanic cone, rising from almost sea level to (back then) 9,677 feet. I always wanted to go there. Hidden on the north side in a perched basin is a large deep lake.<sup>65</sup>

*Danger on Peaks* (2004) is actually Snyder’s first book of poems after *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996). After the book was published Snyder gave a talk to the local people in Copperfield, Santa Rosa in California, by way of introducing the poems and his short narratives therein included. Snyder claimed that he had no particular intention of ever writing any new book after that, though the poems somehow “sneaked upon” him, which he considers as the best way for poems

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different tribes had different names; therefore, in several Salishan languages *Tkomma* can be encountered, whereas in others, it may suggest a name for any snowcapped peak. Other names are *Tehoma*, *Takober*, *Takoman* (in Elwood Evans’ account from 1882, writer and historian) which referred to the mountain as a source of nourishment, to the white water coming down its slopes. Another early historian, John Flett, explained “the earth is our mother and *Tahoma* gives us drink, gives water to the land.” W. D. Lyman heard from a Puyallup woman that *Takhoma* means “breast of the milk-white waters” or “great, white mountain.” An educated Puyallup, the Reverend Peter Stanup, wrote to Edwin Eells, who was an Indian agent at Tacoma in the 1880’s that the meaning of *Ta-ko-man* is a high, treeless, white or light-colored peak or mound. *Takoman* was mostly used to refer to the peak near Tacoma, mostly because the syllable “ko” means “water” and refers to the “little lake on top of the mountain. In that lake is a great abundance of valuable shells, from which the Indians made their nose and ear-rings and other valuable jewelry.” Henry Sicade, an educated Nisqually, wrote that *Tahoma* means “the great mountain, which gives thunder and lightning, having great unseen powers,” the Nisqually name was *Tacobud*, “the place where water comes from.” A Samish woman explained that *Takhobah* was a “hard mountain.” A Lummi Indian explicated that from the ancestral home of the Lummi Indians near Mt. Baker, Mt. Rainier can be seen on a clear day. *Kobah*, “high mountain always covered with snow,” was the Skagit name for Mt. Baker; whereas *Takobah*, “higher than *Kobah*,” was their name for Mt. Rainier.

<sup>65</sup> Snyder, *Danger on Peaks* (Berkeley: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005), p. 5. Other quotations will come from this edition and will be marked as DP with a page reference.

to happen, on condition that we leave off the calculated mind and let off the unpredictable mind of creativity.

Mount St. Helens' section refers back to Snyder's experience in 1945 when he climbed the mountain for the first time. At that time he was in his higher grades of grade school, living by the Columbia River, where he could see Loowit, as it is known in the Pacific Northwest, from practically everywhere.

From the doab of the Willamette and the Columbia, slightly higher ground, three snowpeaks can be seen when it's clear – Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, and Mt. St. Helens. A fourth, Mt. Rainier, farther away, is only visible from certain spots. (DP, 5)

“The Mountain” – the very first part of Mount St. Helens' section – opens up with the vastness and nearly iridescent, almost undulating though steady, presence of the river and the mountains as prerequisites for his snowpeak climbs in the Cascades and in the Sierras.

In a gentle landscape like the western slope, snowpeaks hold much power, with their late afternoon or early morning glow, light play all day, and always snow. The Columbia is a massive river with a steady flow. Those peaks and the great river, and the many little rivers, set the basic form of this green wooded Northwest landscape. Whether suburban, rural, or urban the rivers go through it and the mountains rise above. (DP, 5)

Afterwards, the lines seem to be meandering up to the north side of the mountain, and open the “Spirit Lake”<sup>66</sup> section, where Snyder describes his first encounter with the lake, a spot much feared and envisaged by the local Indians as “the house of demons and the lake of strange noises.” (IL, 63) Snyder, who first saw it at the age of thirteen, remembered it as “clear and still [with] faint wisps of fog on the smooth silvery surface, encircled by steep hills of old fir.” (DP, 5) The lake, enveloped in the mountainous tranquility of the terrain, was thought to have been inhabited by many evil spirits and held dark powers. Snyder's description appears as if the visible and the emotional surfaced to relate to the stillness of the country that surrounded him. Its

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<sup>66</sup> Parts of “Mt. Saint Helens” from *Danger on Peaks* were reprinted in Snyder's book of essays *Back on the Fire. Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2007), where “The Spirit Lake” section, “The Climb” and “Atomic Dawn” compose the essay entitled “Writers and the War Against Nature,” pp. 61-71. Hereafter *Back on the Fire* as BF.

undisturbed mystery that nature hid within that land throughout time and space was slowly tossing and turning in its slumber, as though awaking the old native stories in the restless belly of that smoky mountain. The prevailing stillness and steadiness of the landscape, which according to the Indians was guaranteed when no man approached the lake, was then at pace with the hikers, and harmoniously intermingled with the lower slopes and the icy ones laying the way up. In contradistinction to the North Pacific myths of the native people, there was nothing fearful in nature herself, nor in the lake whose placid waters tranquilized its vicinity, along with the forested trails going up into the realm of “pure transparency of blue.” (DP, 7) The space where no fisherman, hunter or woman picking berries would have ever trodden, was now endowed with restful sleep relatively soon to be perturbed; however, not by the spirits supposedly dwelling in the lake. The native myths pierce the realm of tranquil elation that Snyder sensed throughout his ascent and descent. They go down human ideas of fear which itself was caused by the powers different than those of men, whereas, nature herself was pervaded by good-hearted spirits as well as by ill-natured demons (Seatco) who were imagined as people cast out from various tribes because of their wickedness. As Ella E. Clark recounts,

Banding themselves together, these demons called themselves Seatco, and gave themselves up to wrongdoing. The Seatco were neither men nor animals. They could imitate the call of any bird, the sound of the wind in the trees, the cries of wild beasts. They could make these sounds seem to be near or seem to be far away. So they were often able to trick the Indians. A few times, Indians fought them. But whenever one of the Seatco was killed, the others took twelve lives from whatever band dared to fight against them.

In Spirit Lake, other Indians said, lived a demon so huge that its hand could stretch across the entire lake. If a fisherman dared to go out from shore, the demon’s hand would reach out, seize his canoe, and drag fisherman and canoe to the bottom of the lake.

In the lake also was a strange fish with a head like a bear. One Indian had seen it, in the long-ago time. He had gone to the mountain with a friend. The demons who lived in the lake ate the friend, but he himself escaped, running in terror from the demons and from the fish with the head of a bear. After that, no Indian of his tribe would go near Spirit Lake. (IL, 63-64)

The idea which is applicable to both the myths and Snyder’s essay is that of sincere and profound respect to nature along with all the old ghosts inhabiting the mythic time and somehow sneaking to the surface of the mind and of the land till the point where

the two fuse. Mount St. Helens' section is itself is a combination of texts: "The Mountain," "The Climb," "Atomic Dawn," interspersed by two poems "Some Fate" and "1980: Letting Go," transmuting into other short narratives entitled "Blast Zone" and "To Ghost Lake," and finally ends with poems "Pearly Everlasting" and "Enjoy the Day." Implicit in the section are thoughts on the remarkable beauty of Loowit, the mountain's permanent image, the nature of snowpeaks; the views of nature are meandering through Snyder's first experience of snowpeak climb; they flow through Buddhist thoughts of impermanence and of the empty universe, the eruption day, and also reflections on Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the atomic bombs were dropped, to the final poem joining the mythical with the present. Mount St. Helens' section aligns the voices standing for Snyder's experiences, re-aligns those of the ascent and the descent with close matter-of-fact descriptions of the terrain, the nearby ridges, and slopes. In so doing, the surface of the ragged land appears as that which conceals the long-forgotten myths, the slope of a mountain being the slope of the mind that bends itself before the whole of creation in deep respect for all. The stories ceaselessly whirling and being infiltrated in the belly of Loowit come out with the lava, and the strange noises, the spirits all flow down the slope having its reflection in the mind. ("New friends and dear sweet old tree ghosts/ here we are again. Enjoy the day." DP, 21)

The last paragraph from "The Mountain" flows into the next part, "The Climb" where Snyder gives account of the ascent, and the nature of the snowpeak as reflected from the top.

. . . The trails took us around the lake and up the ridges: Coldwater Mt. Lookout and on to Mt. Margaret and beyond, into the basin of lakes and snowfields nestled below. From the ridges we could look back to Spirit Lake and the mountain with its symmetry and snowfields. We walked through alpine forests, glissaded down and settled in by rocky lakes to boisterous campsites and smoky crusty tincan meals all cooked by boys. ("The Mountain," DP, 6)

Walking the nearby ridges and perching on the cliffs of Coldwater Mountain, I memorized the upper volcano. The big and little Lizards (lava ridges with their heads uphill), the Dogshead, with a broad bulge of brown rock and white snowpatches making it look faintly like a St. Bernard. The higher-up icefields with the schrund and wide crevasses, and the approach slopes from timberline. Who wouldn't take the chance to climb a snowpeak and get the long view? ("The Climb," DP, 7)

Step by step, breath by breath – no rush, no pain. Onto the snow on Forsyth Glacier, over the rocks of the Dogshead, getting a lesson in alpenstock self-arrest, a talk on safety and patience, and then on to the next phase: ice. Threading crevasses, climbing slow, we made our way to the summit just like Issa's "Inch by inch/ little snail/ creep up Mt. Fuji." (DP, 7)

Climbing becomes a process composed of steps and breaths. The changing scenery lets the whole world below conceal itself, as though it ceased to exist when the perceived land is snowed in presumed stability, scenery unaltered rapidly but slowly living according to endless cycles, the seasons and the eruptions. Climbing may reveal itself as a process of acquiring the view; thus, the process of growing higher than the quotidian. Moreover, it envisages the need to accommodate a place by becoming aware of the distance, and at the same time, to see the distance when space is unconstrained. Yet, Snyder's first snowpeak climb brings the following reflections.

West Coast snowpeaks are too much! They are too far above the surrounding lands. There is a break between. They are in a different world. If you want to get a view of the world you live in, climb a little rocky mountain with a neat small peak. But the big snowpeaks pierce the realm of clouds and cranes, rest in the zone of five-colored banners and writhing crackling dragons in veils of ragged mist and frost-crystals, into a pure transparency of blue. (DP, 7)

Suddenly the world high above the real one becomes veiled in its unreal nature, its misty blurred unrecognizable flow, which unexpectedly dichotomizes the lower and the upper parts of the volcano. However, that which is perceived, as imperfect as it may occur initially, seems not to rely on senses entirely. What cannot be neglected at this juncture is that the Chinese added the mind to their ponderings on senses, and Snyder deeply respects that. The mind with its capacity to see into the nature of things becomes a magic tool for mirroring the world around us, grasping its nature as such, and preserving it within itself, or holding the images as reflected in the structure of the mind. The notion of the mind which instantly involves the concepts of enlightenment, imagination (the eye of imagination), and space will be discussed in the chapters to come.

On the top of Loowit Snyder attempts to find any possible characteristics a place can have. Thus, even the place such as snowpeak is in fact capable of having features common to places located far lower, closer to the life's divergent, vibrating

strings. The summit is a place indeed, but how far-fetched to equal it with any places belonging to the lands adjacent to the mountain. Yet,

St. Helens' summit is smooth and broad, a place to nod, to sit and write, to watch what's higher in the sky and do a little dance. Whatever the numbers say, snowpeaks are always far higher than the highest airplanes ever get. I made a petition to the shapely mountain, "Please help this life." When I tried to look over and down to the world below – *there was nothing there.* (DP, 8)

The place revealed its peculiar nature of existing as if in abeyance in regard to that which was lower. It may be considered as a sacred place, inhabited by gods, or the one to keep distance from as the Indians believed. Snyder ascribes the ideas of perennial and untouched existence to the volcano which he considers as higher than any airplane ever goes. The idea to look down and spot the place one lives in is no longer available when finding oneself in the realm piercing the clouds and frost-crystals. The distance is brought closer to a human who has ascended the summit. It is so in a sense that it enables the comprehension of the distance by reducing human perception to a point of doubt. The doubt concerns the act of looking over and down to the world below, and ends with the statement "*there was nothing there.*" All the experience is suddenly diminished to being in time suspended, above the real, unreached by any matters from the world below. The landscape thus seems to have something of the sacred and the perennial. Therefore, Snyder made his petition there and prayed for help to all life in a place which was in a sense so enddistanced from life and the living, but – at the same time – so much affecting those inhabiting the adjacent lands. The mountain grows into a role of keeping fate within itself. Therefore, "Some Fate" refers back Snyder's climbs in 1946 and twice in 1949.

Climbed Loowit – Sahaptin name – three more times.  
July of '46 with sister Thea  
(went to Venezuela & Cartagena as a seaman summer of 1948)  
June of '49 again with dear friend Robin who danced shimmering in the  
snow, again with her late that summer (DP, 10)

Fate that freezes the old Indian tales, and somehow reinvents events, alters their shape, gives new elements and tears away some of the older ones, captured in the belly of the

old volcano, still gives the illusion of a still place on top of the mountain that is tossing and turning inwardly in its dream while creating the illusory stillness.

This wide Pacific land            blue haze edges  
mists and far gleams            broad Columbia River  
eastern Pacific somewhere west  
us at a still place            in the wheel of the day  
right at home            at gateway to nothing  
can only keep going.

Sit on a rock and gaze out into space  
leave names in the summit book,  
prepare to descend

on down to some fate in the world. (DP, 10) (*spacing original*)

Some fate down below seems to be doing the same, as if the gateway to nothing had something to do with the gateways opened by fate itself for people to enter and forget themselves in the whirl of days. However, the whirl/ wheel of days is ascribed to places below, whereas the climbers are as though stopped “at a still place in the wheel of the day,” or – in T. S. Eliot’s words – at a “still point of the turning world.”<sup>67</sup> Just as the sacred is a delusion according to Snyder, such are still places, which – like people – “can only keep going.” The wheel of destiny is constantly moving events forward and reinventing them afresh out of the unacknowledged stillness. “Some Fate” is followed by a poem “1980: Letting Go,” where the supposedly dormant mountain opens another fate releasing “centuries, years and months” of steams and gasses, mud and crumbling boulders. In the poetry reading in Copperfield, California, Snyder refers to the day of the eruption from a perspective of a poet long elevated by nature and deriving from her power and inspiration. “1980: Letting Go” is therefore a performance that nature is creating out of rocks, boulders, the exploding mud, fiery lava, the elements all shaking from the mountain’s inner volcanic dream. It is a spectacle of steams and gasses nearing the fate of those living nearby. It is at this juncture, that Nature ceases to be viewed as a book or a text, though in a certain sense she may resemble the text just as rocks may stand for words. “Nature not a book, but a performance,” (,Writers and the War against Nature,” BF, 64) as Snyder reiterates in his many essays. Therefore, with these words in mind, the poet expresses his

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<sup>67</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Four Quarters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 15.



“great admiration, a remarkable elation and an unspeakable delight”<sup>68</sup> at the Loowit’s performance of 1980, which he admits he could not somehow explain.

*she goes*

8.32 AM            18 May 1980

superheated steams and gasses  
white-hot crumbling boulders lift and fly in a  
burning sky-river wind of  
searing lava droplet hail,  
huge icebergs in the storm, exploding mud,  
shoots out flat and rolls a swelling billowing  
cloud of rock bits,  
crystals, pumice, shards of glass  
dead ahead blasting away –  
a heavenly host of tall trees goes flat down  
lightning dances through the giant smoke (DP, 11)

The performance renders the spectacle, which is totally beyond any control of man when it actually happens, an event that unveils deep awe often spun from dread and fear. Snyder claims that “there is something quite inspiring in its old odd way about the extreme power of a natural non-dualistic, unjudgemental event, about which you can have no particular opinion, except awe.” (DPCD) The poet qualifies awe as a “modern contemporary emotion.” (DPCD) However, this very feeling is of no avail when it is not enveloped in deep respect and empathy. The awe arouses a kind of humiliation before the acts of nature. When the author ascended the volcano, he made his petition to the mountain by saying “Please help this life.” A prayer, which in its simple form, addresses Loowit as the spirited shapely mountain claimed capable of that which in all world religions lies beyond the rich of their worshippers and the worshipped. Duly, there seems to be no need of any answer to the prayer directed to nature herself, which is a powerful force that rules the lives of all the living. The prayer that occurred in “The Climb” refers to one of the poems that come later in Mount St. Helens’ section, namely, “Pearly Everlasting,” where Snyder provides his readers with a brief explication and a grateful admiration, his deep trust in the non-dualistic nature.

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<sup>68</sup> Snyder, *Danger on Peaks, a recording*, 27.X.2004, Copperfield, Santa Rosa, CA (The Cloud House Poetry Archives in San Francisco). A gift from Stephen Kushner. Other quotations will appear as DPCD.

I had asked Mt. St. Helens for help  
the day I climbed it, so seems she did

...

*If you ask for help it comes.*  
But not in any way you'd ever know  
– thank you Loowit, lawilayt-lá, *Smoky Mâ*

gracias            xiexie            grace (DP, 20) (*spacing original*)

Performance, writes Snyder, is of key importance, because this phenomenal world is no longer a book opened before humans to read and elevate themselves upon it, but a mutual performance, an incessant interplay of the elements and humans - the spectators intricately involved in the course of those unjudgemental events.

Nonetheless, in the Mount St. Helens' section, Snyder ponders upon the nature of disasters: what caused them, how to understand and interpret them, how to learn and take inspiration from them. From the very beginning there is a feeling of the uncontrolled, the natural, the untamed, the innermost life of the earth itself that is fully vibrant, swelling, and swarming with changes, flowing endlessly, and both circumambulating as well as intersecting the lives of men. This feeling is a deep admiration that humans can afford when disasters do not affect them directly; when – as spectators – they do not participate in the core of events but remain somehow enddistanced from the main flow of the disastrous power. “1980: Letting Go” is – apart from descriptions of the elemental force – a combination of emotions gathered from different angles when people are affected, whether directly or indirectly, by natural disasters. After the vivid description of the eruption, there appears

a calm voice on the two-way  
ex-navy radioman and volunteer<sup>69</sup>  
describes the spectacle – then

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<sup>69</sup> There is a short passage in Notes at the end of *Danger on Peaks*, introducing this man: „The person who was calmly calling radio information in on his two-way radio was Gerald Martin at a site two miles north of Coldwater II station and seven miles from the crater. He was a retired navy radioman volunteer from Southern California. The very first victim of the blast was volcanologist David Johnston, who was on watch at the Coldwater II Observation Post. He radioed the famous message “Vancouver! Vancouver! This is it!” at 8:32 AM on May 18, 1980. His station was vaporized. The viewpoint is now known as Johnston Ridge.”

says, the hot black cloud is  
rolling toward him – no way  
but wait his fate

a photographer's burnt camera  
full of half melted pictures,  
three fallers and their trucks  
chainsaws in back, tumbled gray and still,  
two horses swept off struggling in hot mud  
a motionless child laid back in a stranded ashy pickup (DP, 11)

In his poetry reading in Copperfield, while reflecting upon the ways of dealing with natural disasters, the poet gives his lesson on impermanence. Snyder refers to the Occident where natural disasters were often taken as a punishment from gods, for example, eruptions, plagues were used by enthusiastic, charismatic priests to tell people that they were sinful; whereas, the Chinese used to say that if things got too bad (persistent drought, famine, earthquakes), the emperor was out of tune with heaven, with nature, and he had to humiliate himself, apologize, fast, put on rough clothing, and go to the Temple of Heaven in Beijing to admit that he must have done something wrong. While pondering upon that which used to be called the acts of God, the poet tries to make people “incorporate it into simple, basic, ancient Buddhist lessons of impermanence, [by saying] that there is no permanence, no stability, nothing that you can cling to, nothing you can maintain your attachment to, in the whole universe which will blow away, anyway.” (DPCD)

Loowit, the Smoky mountain of the Pacific Northwest, stands out in the volume, *Danger on Peaks*, as a giant, earth-made receptacle in which the dormant forces of nature integrate human imagination, scientific research, arouse curiosity of the more-than-human world, and remain the long-lasting landmark, but also blur one's perception of a place, scare with its explosive, magnetic, all-devouring force.

rolling earth-gut-trash cloud tephra twelve miles high  
ash falls like snow on wheatfields and orchards to the east

five hundred Hiroshima bombs

in Yakima, darkness at noon (DP, 12)

The view from the Smoky mountain teaches how to withhold our perception of the world for a while, that is to curl it back inside in order to see deeper, which is closer to understanding that instantly extends to other species, to lives scattered across the earth. The lack of any attachment to the universe, felt on the top of Loowit, invokes emotions such as detachment, distance, alienation on one's path. The blurred view from the snowcapped volcano led Snyder straight into the "atomic dawn." Since Mount St. Helens' section focuses predominantly on Snyder's experiences that the poet relates in a clear, matter-of-fact manner, there is a link between the day of his climb and the day after that, thus, time-space concentrates on and revolves around 1945, Spirit Lake and Hiroshima.

The day I first climbed Mt. St. Helens was August 13, 1945.

Spirit Lake was far from the cities of the valley and news came slow. Though the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima August 6 and the second dropped on Nagasaki August 9, photographs didn't appear in the *Portland Oregonian* until August 12. Those papers must have been driven in to Spirit Lake on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Early the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> I walked over the lodge to check the bulletin board. There whole pages of the paper pinned up: photos of the blasted city from the air, the estimate of 150,000 dead in Hiroshima alone, the American scientist quoted saying "nothing will grow there again for seventy years." The morning sun on my shoulders, the fir forest smell and the big tree shadows; feet in thin moccasins feeling the ground, and my heart still one with the snowpeak mountain at my back. Horrified, blaming scientists and politicians and the governments of the world, I swore a vow to myself, something like, "By the purity and beauty and permanence of Mt. St. Helens, I will fight against this cruel destructive power and those who would seek to use it, for all my life." (DP, 9)

The feeling of disasters from 1945 and 1980 seems to load the texts with images characteristic of the waste land, an idea that originated in T. S. Eliot's works, and implicit in some parts of Mount St. Helens' section. However; the section is abundant in images and non-images, that is ideas about impermanence, fate, prayers, a vow, a tranquil contemplation of a place such as a snowpeak as well as a still place being rolled over and over again by the wheels of time and life. Non-images work as tools and gateways to higher truths about human existence on earth, human's links with the earth as the holder of natural power, a gift of incalculable force standing often in opposition to man who has lost his respect and awe in front of the natural, the wild, the untamed elements. The images (the lake, the mountain, the trails) depict the setting as

pristine, serene places of profound repository of other images, those from lower layers where perception and lore stay undivided. Loowit is pure, beautiful and permanent, she is able to hear prayers. However, she is also capable of reversing the order of things, changing light for darkness, covering her slopes and the surrounding lands lower at her feet with the fierce, scorching heat, fiery lava, mud, boulders, rock bits, steams and gasses of her insides. The picture of Yakima from “1980: Letting Go,” darkened at noon, is reminiscent of Hiroshima after atomic bombs have been dropped. These places become the waste lands due to reasons which are natural or human. Atomic dawn correlates both places on the grounds of the disaster that altered them completely, devastated and blasted the stillness of Snyder’s clear morning after the descent. The initial hiatus the title “Atomic Dawn” may suggest, is in fact an attempt to join minds and hearts<sup>70</sup>, and in so doing, arouse compassion, dig for this virtue among the vestiges these places offered at that time. Atomic dawn brings to focus the foundations which in normal circumstances are taken for granted, like the sun shining on one’s shoulders, the smell of a forest, the ground felt under the feet, and finally the magnificent elation of being one with the mountain. All those basic facts erased from places like Hiroshima and Nagasaki appear as precious, impermanent necessities that can easily be blasted away by human intervention having long-lasting effects on the earth.

Another narrative subsection of “Mount St. Helens” is the “Blast Zone” and “To Ghost Lake.” Both narratives refer to the year 2000, when Fred Swanson - scientist for the forest service, volcanologist, soil scientist, forest tree scientist, and Snyder’s friend – invited him to go back to Mount St. Helens. Swanson got him around and took him through, inside the blast zone. This event to which Snyder refers to in his poetry reading in Copperfield is presented mostly in its descriptive, matter-of-fact manner. The remains of old places repeat themselves in Snyder’s and Swanson’s observations of new and rebuilt bridges and roads in the areas devastated by the eruption, the

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<sup>70</sup> Snyder uses an expression “winning hearts and minds” in reference to the notion of sustainability. It is explicated in his essay in *Back on the Fire* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2007). The essay occurred under the title “Sustainability Means Winning Hearts and Minds.” There Snyder maintains that “the struggle for the integrity of the environment will need good tools . . . . But though weapons win battles they don’t win the peace. Peace is won by winning hearts and minds. Watershed imaging, bioregional ideas of governance, the actual existence of communities that include the nonhuman in their embrace, dreams of ecological justice, and the faint possibility of a long-term sustainable land and culture – all this nutty ancient stuff is a matter of engaging hearts and minds,” p. 98.

“volcano-ash-gray” dam, the edge of the lake still all “pumice, ash and broken rock;” (DP, 14) the wild and the managed sides, the original and the restored (“Baby plantlife, spiky, firm and tender,/ stiffly shaking in the same old breeze.”) (DP, 17). The way up the volcano is at the same time a way down the crevices and gullies left after the eruption; the trail trodden by memories sliding down the mountain and rejuvenating life that was blasted and blown away in 1980. In the

upper cirque of Coldwater Creek there are plenty of old gray logs lying tossed about the ground. Between and around the logs the hills are aflower in fireweed and pearly everlasting *Anaphalis margaritacea*. Little silver fir three to ten feet high are tucked in behind the logs, mixed in with the tall flowers. (DP, 15)

On the horizon Loowit looms in her new shape, “with smoking scattered vents in . . . violet-gray light” (DP, 15) when they pull up to the high ridge, Johnston ridge, and approach the edge.

The white dome peak whacked lower down,  
open-sided crater on the northside, fumarole wisps  
a long gray fan of all that slid and fell  
angles down clear to the beach  
dark old-growth forest gone no shadows  
the lake afloat with white bone blowdown logs  
scoured ridges around the rim, bare outcrop rocks  
squint in the bright  
ridgetop plaza packed with puzzled visitor gaze

No more White Goddess  
but, under the fiery sign of Pele,  
and Fudo – Lord of Heat  
who sits on glowing lava with his noose  
lassoing hardcore types  
from hell against their will,

Luwit, lawilayt-lá – *Smoky*  
is her name (DP, 15) (*spacing original*)

The beautiful, shapely mountain, as Snyder referred to Loowit back in 1945 after his first snowpeak climb, now seems to have undergone a certain transformation. However, features considered as typically hers remained conspicuous throughout time.

The collapsed peak, guarded by Fudo (the Wisdom-King), still guarantees contact with the extensive interior holding fate and lives within its grasp. Nevertheless, the contact is possible on perceptual and mental level. The ridgetop plaza, where visitors come to see the crater, becomes a place where perception itself duly clings to images of the disaster. Memories of the old-growth forest, the dearth of shadows there and “the lake afloat with white-bone logs,” the scoured ridges redirect perception to thinking toward power that the mountain holds. The power which is beyond all human efforts to remain untouched by disasters makes perception a tool that reinforces human awareness of the fragile, momentary feeling of interdependence between humans and nature. This feeling is abandoned the very moment a man goes down the plaza and redirects perception to things considered as guarantors of safety among that which is known and protected, that is the quotidian, the mundane existence among things. The volcano throwing lava may be read as giving away fate to people; the tumbling cracks of fate sliding in to change perception and make humans harken to the lesson of impermanence and adjust the teachings to their understanding of life processes.

The “Ghost Lake” part focuses on the way back down and a drive-circumambulation of the mountain by going north and east up the Cowlitz Valley, and the next morning view of the blast zone. The realm is abundant in multitudinous patterns coming to view when approaching the zones one after another. The new patterns as if walk in view, play with the elements belongs to each zone.

In a great swath around the lake basin, everything in direct line to the mountain is flat down: white clear logs, nothing left standing. Next zone of tree-suffering is dead snags still upright. Then a zone called “ashed trees” blighted by a fall of ash, but somehow alive. Last, lucky to be out of line with the blast, areas of green forest stand. A function of distance, direction, and slope. Finally, far enough back, healthy old forest stretches away.

New patterns march in from the edges, while within the zone occasional little islands of undamaged vegetation survive. In some cases a place still covered with snow and down in a dip. From Windy Ridge the carpet of floating logs on the lake is mostly at the north end. (DP, 16)

Random patterns, distinctive to each zone, build up a new shape and endow the visitors with an awareness that is possible only after experiencing disasters and

catastrophes. This ability to see into the lines, zones, and to read the function of the distance and direction seems to be of importance. Ghost Lake is a remnant of a scenery Snyder knew well in 1949, now all interlaced with that which is left and preserved in a landscape stripped of what once composed its integral part. Therefore, its perception splits into remembrance and observation both anchored at the playful combination of patterns engraved in the land and the mind.

Loowit cooled in white  
New crater summit lightly dusted  
Morning fumaroles summit mist-wisps - "Hah" ... "Hah"

One final trip before leaving: a walk to Ghost Lake: pearly everlasting, huckleberries and fireweed, all the way.

Out to Ghost Lake through white snags,  
threading down tree deadfalls, no trail work lately here,  
light chaco sandals leaping, nibbling huckleberries, walking logs  
bare toed dusty feet  
I worked around this lake in '49  
both green then (DP, 18)



### 3.2. Walking, Stalking, Circumambulating.

*Walking on walking,  
under foot earth turns*

*Streams and mountains never stay the same.*<sup>71</sup>(spacing original)

Walking renders a walker capable of particular way of understanding, such as a proper perception of space since place and the scale of space must be measured against our bodies and their capabilities, claims Gary Snyder in “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking.” (PW, 98) He adds that a mile was originally a Roman measure of one thousand paces. Therefore, translating distance into a category of space with regards to the capabilities of our bodies is gaining a perception of space as such; it is grasping the distance. As an example Snyder states that “to know that it takes six months to walk across Turtle Island/North America walking steadily but comfortably all day every day is to get some grasp of the distance.” (PW, 98) Once spatial relationships become visualized – on foot and with imagination – space comes to form places that we first learn as children by walking them; whereas they interweave with other spots forming regions, bioregions or watersheds.

The act of walking is a direct way of experiencing the world stretching around the walker. It is like weaving the landscape into his mind by engaging images spun from one’s surrounding into the vivid interplay of perception and imagination. Therefore, walking involves the walker into the act of weaving, spinning places with non-places, that is those trodden and seen with those preserved in mind. In doing so, there occurs a certain network of places, whose images forever flow through the mind, time and space. Thus, as Snyder says one learns the land with one’s body, labor, and walking, for “lots of walking brings us close to the actually existing world and its wholeness.” (PW, 23) It opposes stagnation and confinement, but enacts process and transformation. Walking became daily practice for John Muir in his ambulations in the woods while botanizing, in Yosemite Valley, and for Henry Thoreau in his wanderings near Walden Pond, to Concord and back. It constitutes an integral part of being-in the

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<sup>71</sup> Gary Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1996), p. 154. Other quotations will come from the same edition, and will be marked as MRWE with a page number.

land for Annie Dillard in her walks around Tinker Creek in Virginia, and for Snyder rambling the Kitkitdizze area of his home, Sierra Nevada, or Yosemite Valley among others. The act of walking is a celebration of the physical, the elemental, the earthly, and the primitive. It is somehow grasping the Snyderian statement of “growing with less” by trodding the paved, graveled paths, and finally leaving them to take lessons from the wild. Walking involves leaving behind what is unnecessary and taking on one’s back the minimum; that which one can carry with him. Therefore, “walking is a great adventure, the first meditation, a practice of heartiness and soul primary to humankind.” (PW, 18) It is experiencing the now of the ground constantly moving under our feet, (re)turning, (re)enacting, transforming afresh. Walking is turning the outside inside, it is a constant share between the interior and the exterior; it is meditating the landscape, contemplating the comings and goings of objects dispersed across space, their appearance on the horizon, their flow toward ourselves as we walk, their strong physical presence and then their gradual disappearance behind our back. Thus, the act of walking becomes a process of becoming in the world and of perceiving the world. “Out walking, one notices where there is food.” (PW, 18) Moreover, out walking one leaves imprints on the ground, in the woods, meadows, and paths. Those first tiny microscopic traces, footprints left behind inform the world of human presence.

The world is watching: one cannot walk through a meadow or forest without a ripple of report spreading out from one’s passage. The thrush darts back, the jay squalls, a beetle scuttles under the grasses, and the signal is passed along. Every creature knows when a hawk is cruising or a human strolling. The information passed through the system is intelligence. (PW, 19)

Moreover, this presence is mutual, which is conveyed in yet another poem by Snyder:

*They’re listening*

As the crickets’ soft autumn hum  
is to us  
so are we to the trees  
as they are

to the rocks and the hills.<sup>72</sup>

When strolling, one is put in touch with the most physical. At this juncture, Snyder's "rhetoric of ecological relationship" seems germane to one's understanding of the links between nature, humans and spirit. At the same time, "walking is the exact balance of spirit and humility" (PW, 18) which are integrated in a human taking walks, immersed in tranquil contemplation. To such man Thoreau ascribes the notion of sauntering, thus rendering him a Saunterer, a Holy-Lander, the one striving to *Sainte Terre*, or simply the one without a home or land – *sans terre*, which is closer to Snyder's thoughts on "being at home in the whole universe," (PW, 104) or – to put it in Thoreau's words – "equally at home everywhere."<sup>73</sup> The ordinary act of walking is extended and rendered a notion brimming with spiritual practice, thus immaterial and literal paths intermingle and interconnect with each other forming a component of spiritual growth. Therefore, for Snyder as for Dillard, walking entails spiritual practice, meditation. It leaves one opened to aesthetic and immaterial experience. Snyder depicts walking through the landscape as "outer meditation,"<sup>74</sup> of which circumambulation may serve as an example, whereas Dillard – in her novel *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* – refers to the idea of stalking. Both methods of depicting the spiritual, the sacred and the aesthetic take walking as a spiritual dimension of interconnection with the whole of the living, as well as a ritual that enables to gain intellectual knowledge of the land.

By saying: "Summer: I go down to the creek again, and lead a creek life. I watch and stalk,"<sup>75</sup> Dillard begins a chapter "Stalking," where she attempts to define the walking/stalking combination, a ritual of seeking for creatures.

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<sup>72</sup> Gary Snyder, Jim Harrison, *The Etiquette of Freedom. Gary Snyder, Jim Harrison and The Practice of the Wild. A Companion to the Film*, ed. Paul Ebenkamp, (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), p. 79.

<sup>73</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 597.

<sup>74</sup> The idea of meditation as going through the landscape was explained by the author in "A Wilderness Journey with Gary Snyder" in *Inquiring Mind*, vol. 11., no 1, Fall 1994., p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim At Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), p. 182. Other quotations will come from the same edition and will be marked as PTC and a page number.

In summer I stalk. . . . The creatures I seek have several senses and free will; it becomes apparent that they do not wish to be seen. I can stalk them in either of two ways. The first is not what you think of as true stalking, but it is the *Via negativa*, and as fruitful as actual pursuit. When I stalk this way I take my stand on a bridge and wait, emptied. I put myself in the way of the creature's passage, like spring Eskimos at a seal's breathing hole. Something might come; something might go. I am Newton under the apple tree, Buddha under the bo. Stalking the other way, I forge my own passage seeking the creature. I wander the banks; what I find, I follow, doggedly, like Eskimos haunting the caribou herds. (PTC, 184)

Walking/Stalking coalescence also favors seeking visions. Dillard is, therefore, a pilgrim questing her surroundings, eagerly attempting to see into the nature of things. James McClintock in "Annie Dillard: the Ritualist" (*Nature's Kindred Spirits*) depicts the experience of walking as common to many renowned figures.

Walkers are pilgrims seeking visions. Walking as more than exercise has a long tradition in literature, from Plato's walks during which he formulated his dialogues, to Saint Augustine's walk on the seashore, to seventeenth-century literary figures who walked as a form of Christian meditation, to Romantic walkers William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir. (NKS, 94)

Therefore, for Dillard walking conjoins the casual and the metaphysical. Moreover, it becomes more of a ritual rendering her a seeker of vision among that which is natural, elementary, quotidian. Many of the walks underlie the acts of trying to see muskrats or fish. However, the very inability to detect them increases the moment of actual revelation when they finally materialize only to vanish in floating bubbles a few seconds later. As McClintock claims, "the common action becomes uncommon, a preparation for metaphysical experience rather than the merely social or moral. . . . Dillard does not just walk; she stalks the natural object, and she stalks the metaphysical." (NKS, 95) There is much of the ecstatic and wonder, or – in Snyder's words – "joyful interpretation," when the first muskrat appears on the surface of water. The language reveals itself as revelatory, joyful and unexpected, spontaneous, wondrous and ephemeral as well.

I was stock-still, looking deep into Tinker Creek from a spot on the bank opposite the house, watching a group of bluegills . . . I was focused for depth. I had long since lost myself, lost the creek, the day, lost everything but still amber depth. All at once I

couldn't see. And then I could: a young muskrat had appeared on top of the water, floating on its back. Its forelegs were folded languorously across its chest; the sun shone on its upturned belly. Its youthfulness and rodent grin, coupled with its ridiculous method of locomotion . . . made it an enchanting picture of decadence, dissipation, and summer sloth. I forgot all about the fish. (PTC, 190-191)

Even though Dillard's language is immersed in the Christian terms, and her stalking experience deeply intermingles nature with God, her perception of nature is close to the Snyderian one in its spiritual aspect. In Snyder, there is more attention paid to the spirit of nature herself and to Buddhist connotations aroused in discussions on walking as circumambulating. However both kinds of walking are categories growing out of their frames; releasing the ordinary as well as the sacred; abandoning them in order to be left with the bare ground ones steps on. In Dillard stalking is observing, staring at the world as it is happening; whereas in Snyder walking grows into practice which is process – an impermanent, ever changing flow of rivers and rise of mountains. In Snyder the incessant flow of things is referred to as impermanence, whilst Dillard focuses on momentary emotions, a touch-and-go creek world.

Stalking is a pure form of skill, like pitching or playing chess. Rarely is luck involved. I do it right or I do it wrong; the muskrat will tell me, and that right early. . . . stalking is a game played in the actual present. . . . I retreat – not inside myself, but outside myself, so that I am a tissue of senses. What I see is plenty, abundance. (PTC, 200-201)

The multitudinous world of forms flows out of any controlled shapes and patterns and thus becomes a uniform entity constantly in process, becoming, growing and diminishing its elements. The images of the world existent under endless transformations is a link between Snyder and Dōgen whose work, “Mountains and Rivers Sutra” greatly inspired Snyder. As walking has become for Snyder a theme profoundly interlinked with observation, learning a place, and becoming a native, the term opens itself to a broader consideration as it stands as a knot in a network of interrelated subjects that the poet has undertaken in his writings. In his “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking” (PW) Snyder writes,

There's all sorts of walking – from heading out across the desert in a straight line to a sinuous weaving through undergrowth. Descending rocky ridges and talus slopes is a specialty in itself. It is an irregular dancing – always shifting – step of walk on slabs and scree. The breath and eye are always following this uneven rhythm. It is never paced or clocklike, but flexing – little jumps – sidesteps – going for well-seen place to put foot on a rock, hit flat, move on – zigzagging along and all deliberate. The alert eye looking ahead, picking the footholds to come, while never missing the step of the moment. The body-mind is so at one with this rough world that makes these moves effortlessly once it has had a bit of practice. The mountain keeps up with the mountain. (PW, 113)

Walking is never seen as an act closing in itself but always bifurcating into other activities, germane to walking itself. It sometimes escapes the pace and rhythm thus resembling the terrain upon which walking is practiced, craggy, “zigzagging” movement accompanied with the deliberate eye of the walker. Therefore, it is “flexing,” twisting, bending, winding and adjustable. Such walking is an integration of body and mind, the “body-mind” that touches the rough surface of the terrain, feels its porous structure, and becomes one with the land rolling under the feet of the walker.

### **3.2.1. Temples Among the Ridges.**

Snyder's “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking” engages the act of walking as the core activity common to travelers and spiritual seekers of Japan and China. With its title reference to Dōgen's “Mountains and Waters Sutra,” it treats about the spiritual dimension of the activity which transplants walking from the Japanese and Chinese ground, and places it on the North American ground, or – on another level – in the mind which is capable of grasping the metaphor and going beyond it while still remaining oneself. As an interlude to his essay, Snyder used the first part of Dōgen's sutra:

The mountains and rivers of this moment are the actualization of the way of the ancient Buddhas. Each, abiding in its own phenomenal expression, realizes completeness. Because mountains and waters have been active since before the eon of emptiness, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose, they liberated and realized. (PW, 97)

*Sansuikyo* (“Mountains and Waters Sutra”) was written in 1240, thirteen years after Dōgen returned from his visit to Song-dynasty China. He left home at Kyoto at the age of twelve and climbed the “well-worn trails” in the forests of Mt. Hiei.<sup>76</sup> “Blue Mountains...” unveils both the act of walking as well as places to which travelers walked. Therefore, the reader stands at the vast network of well-marked trails which are still found throughout the land - as Snyder claims in his essay – the trails “tramped down by musicians, monks, merchants, porters, pilgrims, and periodic armies.” (PW, 98) Snyder, erudite in the Chinese and Japanese culture, history and religion, makes his “Blue Mountains...” a trail sliding through sacred sites in Asia, with lots of valuable digressions about the mountains as such, their mythic associations, their nature as contrasted with the nature of a house.

Sacred mountains and pilgrimage to them is a deeply established feature of the popular religions of Asia. When Dōgen speaks of mountains he is well aware of those prior traditions. There are hundreds of famous Daoist and Buddhist peaks in China and similar Buddhist and Shinto-associated mountains in Japan. There are several sorts of sacred mountains in Asia: a “sacred site” that is the residence of a spirit or deity is the simplest and possibly oldest. Then there are “sacred areas” – perhaps many dozens of square miles – that are special to the mythology and practice of a sect with its own set of Daoist or Buddhist deities – miles of paths – and dozens or hundreds of little temples and shrines. Pilgrims might climb thousands of feet, sleep in the plain board guesthouses, eat rice gruel and a few pickles, and circumambulate set routes burning incense and bowing at site after site. (PW, 99)

Walking is here associated with a mountainous terrain; paths are winding through flanks of mountains studded with stone shrines and temples, or places to bow, to worship a place or gods underlying it. Snyder first envisages the act of walking from the perspective of an old Japanese practice of traversing ancient pilgrimage routes by the mountain ascetics – Yamabushi. Such practice is designated by means of a symbolic diagram (mandala) or a holy text. It connotes moving within a certain space with a purpose of spiritual accomplishment. In his essay the poet refers to his own experience:

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<sup>76</sup> The Japanese headquarters mountains of the Tendai sect of Buddhism.

Some friends and I once walked the ancient pilgrimage route of the Ōmine Yamabushi . . . in Nara prefecture from Yoshino to Kumano. In doing so we crossed the traditional center of the “Diamond-Realm Mandala” at the summit of Mt. Ōmine (close to six thousand feet) and four hiking days later descended to the center of the “Womb-Realm Mandala” at the Kumano (“Bear Field”) Shrine, deep in a valley.

Walking through the landscape, which is “a projection of complex teaching diagrams” (PW, 101), instantaneously involves practice and worship, that is bowing at each place which is designated, blowing conchs, and chanting sutras. Snyder explains that it comes from the Japanese variety of Vajrayana Buddhism, the Shingon sect, in its interaction with the shamanistic tradition of the mountain brotherhood. (PW, 100) The act of walking is a ritual which becomes rooted in the practice. These lead to realization to which Dōgen refers by quoting Wenzhi,

“The path of water is such that when it rises to the sky, it becomes raindrops; when it falls to the ground, it becomes rivers.” . . . The path of water is not noticed by water, but is realized by water. (PW, 101)

The tao of water, ascending to heaven becomes rain and dew, descending to earth becomes rivers and streams. (“Mountains and Rivers Sutra,” transl. Carl Bielefeld)

Realization involves following the path without noticing it, or analyzing its cycles or routes. Realization is accomplished by walking in which spirit and humility prevail. The theme of realization is undertaken in both Dōgen, as well as Snyder, by using a metaphor of mountains and rivers as an endless participation in each other’s formation. The same metaphor is also observed in Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. Therefore, mountains and waters (Dōgen), mountains and rivers (Snyder), and mountains and a creek (Dillard), and mountains and a pond (Thoreau), become crucial elements in dispute on the spiritual and the metaphysical. The two elements depict a dyad, Snyder says, and “together make wholeness possible: wisdom and compassion are the two components of realization.” (PW, 101) Of these two forms Snyder writes,

Mountains also have mythic associations of verticality, spirit, height, transcendence, hardness, resistance, and masculinity. For the Chinese they are exemplars of the “yang”: dry, hard, male, and bright. Waters are feminine: wet, soft, dark “yin” with



associations of fluid-but-strong, seeking (and carving) the lowest, soulful, life-giving, shape-lifting. Folk (and Vajrayana) Buddhist iconography personifies “mountains and waters” in the *rupas* – “images” of Fūdo Myō-ō (immovable Wisdom King) and Kannon Bosatsu (The Bodhisattva Who Watches the Waves).<sup>77</sup> (PW, 101)

The two “seen as Buddha-work partners” (PW, 101) participate in creating the total process of nature by integrating landforms, the solid with the flowing ones. Therefore, landscape was often referred to by the Chinese as *shan-shui* (mountains and waters), and in this way, landscape painting was “mountains and rivers picture.” The image of the landscape as flowing through time and space was taken by Snyder in his book of poems *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, where an incessant play of the landscape being rolled over and over again in the hands of a reader represents the ongoing process of the entire natural world. Hence, a mountain range (chin. *mai*: “pulse” or “vein”) stands as a network of veins on the back of a hand. In the same way, “landforms are a play of streams-cutting and ridge-resistance and that waters and hills interpenetrate in endlessly branching rhythms.” (PW, 102) Snyder explains how the Chinese feel for land incorporated the dialectic of rock and water, the “rocky uplift,” and “downward flow,” and of the dynamism and “slow flowing” of earth-forms. (PW, 102) The Chinese scrolls depicted the movement through seasons opened to changes, it showed an unending transformations altering the landscape and renewing themselves with every cycle. The scroll embodied the wholeness of nature along with “the dusty world of human affairs.” (PW, 102) The idea of the scroll underlies Snyder’s *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996). As we gradually seem to be grasping the meaning of a place, we come to understand it as a flowing and flexible network, “veined” spots interrelated with one another, subdued to transformations, open to comings and goings of humans as well as of all the living. Therefore, the conception of the “fluidity” of a place is anchored in the Chinese reflections on the incessant flow of things and in a conception to see the world in our own bodies. Snyder has been intent on showing a close relation between the act of walking and perception of the world; the relation going deeper into the integration of these terms under the influence of the idea of home as reflected in our bodies (being at home in the world which –

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<sup>77</sup> Snyder continues: Fūdo is almost comically ferocious-looking with a blind eye and a fang, seated or standing on a slab of rock and enveloped in flames. He is known as an ally of mountain ascetics. Kannon (Kuan-yin, Avalokitesvara) gracefully leans forward with her lotus and vase of water, a figure of compassion. (PW, 101)

at the same time – is mirrored in us). As the Chinese put “Walking” among the “four dignities” – Standing, Lying, Sitting and Walking – which were meant to indicate that these are ways to be “fully ourselves, at home in our bodies.” (PW, 99)

“I can see mountains constantly walking,” writes Snyder. In Dōgen’s sutra we read:

The Master TA-YANG SHAN-K’AI addressed the assembly: “The blue mountains are constantly walking. The stone woman gives birth to a child in the night.” The mountains lack none of their proper virtues; hence they are constantly at rest and constantly walking. We must devote ourselves to a detailed study of this virtue of walking. The walking of the mountains is like that of men: do not doubt that the mountains walk simply because they may not appear to walk like human. (MWS)

The fragment points to the fundamental meaning of walking Dōgen explains later in the sutra. He probably thinks of the mountains of Asia that he walked over the years, thousands of miles trodden and practiced in regard to the conception that “the Mind studies the way running barefoot.” (PW, 103) It is only at these moments that the mind is able to read the earth verse flowing under a walker’s feet as he moves on. The earth verse can be read according to the movement of the body walking as “the road that’s followed goes forever,” (MRWE, 21) “the earth turns” thus landscape never stays the same. The earth verse is

Wide enough to keep you looking  
Open enough to keep you moving  
Dry enough to keep you honest  
Prickly enough to make you tough  
Green enough to go on living  
Old enough to give you dreams (MRWE, 150)

As Dōgen states in his sutra, “the tips of the mountains’ feet walk across the waters, setting them dancing; therefore, walking extends freely in all directions, and ‘practice and verification are not nonexistent.’” (MRS, unpaginated) In this way, the earth verse flows along with the walker just like the blue mountains are constantly walking. Dōgen meditates upon the nature of walking by explicating the process of flowing, hence impermanence – that is inherent in all beings – is also implicit in the conception

of the mountains “constantly walking.” While Dōgen leaves off the categories of walking as pure and simple movement of the body, it needs to be explained as not separate from the processes of nature constantly going on in the world of rivers, streams, rocks, mountains, roads, paths and human comings and goings within these changes, subdued to them and spun from them. Dōgen goes on his ponderings,

He who doubts that the mountains walk does not yet understand his own walking. It is not that he does not walk, but that he does not yet understand, has not made clear, his walking. He who would understand his own walking must also understand the walking of the blue mountains. The blue mountains are neither sentient nor insentient. Therefore, we can have no doubts about these blue mountains walking.

Therefore, the first poem in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, “Endless Streams and Mountains,” opens with the images of clearing the mind. Snyder starts by saying “Clearing the mind and sliding in / to that created space,” (MRWE, 5) which may refer to a meditative space, an empty formless vacuum, or to a scroll yet untouched by painter’s brush, destined to be unrolled from right to left, exposing tiny detailed interconnected flow of images, of scenes, “a web of waters streaming over rocks, / air misty but not raining.” (MRWE, 5) The space unfurls place by place, whereas looking becomes walking its scenes, flowing over the scroll, touching its structure, moving from one place to another as “the space goes on.” (MRWE, 154) The act of walking is pervaded by watching the space, gazing at places tightly knit together by invisible thread of existence. It is mere understanding that walking, like looking, is tying places together as knots in the ever-present, constant and ever-flowing appearance and disappearance of things. Hence, Snyder’s and Dōgen’s mountains and streams are the “processes of this earth, all of existence, process, essence, action, absence; they roll being and non-being together. They are what we are, we are what they are.” (PW, 103) Each is its own “frail self” encapsulated within itself but simultaneously connected with the rest of creation.

So the blue mountains walk to the kitchen and back to the shop, to the desk, to the stove. We sit on the park bench and let the wind and rain drench us. The blue mountains walk out to put another coin in the parking meter, and go on down

to the 7-Eleven. The blue mountains march out of the sea, shoulder the sky for a while, and slip back into waters. (PW, 103)

A web intricately interweaves paths and trails as well as a traveler's eyes and feet. As Anthony Hunt observes in his exhaustive study of Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers*...

Vision, like "fixed" perceptions, becomes unstable. Just when our eyes become accustomed to a distinct path, diverse paths emerge in front of us; in one moment we are on the trail; in the next we have visually stepped off to look at it from beyond.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, on a path meandering among rocks and boulders, there cease to be "I" and "we," but one realizes that there are "only eyes," Hunt observes; whereas "eye" at the same time equals "I." Therefore, the "created space" becomes at the same time the one where perceptions of Snyder and those of the reader merge and the reader sees as if "inside his perceptions." (GSM, 61) Walking also transmutes into following the structure of the scroll visually, or floating along in front of the scroll as it unrolls. The participant and the observer become one, being embodied in the scroll and out of it in the moment after, when – "seeing this land from a boat on a lake / or a broad slow river, / coasting by" (MRWE, 5) – the "created space" is filled with water, and a boat on its surface is now our vehicle of perception, a tool moving things forward, making views change their shape, reach destinations other than our own. Further, "the perspective imposed by the painted boat image on the reader's mind and eye (and on the author's as he too views his painting) serves as a device to 'coast' one's way across the unrolling landscapes of the scroll and the various sections of the long poem." (GSM, 62) Seeing with the eyes of the poet involves walking the winding paths of the scroll. The movement of feet is somehow forgotten within the observation of the landscape painted with a brush, enlivened by the movement of an eye and hands rolling the scroll forward from right to left.

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<sup>78</sup> Anthony Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004), p. 63. Other quotations will appear from the same edition and will be marked with GSM and a page number.

The path comes down along a lowland stream  
slips behind boulders and leafy hardwoods,  
reappears in a pine grove,

no farms around, just tidy cottages and shelters,  
gateways, rest stops, roofed but unwalled work space,  
- a warm damp climate;

a trail of climbing stairsteps forks upstream.  
Big ranges lurk behind those rugged little outcrops –  
these spits of low ground rocky uplifts  
layered pinnacles aslant,  
flurries of brushy cliffs receding,  
far back and high above, vague peaks.  
A man hunched over, sitting on a log  
another stands above him, lifts a staff,  
a third, with a roll of mats or a lute, looks on;  
a bit offshore two people in a boat.

The trail goes far inland,  
somewhere back around a bay,  
lost in distant foothill slopes  
& back again

at a village on the beach, and someone's fishing. (MRWE, 5-6)

This virtue of walking, the peculiar flowing over the scroll renders the reading of the long poem a very detailed perception of the universe, “painted into existence,” (GSM, 63) and depicted as an unstable unity of integrated facts and actions which are inscribed in the actual unrolling structure. The slow and careful flow of the structure “invites a solitary communion” – in Thoreauvian terms – with the people and places whose daily duties are depicted in the scroll. While oceans “beckon toward a vast, lonely wilderness of space,”<sup>79</sup> rivers connect people and places; thus “human places” are joined by the washing of the flowing waters, or altered completely as in Wendell Berry’s “flooded house.” Moreover, as H. Daniel Peck claims, “rivers are the most human and social bodies of water.” (TMW, 22) So too is the spacious watery area—a lake—in Snyder’s *Mountains and Rivers...* a humanized space of observation, encompassed by a cool mind whose frames are those of the boat upon which the mind outlooks into the nature of the scroll. Fittingly enough, Thoreau writes in *A Week on Concord and Merrimack Rivers*,

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<sup>79</sup> H. Daniel Peck, *Thoreau's Morning Work. Memory and Perception in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, the Journal, and Walden* (Chelsea, Michigan: BookCrafters, 1990), p. 23. Other quotations will come from the same edition, and will be marked as TMW with a page number.

Rivers must have been the guides which conducted the footsteps of the first travelers. They are the constant lure, when they flow by our doors, to distant enterprise and adventure, and, by a natural impulse, the dwellers on their banks will at length accompany their currents to the lowlands of the globe, or explore at their invitation the interior of continents. They are the natural highways of all nations, not only leveling the ground, and removing obstacles from the path of the traveler, quenching his thirst, and bearing him on their bosoms, but conducting him through the most interesting scenery, the most populous portions of the globe, and where the animal and vegetable kingdoms attain their greatest perfection.<sup>80</sup>

Like the traveler, the observer of the scroll is being conducted through the most interesting scenery, guided to go along with the flow of the river upon which the mind-boat is floating. It is not without reason that in his first poem of the volume Snyder as if distances his reader and requires that he change his mode of perception. The implications of the importance of the special view are suggested by Thoreau in an 1860 Journal entry, while describing yet another boating experience: “[t]o . . . see the earth from the *water side*, to stand outside of it on another element, and so get a pry on it in thought at least, that is no small advantage.” (March 25, 1860: Journal, 13: 226-27; Thoreau’s emphasis, TMW, 23) Rivers enable the complex mode of perception as contrasted with highway travel. In his detailed study on memory and perception in Thoreau’s writings, Peck continues this discussion by adding that “[a]t the most basic level, the river perspective enhances observation simply because of the clear, unobstructed line of sight to the shore that it provides.” (TMW, 23) The subject is as if floating on an element different from that which he observes, and therefore his or her role is that of the observer, provided that (s)he is near the object of his or her vision rather than distanced farther from the shore when the viewed scenery becomes diminished, at which time its structure seems unclear, blurred, dubious and thus unstable. However, the view from the “water side” is fleeting itself, continuous but changing, dependant on such elements as the speed and direction of the current and the wind. Peck suggests that the relation of subject and object becomes discontinuous and relative due to the absence of the fixed point of view. (TMW, 23) It is at this point that observation gradually transmutes into reflection. This is also the way the scroll ends. Observation has come to cessation whereas reflection continues (“the boat has floated

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<sup>80</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers in Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), p. 306-307.

off the page”), and because of this fact, seals and poem-colophons appear at the end to mark the factual observation with words which come to represent some tangible part of the real act of seeing the scroll. Leaving off observation which is straight-to-the-point, one indulges oneself in reflection, which is closer to imagination, and in metamorphoses Thoreau wrote about in the “Friday” section of *A Week on the Concord and the Merrimack Rivers*. Most probably unaware of the scroll being unrolled before him, he became a literal observer of the landscape flowing in front of him, yet himself embodied as the one unrolling a map of the observed land.

Sitting with our faces now upstream, we studied the landscape by degrees, as one unrolls a map . . . , assuming new and varying positions as wind and water shifted the scene, and there was variety enough for our entertainment in the metamorphoses of the simplest objects. Viewed from this side the scenery appeared new to us. (TMW, 349)

The act of the unrolling of the scroll, as well as of the map, renders the observer an active participant whose eyes wash the views and perceive things anew in their newly acquired forms.

Hence, “walking on walking” becomes a multifaceted and multilayered act in which the movements of feet, eyes, and hands are rendered a uniform, integrating force that encompasses the movements of walking, watching and unrolling, and simultaneously melts them. Hunt says, “these people are part of a single scroll, an unrolling painted universe, and we too go with them. We watch them; we step into their shoes; we sit in their places.” (GSM, 63) Barbara Paparazzo concludes, “everyone and everything is on a journey – moving, appearing, disappearing, existing in a continual state of transformation, even the mountains and rivers – ‘walking on walking, / under foot                      earth turns.’” (*spacing original*)<sup>81</sup> Yet suddenly, “[t]he watching boat has floated off the page;” (MRWE, 6) however, the scroll’s title takes us somewhere farther, into another dimension of this journey, into the reflection phase which follows. Though the path’s end is upon us, it is endless, like the streams and mountains. As the representational world of the scroll ends, we leave the page but still are immersed in the three dimensional world of the painted and the real which at some

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<sup>81</sup> Barbara Paparazzo, „Walking on Walking: Impermanence and Landscape In Gary Snyder’s *Mountains and Rivers Without End*,” *Great River Review* (January 2006).

point merge. Hunt calls it “the interaction of realities.” (GSM, 64) It enters and reenters Snyder’s long poem. By means of this interaction “all worlds are real in a world of non-duality,” (GSM, 64) which recalls T’ien Hsieh’s of Wei-lo statement, quoted in “Endless Streams and Mountains,” “...the water holds up the mountains, / The mountains go down in the water.” (MRWE, 7) The scroll continues on with seals and poems added by those who saw it, “it tells a further tale.” (MRWE, 7) In this way, the scroll goes on relying on reflections and ponderings, changing into words. Walking changes as well, the trails threading their way become letters meandering their way among perceptions and thoughts, leading somewhere off the page, recurring somehow with one more glance at the landscape flowing forward and backward. T’ien Hsieh’s commentary touches upon the nature of reflections on the mountain-river dyad, and provides an insight into the non-dual nature of the two. The mountain reflected in the surface of a lake gives a literal insight into the way waters hold up mountains; and mountains are in turn passed through by glissading waters that are cascading down their slopes. Hence, the mutually embracing universe, rising and flowing without end, stretches across the field of perception of a single person viewing the scroll. It goes from the Ch’ing dynasty collector Liang Ch’ing-piao through the Imperial collection down the early twentieth century to the Cleveland Art Museum. Seals and poem-colophons written on the scroll recall the names of those who saw it; whereas next in line is Snyder’s own poem-colophon to leave a mark on it.

Step back and gaze again at the land:  
it rises and subsides –

ravines and cliffs like waves of blowing leaves –  
stamp the foot, walk with it, clap! turn,  
the creeks come in, ah!  
strained through boulders,  
mountains walking on the water,  
water ripples every hill. (MRWE, 8)

His words seem to be extending further than the space of the page, outside the museum, into the vaster space that is flowing, rising and subsiding like that on the scroll. From the perspective of a boat on a river or a lake, which is itself shifting, one is able to read the scroll as an unending dance of the universe; furthermore, the observer suddenly realizes that (s)he is part of the flowing energies, always changing, always traveling, and always in motion. Just like mountains’ and rivers’ walking



and flowing, one is in a whirl of these processes forever “walking on walking” until one finally gets lost in winding thoughts which ask if it is “the walking foot that turns the planet or the turning planet that has taught the foot to walk.” (GSM, 35) Walking is now a category which cannot stand apart from watching. It touches the surface of the earth, and paints its lands with paths and trails. When a brush leaves off, the page becomes traversed by those who came to watch / walk it. As continents drift, mountains uplift, waters flood the lands or dry up, the ongoing rhythm of the entire universe is walking on over again.

— I walk out of the museum — low grey clouds over the lake —  
chill March breeze.

Old ghost ranges, sunken rivers, come again  
stand by the wall and tell their tale,  
walk the path, sit the rains,  
grind the ink, wet the brush, unroll the  
broad white space:

lead out and tip  
the moist black line.

*Walking on walking,*

*under foot            earth turns.*

*Streams and mountains never stay the same.* (MRWE, 8-9)  
( *spacing original*)

Snyder, now a character in his poem, steps back from the museum and gazes at the landscape unrolling outside the building of the Cleveland Art Museum. As an observer and participant, the poet stands back from the Chinese scroll, and enters the outside world as though he unrolled the past into the present, in the sound and feel of the Japanese Nō performance (the stamp of the foot, the clap and turn) (GSM, 66). His rhythmic turns seem to resonate with the movements of myriads of patterns which form the interlacing network of the geological time. The inclusiveness of his vision transcends the scroll though it is now interconnected with the landscape issuing from it and transmuting into the world outside since “all phenomena are on a pilgrimage.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Paparazzo, „Walking on Walking,” p. 118.

As “the space goes on” walking is an unending performance. As the performance has many dimensions, different people become walkers, observers, visitors, dwellers; all participating, engaged, walking their lives away in tune with the turning of the earth. Like at the beginning and end of the Nō performance, there appears a formal “foot stamp,” the repercussions of “walking on walking” appear in beginning and end sections of *Mountains and Rivers*. The echoing steps, which are also suggestive of the old mountain woman Yamamba (Yamauba), or the Yamabushi (the Mountain Buddhists), “a Japanese mountaineering cult whose physical hiking is identified with spiritual activity.” (GSM, 41) As Snyder recounts in his essay “[t]he Mountain Spirit true [No] Nature,” Japan is richly endowed with female folklore figures among which Yamamba<sup>83</sup> appears as a mountain spirit – “[t]he Old Woman of the Mountains,’ . . . a timeless crown goddess, sometimes young but ragged , with a wild-haired baby boy – the subject of many old tales,” (BF, 46) where one encounters “magical maidens who are also exquisitely sensitive birds, sweet old ladies who turn out to be cannibals, all-devouring brides, mountain-dwelling hags who admire human dancers, and many more.” (BF, 46) Yamamba (Yamauba) as well as Yamabushi are closely conjoined by the act of walking which gains spiritual as well as geological dimension, and eventually resembles a “magical display,” a mysterious in a sense dance of the universe, whose powers melt and transform in endless cycles, which is brought by the poet in descriptions from “Finding the Space in the Heart,” where readers encounter the “big, flat, and salt-encrusted” Black Rock Desert, whose geological characteristics result from having been the floor of the “Pleistocene Lake Lahontan” at whose shores

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<sup>83</sup> While his Japan years, Snyder lived in Kyoto, in the Rinzaï Zen temple compound of Shokoku-ji at which time he began to attend Nō performances, and became an aficionado of Nō history and aesthetics. At the end of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, he explains his making of this book of poetry. Snyder says: “Nō is a gritty but totally refined high-culture art that is in the lineage of shamanistic performance, a drama that by means of voice and dance calls forth the spirit realms. I began to envision *Mountains and Rivers* through the dramatic strategies of the Nō.” (“The Making of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*,” *Mountains and Rivers*, pp. 155-160). In “The Mountain Spirit’s True [No] Nature,” Snyder recounts that Yamamba story migrated into the aristocratic Buddhist/Samurai culture of the early fifteenth century when she became the main character in the Nō play *Yamamba*, which is sometimes attributed to Zeami, the “Shakespeare” of Nō. In the play a young woman who has become a celebrity in the Capital for her dance called “Yamamba” is on pilgrimage to the temple where her mother is buried. The route takes her over a high mountain pass where she and her guide are surprised by a sudden nightfall. She is befriended by an old woman with a hut nearby, who seems to know of her and asks to see her “Yamamba” dance. When the dance finally takes place, it is hard to say who is really dancing. The real Yamamba is not so much angered that she has been appropriated by a human entertainer as she is curious to see what the dancer will do. The young dancer is terrified. But when the time comes it is the old woman who dances; the young woman possibly merges with her, and there is only one dancer on the stage at the end.” (BF, pp. 43-49).

grazed the gregarious “Columbian Mammoth.” Evidence of the ancient lake may be seen on the cliffs that surround the Black Rock Desert (GSM, 262):

Faint shorelines seen high on these slopes,  
long gone Lake Lahontan,  
cutthroat trout spirit in slit – Columbian Mammoth bones  
four hundred feet up on the wave-etched  
beach ledge; curly-horned  
desert sheep outlines pecked into rock, . . . (MRWE, 152)

The prevailing sense of a pilgrimage that is issuing from *Mountains and Rivers*, from its imagery and words, its close links with the Japanese play *Yamamba*, gives the feeling of being constantly drawn to and led by the spirits dwelling in the long poem, by people appearing from within the lines, as well as depicted in the Chinese landscape scroll being unrolled over again in front of us. The space is now meditative, it flows “like waves of blowing leaves” through time past and present. However, Snyder has never lost his sense of belonging; therefore, the terrain gradually changes into the old sacred Turtle Island landscape. The reader is being guided, like in a Nō performance, through the multiplicity of “arisings of nature.”<sup>84</sup> Insubstantial as the processes are, they bring us closer to experience existence “just as it is.” The “just as it is” of the ongoing transformations teaches to transcend the existential doubt, and gives rise to compassion. This belongs to Yamamba’s role whose participation is “endless stream of birth and death through which she constantly passes, . . . make her into a powerful symbol of Enlightenment and simultaneous ignorance.” (BF, 47) As Snyder continues “[s]he affirms the ineluctable color of each moment, even while walking her geological-time-scale rounds. She also finds occasional ways to secretly assist human beings.” (BF, 47). Yamamba becomes a spirit forever walking the winding paths each person leaves off after circles inscribed within his stay on earth become closed. Grasping the knowledge of emptiness and impermanence that is embedded in the volume is to have at least a vague vision of the fixed and the flowing; moreover, “beginning and ending in emptiness, it is, nevertheless, all that all of us have.” (GSM, 265) In order to comprehend these thoughts one needs to “step back” to the beginning

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<sup>84</sup> Paparazzo, “Walking on Walking,” p. 112.

of the sequence where Snyder placed Milarepa's<sup>85</sup> statement concerning the nature of emptiness, namely, "[t]he notion of Emptiness engenders Compassion." At this juncture, Snyder unrolls before his imaginative readers another landscape. It is as if under Yamamba's feet, the Great Basin's emptiness uncovered its space. The scroll being unrolled in front of the reader becomes abundant with places in the northwestern Nevada known as the Black Rock Desert. The poet, the reader, and the constant stomp of the Yamamba's walk heard from the background of the sequence, are now all transfixed into the "empty" space of the Great Basin. Furthermore, the poetic landscape of the poem opens into lines which may serve as colophons to the space of both the poem as well as the scroll gradually appearing and rolling back to its former shape. The lines are subscribed as belonging to an old desert sage, and they convey the following message, "Stomp out greed / The best things in life are not things." (MRWE, 152) Snyder seems to be preparing his readers not to stop unrolling and reading the landscape when it literally ends, but to "walk on" and step into another landscape, an interconnected one, which is the space of life ceaselessly turning and moving things out of their frames, altering the here and now. The notion of emptiness is therefore within things and beyond them, it is implicit in our understanding which creates a space for compassion. Since the cycles will eventually lead all readers, walkers, and watchers to the end of the scroll, and of the intimate landscape they have inhabited; the end finally appears as one's crossing from the paginated to the unpaginated realm, from the familiar to the "know not" flowing, empty vastness, "[o]ff nowhere, to be or not be." (MRWE, 152-153) As Hunt concludes, "to recognize how completely interconnected all beings are in time and space is to know the true meaning of emptiness: nothing, no thing, no species, exists in and for itself." (GSM, 58) The turning world is shared with all other beings and therefore humans need to "stomp" out of greed, and "meet heart to heart." (MRWE, 153) The heart and form discussion brings forth the Buddhist *Heart Sutra*, where the play of emptiness and form pave the way to the notion of interbeing. Snyder entitled the poem, whose

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<sup>85</sup> Milarepa is a renowned figure of Tibetan Buddhism who live roughly from 1025 to 1135. Warmed only by "inner heat," he lived for many years in total solitude in ice caves high in the Himalayas, wearing only a cotton cloth. When his father died, Milarepa, then seven years old, watched helplessly as his mother suffered and the family property was taken away. He swore vengeance and later, with great violence, did indeed redeem the wrongs enacted upon his family. The consequence of his violent action, however, was shame at his own behavior." Under the guidance of Marpa, Milarepa underwent trials and was subjected to immense suffering. Hunt, *Genesis, Structure and Meaning in Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers Without End*, pp. 57-58.

landscape unrolls the Black Rock Desert, “[f]inding the Space in the Heart,” and in doing so, he brings the desert emptiness to juxtapose it with the space implicit in the heart, where an unlimited room for compassion is to be found.

The initial dichotomy of the painted and the real seem now to have completely melted in the one interconnected universe. Apart from Milarepa’s words, there are yet other ones to be found at the beginning of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Since the end of the scroll continues on, the stump of feet walking on comes to reverberate lines from Dōgen’s comment on the saying by an ancient Buddha who said “A painted rice cake does not satisfy hunger.” (MRWE, ix) Dōgen comments:

“There are few who have even seen this ‘painting of a rice cake’ and none of them has thoroughly understood it.

The paints for painting rice-cakes are the same as those used for painting mountains and waters.

If you say the painting is not real, then the whole material world is not real, the Dharma is not real.

Unsurpassed enlightenment is a painting. The entire phenomenal universe and the empty sky are nothing but a painting.

Since this is so, there is no remedy for satisfying hunger other than a painted rice cake. Without painted hunger you never become a true person.” (MRWE, xvii)

“Wide enough,” as well as “[o]pen enough” to look and to walk, the painted universe is as much real as the one ongoing dynamic painting/landscape happening beyond the actual scroll. The edges like faint shorelines melt into the outside, which becomes a life-long practice, commitment, self-discipline in one’s way to understanding. Dōgen uses painting as a central metaphor for understanding, which itself is realization of the outside within the inside world, whereas each person is a “piece of the continent,” (GSM, 58) forever walking away the dichotomies to eventually comprehend that there is not any other world than the one, whose “ceaseless wheel of life” (MRWE, 142) – even if illusory as it may appear – rolls onward, though retrieving the backward while encountering it in its newly altered forms.

*Walking on walking,  
under foot      earth turns*

*Streams and mountains never stay the same.*

Into earth      rock dives.

As the mountains lift and open  
underground out,  
dust over seashell, layers of ooze,  
display how it plays. (MRWE, 146) (*spacing original*)

The investigation of walking, as proposed by Dōgen and Snyder, leaves off the edges of the notion as such, in order to bring forth the notion of understanding which is implicit in the act itself. The closeness of a walker with the world turning under his feet is his participation in the ongoing process of the cycles of the earth. He becomes part of the landscape that changes its forms, gives birth and dies innumerable deaths (“*red sandstone; / gleaming dolomite,*” MRWE, 142) The metaphor of a painting and unceasing walking, both practiced and heard somewhere in the distance, “where the oldest living beings / thrive on rock and air,” (MRWE, 142) seems to be finally walking into the space of the heart, and the “created space” within one’s mind. However, the space is flowing, steadily leaving off to take new forms, spiraling down and winding underneath with “no loss, no gain,” (MRWE, 153) till “the sky is the ground, / no place between.” (MRWE, 153) In these regards, “‘*walking*’ is not merely motion here; journeys are not merely travel’ rather, as the final line indicates, ‘*walking*’ is a process of continuous change—the meaning of the verb *naturing* if such a verb could exist in American English—and, in spiritual terms, the opportunity for ongoing transformation. . . . walking can be one form of meditation, one type of ritual—as in “circumambulation”—one part of the spiritual path towards enlightenment.” (PFW, 187)

### 3.2.2. Circumambulating Mt. Tamalpais.

Walking, apart from being a “deeply satisfying way to move” on its basic level, and inherent in cyclical processes, in geological terms, is also implicit in the idea of mediation. However, before walking meditation became initiated into the American continent in the mid-60’s, Snyder became acquainted with this practice a few weeks after his arrival in Kyoto, Japan, in May 1956, when an elder zen student, Walter Nowick, took him up on Mt. Hiei and led him to shadowy Tendai temple. Snyder recollects this event in his foreword to *Opening the Mountain*,

. . . I first heard the story of the Tendai sect’s ceremonial walking practice, called *kaihogyo*, on the long Mt. Hiei ridges and valleys. Only few monks ever completed the full thousand-day walk, which averages (because of route variations) twenty-five miles per day.<sup>86</sup>

Snyder’s initiation in the ritual walking practice was not until the next spring when he joined a group of *yamabushi* adepts, who were “members of a very old Shinto-Buddhist mountain-walking brotherhood.” (OM, xiii) In Wakayama prefecture the poet got to know the sacramental ascent of Mt. Omine, which was accompanied by chanting the Heart Sutra, and the group was greeted by an echoing conch-shell chorus at the summit. Other encounters with such pilgrimages were part of Snyder and Joanne Kyger’s six-months “swing through” (OM, xiii) India in early 1962, a journey recounted in Snyder’s *Passage Through India*. It was in there where they grasped accounts of circumambulations.

We went overland by truck-bus into Nepal and picked up accounts of not just treks but circumambulations, the ceremonial sunwise pilgrimages that would go around an entire mountain, or just a small rock-stupa, or even a person to whom you wished to offer respect. In Sanskrit it’s called *pradakshina*. There’s a big white-domed stupa with painted eyes on top of Kathmandu. The shrine has a constant stream of people circling it to the right both day and night. Hundreds of little candles light the way when it’s dark. Cows, yaks, and horses are led around by their owners, who also spin prayer wheels. I was told that this is one of the few meditation practices that animals can usefully do for themselves. (OM, xiii)

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<sup>86</sup> Snyder, Foreword in Matthew Davis, Michale Farrell Scott, *Opening the Mountain. Circumambulating Mount Tamalpais. A Ritual Walk* (Emeryville: Avalon Publishing Group, 2006), p. xiii. Other quotations will come from the same edition and will be marked as OM and a page number.

The whole event, the festival of walking around a sacred object brought forth an idea of organizing events like that in North America. (“One should do hikes like that in North America,” OM, xiii) Remote from an idea of an easy walk, or a stroll, a ritual walk depicted humans and animals as integrated in one single activity, spiraling around an object regarded as sacred. Rather than detached from the outside world, the pilgrims felt a deep sympathy with it, sewing the inside realm with the outside realization of it by walking, stopping, chanting, praying and looking, yet not withholding themselves from the phenomenal world. Older than world religions, circumambulating is a profound recognition of life cycles, and instead of clinging to any abstract terms it manifests the real, the natural, and joins all the living by showing the original trail, cyclical in nature, walked by all since the dawn of times. Michael Farrell Scott writes in “Sun Charm: Around Left or Right:”

Circumambulating, to walk a circle around, is a ritual term with sacred and magical meanings, incorporated in many contemporary beliefs and practices, but predating most if not all of them. Older than Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, the practice of walking a circle around has been adopted from previous ritual practices and made integral to newer belief communities. The ancient practice of circumambulating is also expressed in life cycles rites, community building, and even the destruction of an adversary. In the sacred sense, circumambulation is the movement around a holy object or the moving of a holy object around in a circle to influence or honor it. (OM, 134)

As well as its scope, the provenience of the term is both rich and distinctive. Its literal meaning evokes the act of walking (*ambulare*) around (*circum*), whereas the order of these words is reversed to “around walk.” (OM, 4) Yet M. F. Scott gives a related word of “circumnavigation” as a more familiar concept to Americans, who are said to find their synaptic path set on “navigate” rather than on “ambulate” which may be caused by the historic rounding of the earth by ship, which enters the mind. (OM, 4) On the other hand, from a boat on a lake or a river one is as though “circumnavigating” the Chinese scroll discussed earlier in this chapter. The ongoing rolling/rounding of the scroll being observed evokes a metaphor of an incessant flow of waters, whirl of events reiterated with the eyes that behold them. Nevertheless, walking a circle is a sunwise, clockwise movement to the right, as contrasted with the



reading of a Chinese scroll. M. F. Scott goes through the naming of the movement, which in Brahman ritual is *pradakshina*; in Latin the term is *dextratic*; whereas among Celts it is *deasil*. All the terms circle around the word “right.” “The right is auspicious; right is the right way. Life cycle rites of birth, initiation, marriage, blotting out sins, death, among numerous other significant cultural activities, include sunwise circumambulations.”<sup>87</sup> Conversely, the act of circling around in the opposite direction is referred to as *prasavya* in Sanskrit; *cartuasul* in Celtic; *withershins*, *widdershins* or *widershins* in English language. The English word is of Middle High German origin, means “to go against,” and entered English in the early sixteenth century. Its essence is in meaning “the opposite to the usual,” “the wrong way,” or “in a direction contrary to the apparent course of the sun when one is facing south.” In Scotland, the term means “unlucky, or causing disaster.”<sup>88</sup> Hence, in the sacred sense the walk is a ritual of removing disasters with chants and sutras sung at stopping places. Moreover, it is a charm, a solar charm, that “represents the daily spinning of the earth,” (OM, 135) her passage through time and space to complete a cycle, to end a particular season and start a new one. Simultaneously, it represents

the apparent sun rising in the east, passing overhead and setting in the west. When facing south (in the Northern Hemisphere), the sun appears to rise to the left and set to the right; it is left to right, clockwise and by extension “natural” and “appropriate.” (OM, 135)

However, the left-right orientation seems to be lost when one faces other direction than the south. So too is the clockwise solar movement lost. Apart from that, all planets, including the earth, revolve around the sun counterclockwise. Yet, Scott sees the essence of the answer in the sun-dominated seasonal changes on the earth.

The year’s two equinoxes (fall or autumnal and spring or vernal) are straightforward: a day when light and dark are of equal length. But the two solstices (summer, the longest day of light, and winter, the shortest day) are more perplexing, and at the winter solstice more threatening. The shortest day of the year, the day of least sunlight and most darkness, appears to extend itself as if the sun were stuck. In the Northern

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<sup>87</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 509-511.

<sup>88</sup> James Hastings quoted in Matthew Davis and Michael Farrell Scott, p. 134.

Hemisphere, as one looks south for the winter solstice sun to return, it's not hard to imagine the need to affirm the return of life-giving energy of the sun – a reassuring clockwise movement. (OM, 135)

The circuit is nevertheless an act of combining trails which comprise the eternal journey of all the living. Intersected by myriads of livings they form shapeliness of ways traversed by human and more-than-human entities constituting life on the turning earth. The re(turning) sun motif is an emanation of the sacred solar energy, awaited, celebrated by humans, evoked by various mythical figures, birds and beasts. The sunwise movement is “reassuring” that there is eventually one path combining other ones; this is the one evidently leading through this world unending paths that are open to each and every one. As Kenneth Rexroth stated in one of his poems,

Resurrection envelops the earth.  
Geometrical, blazing, deathless,  
Animals and men march through heaven,  
Pacing their secret ceremony. (OM, unpaginated)

To this Wendell Berry's words can be added, which somehow explicate the path as well when Berry says: “I am absolutely suspicious of anyone giving the direct route. My own notion is that the route is not only straight and narrow, but crooked, certainly passing through this world and if I find that it ends here I will not be much surprised.”<sup>89</sup>

Before the three Buddhist poets, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder, “opened” the routes around Mount Tamalpais (photo 7) in 1965, Snyder – a nine-year-old visitor – had first seen the mountain in 1939, and then almost ten years after when he hiked the mountain with Robin Collins, his girlfriend from Reed College in Portland, Oregon. Snyder recalls his earliest memory of his wish to endow the mountain with spiritual meaning, and thinking of rendering it a place of such practice as well.

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<sup>89</sup> Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry. Correspondence between authors. Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections Library, University of California, Davis, CA.

The seed of my desire to make Tamalpais a kind of place of practice [occurred] in September of 1948. I passed through San Francisco hitchhiking on my way back from New York, and stopped to visit my girlfriend who was then living in San Francisco. She and I together took the Greyhound up to Pantoll, and hiked from Pantoll over the hill and down to one of the reservoirs, going much of the way cross country. Camped a night, and the next day hiked over to Bolinas – down the Bolinas ridge road always – and hitchhiked out to Tomales Bay. That night over Tam and night camping out, was my introduction to it. We were at time both 18. (OM, 10)

Traversed by Native Californians – Coast Miwok – for some thousands of years ago, Mt Tamalpais (Mt. Tam.) or otherwise known simply as Bay Mountain, on the Marin peninsula north of the Golden Gate, is a “green beacon . . . for urban dwellers of San Francisco and the East Bay and for travelers returning to the area.” (OM, unpaginated) Undoubtedly, Mt. Tamalpais was, and still is, “a wild place within an easy reach of the cities of San Francisco and Berkeley, serving equally as a site for extended communal hiking or for personal solitude.” (GSM, 166) Snyder and Whalen chose the mountain to give her tribute, to express their “respect and gratitude,” to emphasize her physical as well as magical prominence in the Bay Area landscape. Furthermore, the mountain was a “storehouse” of memories for Snyder taking him back to his first visit to Muir Woods at the age of nine.<sup>90</sup>

Between the years 1952-1956 Snyder sporadically returned to the area until he moved into a three-room unfinished cabin in Homestead Valley at the foot of Mt. Tam. He lived there before he left for Japan. It was nine years before the Buddhist poets actually “opened” the mountain, that Snyder – occasionally with Jack Kerouac whom he met one year before – explored the surrounding of the cabin, whose back door opened into a landscape replete with the bay mountain’s presence. The cabin soon became a meeting point for figures renowned in the San Francisco Renaissance; a place brimming with discussions of Buddhism and poetry. David Robertson, Snyder’s friend, an English Professor and Wilderness Literature specialist at UC-Davis, writes in his “Real Matter, Spiritual Mountain: Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac on Mt. Tam:”

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<sup>90</sup> David Robertson, „The circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais,” *Western American Literature* 30.1, (1995), pp. 3-28.

Snyder introduced Kerouac in the art of wood cutting, they prepared dinners for each other, discussed Buddhism together, and received guests, a list of whom reads like a Who's Who of the San Francisco Literary Renaissance: Allen Ginsberg, Philip Whalen, Kenneth Rexroth, Michael McClure, Robert Creeley, and Philip Lamantia, among others. They also partied, every weekend.

All these parties were practice for the big one, which came in late April, a three-day farewell extravaganza for Snyder. It was, as were most of the Homestead parties that month, a tripartite affair. Down the hill inside McCorkle's house the guests, including Snyder's father, danced to records and to the beat of Kerouac's playing bongo drums on the inverted cans. Out in the yard, to the tune of live guitar music and in the light of a bonfire, Rexroth held forth on the state of American poetry, concluding that, outside of present company, William Carlos Williams was the only poet around worth reading.<sup>91</sup>

The mountain was a natural part of the scene, a "storehouse" of all life happening around and waning some time after. She closed within herself the Miwok life of chanting and walking her flanks; the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of appreciation by nature-loving Hispanics and Yankees who named new trails, and finally the first "opening" by Snyder, Ginsberg and Whalen on October 22, 1965. The "opening" was itself an arresting Chinese/Japanese Buddhist term for starting a practice in a place, explains Snyder, though they did not have any intention of renouncing it to the world. (OM, xiv) Hence, on that day the mountain openers walked the trails in an "intentionally ceremonial" ("opened") way. However, the day

. . . just happened to be the day we could all get together. But we did make a decision. Let's all go do a formal circumambulation of Tamalpais and establish sacred spots on it and pay our respects and do some chanting. Allen was doing a lot of chanting at that time. So was I.<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, the "original circumambulators" (OM, 9) walked the old trails, as if joined them by making their way; established stopping places, the stations or shrines "as the spirit moved them" (OM, 9) when they could chant sutras. In fact, there was nothing

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<sup>91</sup> Robertson, „Real Matter, Spiritual Mountain: Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac on Mt. Tamalpais,” *Western American Literature* 27, (1992), p. 214.

<sup>92</sup> David Robertson quoted in Anthony Hunt, GSM, p. 165.

much ceremonial *par excellence* in preparations but the ceremony itself was issuing from the inner energy foretelling the stations, the spirit desiring to find some connection with place, being, and practice. It was about connecting the trails with one another, forming one path out of many bifurcating ones; “[t]his was something to do, something that you actively, physically, and mentally, of course, do,” as Whalen explicated. (OM, 11) It survived through many years as a moveable feast whose enduring spirit introduced new communities, gathered tribes and, at the same time, initiated walkers into the extensive practice, a ritual, a discipline of cleansing and removing themselves from the scramble of modern life. However, the “opening” was not a term constrained to Buddhist practice only, to chants, incantations and vows chosen by Snyder, Ginsberg and Whalen. It was more of a will to clear one’s life-space and look at that which was spreading under one’s feet till it reached the horizon; at the ground and one’s connections, one’s reflections upon being and walking, stopping and looking. The “up and around” movement may suggest some religious conceptions of mountains as in Islamic, Hebrew, and Christian terms they are believed to express connection between heaven and earth, or function as “higher places,” “favored territories,” or “holy grounds,” with Palestine as an example in Hebrew tradition, “being the highest land, was not submerged by the Flood.”<sup>93</sup> Eliade gives numerous examples of mountains viewed as sacred, as centers of the world, its *axis mundi* (pillars, ladders, mountains, trees, vines etc.) serving as links between the worlds. As there is a break in the homogeneity of space, there is believed to be a certain opening, a passage to move between the realms.<sup>94</sup> Conversely, the opening of routes around Tamalpais offered an alternate way of looking which was not reserved for the worshippers seeking one’s own salvation / enlightenment, but rather expressed itself in re-engaging humans with the only world turning under their feet. The routes are not floating above this world, but stretching unceasingly through its mountains, hills, valleys, deserts, plains, lands known traversed and those less familiar to man. Therefore, the celebration of walking around is the physical, “joyful interpretation” of that which is actually here. It is reading and re-reading, and performing the physical,

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<sup>93</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987) p. 38-39.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

the real which is the endless play of trails. Therefore, it is the “circumambulation of the self,” to use the Jungian terms. Robertson puts in the following way:

It is too burdensome to say that it must be a Buddhist ritual. I would rather think that it is open for anyone to be as creative as they like. They can stop at those points we stopped at, or they can stop at other points. The main thing is to pay your regards, to play, to engage, to stop and pay attention. It’s just a way of stopping and looking – at yourself too. In a way that is what ceremony is for. (GSM, 167)

However, the chants chosen by the poets included: The Heart Sutra, as a statement of the “total truth of the universe;” a magical spell (*dharani*) to avert disasters and “spread protection and well-being thereabout the universe;” short verses referring to specific powers, “rocks, animals, plants, human beings, watersheds, upthrusts, all spiritual beings;” four Vows of Buddhism to “dedicate their lives to work for the benefit of every other being on earth.”<sup>95</sup> Later on, in the spirit of openness, other chants and incantations were added, “Smokey the Bear Sutra,” among others. Upon Robertson’s persistent questions about the opening, Whalen stated in 1992 that “it [was] about getting Buddhist tradition or feeling established in this country, where it is so foreign, where it is so disconnected from anything real.” (OM, 11) Yet, Snyder’s answer brought the idea of consecrating Tamalpais, making it sacred to future generations to do similar circumambulations. (OM, 11) However, the ritual walk was not framed in any fixed form; it was more to the sound and motion, and mindfulness of all walkers for stopping places are everywhere. Snyder admitted,

I see no reason to consider those particular chants as absolute or even necessary. I have advised people to use the idea of “stations” in their own way – feel what they feel, stop at other points where they feel drawn to it, and use it as a moment of mindfulness, or, contribute whatever songs or words they might. . . . After all, Allen, Philip and I just made it up, with some Yamabushi background.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Robertson, „The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais,” quoted in M. Davis and M. F. Scott (OM, 11).

<sup>96</sup> Gary Snyder, letter to Mathew Davis, January 19, 2004, quoted in OM, 12.

Yet, there seem to be some elements that are eclectic as well as those that are more elusive in nature, which reverberates itself in myriads of things that connect people with a place and interconnect them with the sacred planet they inhabit. Stopping places cannot really be universal for everyone since experiencing the walk is never like that. Such stoppings are dictated by inner need to reflect on a particular spot, to look and to see; to hear and to sing; to open up to the world. In a sense, stations somehow float off from the original meaning of the word since a man, interconnected with the earth turning under his feet, cannot stop but only continue to walk on, to look on, even if his scroll ends, his existence floats off, he leaves the page or the place and moves to another state or condition. All is process and in all there is rest, but the rest is just a mere illusion of the “still point,” which is a part of the continuously turning world. T. S. Eliot’s message revolves somewhere off the edge of our consciousness. Stopping place, as an idea, is a receptacle of both conditions such as beginning and ending. Stoppings are stations, hence delusory “still places,” awaiting our arrival only to see us off embarking farther on. Stations must therefore bear individual features of one’s needs and desires when encountered somewhere on our way. Moreover, they must correspond with feelings and thoughts aroused by a particular spot. Stations, like feasts, are moveable as well, and the world, like the walk, is studded with spots overgrown or newly trodden; neglected, forgotten; buried and excavated afresh. They are a particular perception of a place; they entail one’s quest for bonds and ties. Snyder remembered:

About the stations on Mt. Tam: Allen, Phil and I hit on them as we went saying, “Here’s a good place.” Finding, in Shinto terms, a strong sense of “power” at some spots by virtue of the shapes of the rocks, the shapes of the trees, the location, ambience, sense of a spirit presence. Also, it was easy to stop at springs like the Old Rock Springs tank (now gone) and so forth. As for the charms that we chose . . . I would say though that Phil, Allen, and I chose them out of our own eclectic Zen/Vajrayana base, and I wouldn’t look at them as essential per se to the trip. . . . I think that main thing is that we become comfortable with doing some sort of mantra, some kind of chanting. I will always be partial of course to the Buddhist chanting – an idea I got incidentally from the Mt. Hiei school, which has a number of stations on routes around the mountain at each of which the monk stops and does some chanting. I went once with a musician who stopped at every station with me and played a little flute piece. He also was moved to stop at some other locations as he went and play . . . <sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Gary Snyder, letter to Mathew Davis, January 19, 2004, quoted in OM, 9.

For Philip Whalen stations are “shrines” that seem to untie themselves from the ground and open into the sacred which, undoubtedly, emanates from the places they stop at and trails they follow. Chosen on the individual ground, the stations constitute ten stoppings of formal significance in Snyder’s poem, “The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais,” and eight shrines in Whalen’s “Opening the Mountain, Tamalpais: 22:x:65.” To accompany the map and to embrace the spirit of chants and *dhāranī*’s (magic spells or mantras) the two poems are quoted here in their entirety.

“The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais” by Gary Snyder

Walking up and around the long ridge of Tamalpais, “Bay Mountain,” circling and climbing—chanting—to show respect and clarify the mind. Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg, and I learned this practice in Asia. So we opened a route around Tam. It takes a day.

#### STAGE ONE

Muir Woods: the bed of Redwood Creek just where the Dipsea Trail crosses it. Even in the driest season of this year some running water. Mountains make springs.

Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra  
Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Four Vows<sup>98</sup>

Splash across the creek and head up Dipsea Trail, the steep wooded slope and into meadows. Gold dry grass. Cows—a huge pissing, her ears out, looking around with large eyes and mottled nose. As we laugh. “—Excuse us for laughing at you.” Hazy day, butterflies tan as grass that sit on silver-weathered fenceposts, a gang of crows. “I can smell fried chicken” Allen says—only the simmering California laurel leaves. The trail winds crossed and intertwining with a dirt jeep road.

#### TWO

A small twisted ancient interior live oak splitting a rock outcrop an hour up the trail

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
The Heat Mantra<sup>99</sup>

A tiny chörten before this tree.

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<sup>98</sup> The Four Great Vows: However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them; However inexhaustible the passions are; I vow to extinguish them; However immeasurable the Dharmas are, I vow to master them; However incomparable the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it. D. T. Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (Filiquarian Publishing, LCC), p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> Mantra to Chanda Maharoshana, Great Lord of Heat (NAMAHA SAMANTA VAJARANAM CHANDA MAHAROSHANA SPHATAYA HUM TRAKA HAM HAM), OM, p. 39.



Into the woods. Maze fence gate. Young Douglas fir, redwood, a new state of being. Sun on madrone: to the bare meadow knoll. (Last spring a bed of wild iris about here and this time too, a lazuli bunting).

### THREE

A ring of outcropped rocks. A natural little dolmen-circle right where the Dipsea crests on the ridge. Looking down a canyon to the ocean – not so far.

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Hari Om Namō Shiva

And on to Pan Toll, across the road, and up the Old Mine Trail. A doe and a fawn, silvery gray. More crows.

### FOUR

Rock Springs. A trickle even now—

The Sarasvatī for Removing Disasters

—in the shade of a big oak spreading out the map on a picnic table. Then up the Benstein Trail to Rifle Camp, old food-cache boxes hanging from wires. A bit north, in the oak woods and rocks, a neat little saddhu hut built of dry natural bits of wood and parts of old crates; roofed with shakes and black plastic. A book called *Harmony* left there. Lunch by the stream, too tiny a trickle, we drink water from our bota. The food offerings are swiss cheese sandwiches, swede bread with liverwurst, salami, jack cheese, olives, gomoku-no-moto from a can, grapes, panettone with apple-currant jelly and sweet butter, oranges, and soujouki—greek walnuts in grape-juice paste. All in the shade, at Rifle Camp.

### FIVE

A notable serpentine outcropping, not far after Rifle Camp.

Om Shri Maitreya  
Dhāranī for Removing Disasters

### SIX

Colier spring—in a redwood grove—water trickling out a pipe.

Dhāranī of the Great Compassionate One

California nutmeg, golden chinquapin, the fruit with burrs, the chaparral. Following the north Side Trail.

### SEVEN

Inspiration Point.

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Mantra for Tārā<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> An earth goddess figure.

Looking down on Lagunitas. The gleam of water storage in the brushy hills. All that smog—and Mt. St. Helena faintly in the north. The houses of San Anselmo and San Rafael, once large estates . . . “Peacock Gap Country Club”—Rocky brush climb up the North Ridge Trail.

## EIGHT

Summit of Mt. Tamalpais. A ring of rock pinnacles around the lookout.

Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra  
Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Dhāranī of the Great Compassionate One

Hari Krishna Mantra  
Om Shri Maitreya  
Hari Om Namō Shiva

All about the bay, such smog and sense of heat. May the whole planet not get like this. Start the descent down the Throckmorton Hogback Trail. (Fern Canyon an alternative.)

## NINE

Parking lot of Mountain Home. Cars whiz by, sun glare from the west.

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Gopala Mantra.

Then, access from the California Alpine Club, the Ocean View Trail goes down. Some yellow broom flowers still out. The long descending trail into shadowy giant redwood trees.

## TEN

The bed of Redwood Creek again.

Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra  
Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Hari Om Namō Shiva  
Hari Krishna Mantra  
Four Vows

—standing in our little circle, blowing the conch, shaking the staff rings, right in the parking lot. (OM, 17-20)

“Opening the Mountain, Tamalpais: 22:x:65” by Philip Whalen

Hot sunny morning, Allen and Gary, here they come, we are ready. Sutras in creek-bed, chants and lustrations, bed of Redwood Creek John Muir’s Woods.

First Shrine:                      Oak tree grows out of rock  
    Field of Lazuli Buntings, crow song

- Second Shrine: Trail crosses fire road at hilltop  
Address to the Ocean  
Siva music addressed to the peaks
- Third Shrine: Rock Springs music for Sarasvati  
Remember tea with Mike and JoAnn years ago  
Fresh water in late dry season
- Fourth Shrine: Rifle Camp lunch, natural history:  
Allen: “What do wasps do?”  
Gary: “Mess around.”
- Fifth Shrine: Colier Spring, Great Dharani & Tara music
- Sixth Shrine: Inspiration Point, Gatha of Vajra Intellectual Heat Lightning
- TO THE SUMMIT: North Side Trail, scramble up vertical North  
Knee WHERE IS THE MOUNTAIN?
- Seventh Shrine: The Mountain top: Prajnaparamita Sutra, as many  
others as could be remembered in music & song
- Eighth Shrine: The parking lot, Mountain Home  
Sunset Amida going West  
O Gopala, & Devaki Nandi na Gopala  
with a Tibetan encore for Tara,  
Song against disaster.

RETURN TO CREEKBED, MUIR WOODS: Final pronouncement of the Sutras

We marched around the mountain, west to east  
top to bottom—from sea-level (chanting dark stream bed  
Muir Woods) to bring summit sun victory of gods and  
buddhas, conversion of demons, liberation of all sentient  
beings in all worlds past present and future.<sup>101</sup>

Snyder’s poem appeared in his *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996), and was republished ten years later, in a book devoted entirely to Mt. Tam trails, by Matthew Davis and M. F. Scott, where Whalen’s “Opening the Mountain” appeared as well. The book presents circumambulations done by the poets and is accompanied by essays written by Davis and Scott. The circular, mandala-like passage recreated anew with

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<sup>101</sup> Philip Whalen, “Opening the Mountain, Tamalpais: 22:x:65” in *On Bear’s Head* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.: 1958), pp. 307-308.

each new walkers, rejuvenated with popularity after 1965 since when a number of circumambulations was done.<sup>102</sup>

With attention paid on practice, which later on becomes Snyder's "practice of the wild," walking / hiking is for him a way of learning the terrain, a careful in-take of its paths and trails, close observation of plants, trees, and animals that live there; it is a celebration of the world such as it unrolls itself in front of him; whereas, the world is places that consist of tiny microscopic parts, each element dependent on each other, and together making the whole possible and surviving. In this way, the term 'relationship' looms as close interdependence of beings comprising life, its cycles, changes, and forming a long chain of dependencies. The lessons of the wild gathered in his lifetime are crystallized in a book of essays "The Practice of the Wild" (1999), where he says,

[t]he wild requires that we learn the terrain, nod to all the plants and animals and birds, ford the streams and cross the ridges and tell a good story when we get back home.<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, the relationship is that of a man and the terrain, the ground he walks on, the earth giving life and taking life within her succulent depths. Walking / hiking is a revolution, which uproots man from his prior position among creatures and places him among all the living, in the world such as it is. Davidson explains:

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<sup>102</sup> February 10, 1967: first public circumambulation of Mt. Talmapais, led by Snyder and Ginsberg. One month earlier the poets led a circumambulation of a celebratory space which was a part of the Human Be-In (the onset of the Hippie Movement) in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco; April 8, 1968: circumambulation led on the Buddha's birthday by Whalen and Ginsberg; April 8, 1969: the Mountain Yogis circumambulation led by Dr. Neville Warwick; September 21, 1969: Fall equinox circumambulation led by Ginsberg; April 8 1971: circumambulation led by Matthew Davis among others on the occasion of Buddha's birthday; September 21, 1971: Fall equinox circumambulation; September 1974 to present: walks led by Matthews four times a year on Sundays closest to equinoxes and solstices; October 22, 1975: a tenth-anniversary walk led by Davis, Tom Killion, Robin Collier, Stephen Post; May 19, 1990: circumambulation led by Snyder and David Robertson and forty-five faculty and students from the UC-Davis; March 20, 1994: as a result of *Sunset Magazine's* article circumambulation counted over one hundred hikers; May 17, 1998: walk followed by a Stanford University symposium on Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Snyder led the hike. (OM, 8-9).

<sup>103</sup> Gary Snyder, Jim Harrison, *The Etiquette of Freedom. Gary Snyder, Jim Harrison and The Practice of the Wild. A Companion to the Film*, p. 57.

[h]iking for Snyder is a way of furthering a political, social, and spiritual revolution. The ground of all right living (one of the meanings of *dharma*) is, literally, the ground we walk on. Hiking at one and the same time frees us from a dependency on nonessential things (the products of *dharma* in another of its senses). The essential nature of things is not an Aristotelian plot nor a Hegelian dialectic, and does not lead to a goal. Therefore, it cannot be object of a quest, as for the holy grail. Instead, it goes round and round and on and on, rather like the hike that Kerouac and Snyder took [on Mt. Tam] and even more like the poem that Snyder projected writing and told Kerouac about as they walked.<sup>104</sup>

Hunt adds here yet another ongoing journey, namely, the “compositional” one that took almost forty years until *Mountains and Rivers Without End* were published. Hunt explains the complex relationship of going round and round without any accomplishment awaiting on top. It rather resonates with the old Buddhist saying, “if you climbed a mountain, keep climbing,” or the continuity of the scroll after it has ended. With boundaries erased, one is closer to the Buddhist notion of impermanence, in which changes continue their whirling way through things. Therefore, walking becomes meditation. Conjoining the two activities one gets an insight in their true meanings, or rather in that which they offer. In the same way, circumambulating becomes a complex practice, a fusion of energies such as physical and spiritual. M. F. Scott writes in his essay “Starting Out:”

On foot, circumambulating the mountain becomes a richly complex journey with many twists, turns, irregularities that, seen from a distance, add up to a wildly irregular, clockwise spiral walk from bottom to top of Mt. Tamalpais, starting and ending at the same Redwood Creek site. Near East Peak, the descending path crosses the ascending path for the only time in the walk. For the first two-thirds of the circumambulation, East Peak is on the right; during the descent, it’s mainly behind. (OM, 4-5)

The description seems to correlate with Snyder’s way of referring to walking mountainous ridges, which is something of an “irregular dance” when seen from the distance. However, circumambulation is paced with regard to summer and winter solstices. It offers a kind of symmetry of natural cycles. The walk is therefore

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<sup>104</sup> Roberston, „Real Matter,” p. 220.

measured and divided into units and in effect “becomes a purposeful measure of the natural time.” (OM, 5) The sun becomes a point of reference by giving more time on summer solstices and less time on winter ones. Hence, the day is an “understandable measure of time.” (OM, 5) This being a more profound dimension of the walk gives a satisfying unity and a feeling of completeness when the entire circumambulation is done. The irregular spiral that the walk comprises, which at the same time is paced and measured, conditioned by the time of year, also resonates with paradoxes. As Scott enumerates them they touch upon various aspects of the walk.

There’s little room to dally or meander or take an alternate route, as the walk demands a selfless discipline created by the group custom. It is highly personal but takes place in a group. It is private but takes place in a public setting. There is an individual-group, private-public, and sacred-secular tension of constant movement between these spheres. (OM, 5)

The private sphere seems to border with the public one, and as there is one point, near East Peak, at which the ascending and the descending paths intersect, the walkers literally enter each other’s space, move through it, traverse “the irregular spiral” of somebody else’s route while completing their own circle. There are usually more co-existing walks. They pass near each place with their own space carried with them since “circumambulators carry their personal, private, and sacred ritual space with them.” (OM, 5) Hence, the latter one becomes a patchwork of divergent intentions that underlie each person’s ascent. Moreover, as a result of myriads of circumambulators, what one arrives at is the palimpsest of spiraling trails; circular patterns re-made with the movement of feet and burdens of energy.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Lookout.**

#### **A Study of a Cultural Phenomenon.**

## 4.1. Background Information.

The very imagery of a lookout tower instantaneously deconstructs it as a dwelling place, splits the image and directs us into thinking of the tower in terms of the interior and the exterior. However, the term itself was not the first one used to refer to a framework structure perched on top of a mountain as an observation point, a convenient place to look out into the surrounding area in order to detect fires which were common in the mountains of Washington and Oregon, and often endured throughout the summer (photo 8, 9) “Great fires on the Upper Skagit were as old as the Cascadian east wind, a foehn wind that could keep a fire going for months with its bellows-like rise and fall,” describes Suiter. Fires were often started by lightening as well as by native people who cleared trails and burnt the forest understory so as to attract game. (PP, 63) In the first written accounts, Henry Custer, the first Euro-American who reached the area in 1859, writes,

The ground was still intensely hot. Smoke was still arising in all directions from numerous footlogs and trees. Fires were very frequent during summer season in these Mountain regions, to clear the woods from under brush and make travel easier. Once ignited, they generally burn the whole summer, and only the drenching rains of the fall are able to check their further spread. (PP, 63)

As the supposedly endless resource that woods would offer was gradually withering away due to the fires, there was a need to protect the “forest reserves.” A mutual enthusiasm was shared by the President Theodore Roosevelt, who added 132 million acres of woods to the Forest reserves, and Gifford Pinchot<sup>105</sup>, the chief of the Forest Service till 1910. Soon after lookouts were initiated. Those first ones were merely tents, “rag houses,” put up at higher points that offered a better view around. These

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<sup>105</sup> Gifford Pinchot was a Yale graduate who learnt forestry at schools in France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. When he returned to the States his rather extremist conservation ideas were put into practice in North Carolina, at Baltimore, where a third multimillionaire Cornelius Vanderbilt had a private reserve. Afterwards, Pinchot founded a School of Forestry at Yale University. In 1896 he became a member of the government commission whose objectives were focused on how to handle the reserves. Two years later Pinchot became the head of the Division, the later Bureau of Forestry. With the advent of the new President 123 million acres were added to the Forest Reserve System, and the reserves were transformed to the Department of Agriculture in 1905. The Bureau of Forestry became the U.S. Forest Service in 1907 where Pinchot was the chief until 1910. The Gifford Pinchot National Forest is in Southern Washington (with lookouts on Mt. Saint Helens, Tatoosh, Mount Adams, among others). For further information see: Ira Spring, Byron Fish, *Lookouts. Firewatchers of the Cascades and the Olympics* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1996), pp. 13-22.



were followed by cabins erected in more strategic areas, where telephone wires were strung before the radio became common. The boom fell on the years between 1929 and 1935. Snyder's Crater Mt. lookout (Okanogan National Forest) was erected in 1932 and removed in 1968; Sourdough Mt. Lookout (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest) – in 1917 (Ira Spring and Byron Fish's source refers to the Glee Davis lookout cabin—discussed briefly later in the chapter—which was removed and a new one was built in 1933 and stands till these days, which Suiter mentions in his *Poets on the Peaks*); Whalen's lookout was put on Sauk Mountain (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie NF) in 1928 and stood till 1980.<sup>106</sup> Throughout the years lookouts went through different architectural phases, ranging from the first free-style combinations which looked like three-storey towers, with storage room at the bottom, the living area in the middle, and a work room on top; “grange halls” appeared after them. They had a gable roof and a simple design which resembled that of a child. “Hip roof” cabins, or in other words, pyramid-shaped ones followed throughout 1930s till 1940s. Afterwards, flat-top towers were introduced.

Set on tops of mountains, encircled by piling peaks and infinite space, lookouts' actual living space was constrained to 10-by- 10-foot or in other, more common, cases till 14-by- 14-foot. Yet the living space becomes a relative term to refer to the area of a cabin whose very purpose was to transcend (to look out of) the notion of a place and encompass that which constituted the outside space. Its relation to the landscape can be expressed in Snyder's words from August, 9, 1953, “an empty water glass is no less empty than a universe full of nothing—the desk is under the pencil.”<sup>107</sup> The abundance of space flew through the cabin, making it thus an open space. Walled with windows, with shutters pulled up throughout the season, it was a body meditating, whose motionless eye lids and position of a sitting body guarded its unison with the rocks it was perched on, with the winds and light beaming down its interior as well as the mind-scape of each lookout manning this isolated place. As the desk under the pencil, beneath each cabin lied vast lonesome history of the varied and rugged Cascadian terrain, whose origins get back to some two hundred million years ago when all continents comprised a single, coherent landmass called Pangaea, at which time it

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<sup>106</sup> Ira Spring, Byron Fish, “Historical Registry of Western Washington Lookouts” in *Lookouts...*, pp. 191-210.

<sup>107</sup> Gary Snyder, “Lookout's Journal” in *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions Press, 1969), p. 19. Hereafter as LJ and a page number.

began breaking up, and thus the continents rode apart on tectonic plates. The breakup gave rise to the forming Atlantic Ocean. An oceanic ridge split apart and filled with magma (superheated liquid rock) which cooled to become basalt. In effect, a new oceanic crust emerged. The process was called seafloor spreading. As the Atlantic's growth was about two inches a year, Europe was gradually separating from North America, and Africa from South America. In the meantime, smaller microcontinent fragments broke off the larger ones. North American plate was pushed into the Pacific one, whereas the Western edge of the continent crumpled, and the heavier rock of the Pacific plate dove under the North American one for sixty to one hundred miles. This process was called subduction. In consequence, the initial wrinkling caused the first rising of the Rocky Mountains into coastal peaks which at that time rose as high as twenty thousand feet. It was at that time when microcontinents and volcanic islands approached North America and began colliding with the western coast. The masses did not subduct under the continent but conjoined it due to the light material they consisted of. Ninety to one hundred million years ago the North Cascades were a group of islands which piled up near the North American plate. Due to their collision with the plate there were formed horizontal faults which thrust and sheared the islands into thin parts. Each of those slices overlapped each other. Later tectonic forces directed them north, shaved them into thin strips. The North Cascades form themselves as series of north-south parallel belts bounded by faults. They are constantly moving north.<sup>108</sup> In reference to Snyder's book of poems, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, they are forever walking north. In this instance, the act of walking precedes all that which is human. Walking belongs in the innermost processes of the earth which make it endure in "walking on walking," (MRWE, 9) or in other words, going through divergent processes of ongoing movement, change, impermanence that is inherent in the very nature of the earth. Therefore, the ancestral components such as "gneisses and schist that once were granite, volcanic ash, sandstone, or serpentine—"<sup>109</sup> the Skagit metamorphic suite—all are the crystallized backbone of the range. These components of the North Cascades traveled immense distance of 4,400 miles, as the "magnetic data in the rock indicates they came from the equator, and shallow

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<sup>108</sup> James Martin, "Rock: Northern Peaks" in *North Cascades Crest. Notes and Images from American Alps* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1999), pp. 25-35.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

marine limestones found in the range contain fossils of a clam found only in Asia,”<sup>110</sup> yet, as James Martin suggests, the birth and upbringing of the Cascades is still not entirely clear.

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<sup>110</sup> Martin, “Rock: Northern Peaks,” p. 28.

## **4.2. Lookout – the Imagery.**

To frame my discussion of Gary Snyder's lookouting experience, I would like to explicate the term and present its various possible interpretations I have compiled and worked out while researching Snyder's writings and during the talk I had with the poet at Davis, California, in March, 2010. Even though a lookout may seem to be a totally artificial place, a post rather than a dwelling place, its imagery remains rich and multi-faceted. The lookout seen in terms of a place is an intriguing spot whose comprehension lies upon the dichotomy of the inner and the outer space. Thus, a dialectics of space is intertwined in the term as such, and negotiates between the two spheres whose distinction becomes the one between the human and the land. Therefore, it appears as the essential and central image in one's understanding of the old relation between man and the earth; moreover, it provides a tangible device which clarifies the meaning of such conceptions as perception and the mind. Despite its literal purpose discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the lookout cabin, or lookout tower, simplified to the lookout itself, relates to a limited space created by human upon the surface worked out by nature throughout millions of years. The result is a constant interplay of something that resembles human abode with the earth that has been his dwelling place since eons. What is constrained to a small area reflects itself in immensity and endlessness of the landscape; its bygone, hidden eons when it formed itself as well as the recent microscopic changes. The interplay renders the image subdued to constant alterations, embodiments, and interpretations. A lookout is the gateway to one's perception of space, yet a human is unable to do that until the external elements allow since his "doors of perception" do not touch upon the infinite; however, the infinity of space exists in terms of his awareness. A lookout in fact unravels and unpacks human understanding of space by bringing its openness as close as it is possible; by placing human inside the many, the elemental parts comprising the whole of the natural world; and finally, by flooding the human and the lookout interior with the vastness of space surrounding him, thus making him inseparable from the rocky, piling, rugged terrain. I will call a lookout a transition image since it transmutes its own nature as well as the human one; it transfigures the real, palpable object into that which is non-palpable, non-limited, endless yet existent, namely, the mind. Since it is a transition image it is a body of change, but these changes happen predominantly when human is engaged in its life. Without that a lookout remains merely a little cabin

placed on top of a mountain, and provides views across the valleys; it offers “a visual feast in all directions.”<sup>111</sup> So too did Thoreau go sauntering for the sake of “visual nourishment;” “free from all worldly engagements,” “to take pleasure in beholding the form of a mountain in the horizon,” “to know what a world he inhabit[ed];” moreover, on a deeper level, he went awandering “for the sake of his soul.”<sup>112</sup> In this case it was Thoreau who altered the convention of travelling, and regarded mountains as “worthy of worship.”<sup>113</sup> Apart from all the spatial patterns that are reflected in the lookout cabin on a disc map called the Osborne fire finder<sup>114</sup>, it somehow revivifies the interior life of a person staying there for the season, and thus offers “an inkling of another world.”<sup>115</sup> Therefore, a peak experience comes to be a spiritual journey of the one outlooking into his interior and—at the same time—lookouting into the exterior world. The interior-exterior and exterior-interior movement speaks for the Merleau-Ponty’s reciprocity of perception. The world being observed is simultaneously the one that observes. The mutual sharing of perception among the animate and the inanimate world renders this experience a profound relation to that which a person perceives. The peaks loom as natural presences, breathing, changing, coming and going when speaking in geological terms, or in Thoreauvian vein, elevating and etherealizing. Ron Dart—whose study is devoted to the peak experience based on Thomas Merton fire watch season—inspired by William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, says,

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<sup>111</sup> Ron Dart, “Thomas Merton, Gary Snyder & Cid Corman: Danger on peaks” in *Thomas Merton and the Beats on the North Cascades* (North Vancouver: Prospect Press, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>112</sup> *Henry David Thoreau: On Mountains*, Wesley T. Mott (series ed.), J. Parker Huber (ed.), Edward Hoagland (foreword), (New York: Mariner Books, 1999), pp. 1-9.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> The Osborne fire finder was an extremely precise and easy to use “stationary disc map with a rotating peep sight for pinpointing smokes in the surrounding mountains. It was mounted atop a steel shaft that went down through the center of the cabin and into the ground. Plumbed in summit bedrock and calibrated on the North Star, the Osborne fire finder was one of the greatest tools ever devised for learning terrain. Working from the center of the cabin, the lookout could scan the horizon in every direction through the Osborne’s cross-hairs and identify any mountain or drainage.” An area of twenty-two miles was charted on the map, for a coverage of 1,5000 square miles. (PP, 31) (photo 10)

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

The fact that peak and valley can be seen as much in a literal as a literary and spiritual way means that the ascent to lookouts and rambles round skyline trails, hanging lakes, talus slopes and high tarns can tell us much about our inner-life or inscape.<sup>116</sup>

A lookout is a place that embodies the human as set upon the world who undergoes its processes of change while knowing about impermanence and death. As if hung between the ‘higher up,’ the ‘high there’ and the ‘down there’ realms, a man appears as on his way through inner and outer journeys. In the case of Thomas Merton, a mountain is interpreted as a purgatorial symbol and signifies one’s ascent to insight, while, his fire watch monastery time in 1952 treats about different types of fires, some of which purge, others purify or destroy and rage. Whereas, Merton’s fires refer predominantly to the soul, in Snyder, there is more to the release from the self, zen non-attachment, and protecting the exterior as a prolongation of the “inscape.”

A lookout considered in terms of spiritual experience is often viewed as a place of seclusion, a refuge for poets and monks, who—having left the comforts of daily life—learn to indulge in tranquility of higher land, while questing for their own “higher latitudes,”<sup>117</sup> like Snyder on Crater, Sourdough; Whalen on Sauk, Sourdough; or Jack Kerouac on Desolation, among others. Since the term lookout also refers to a person manning the cabin, “lookout” and “hermit” were sometimes synonymous for the visitors, even though some of the easily accessible cabins were often reached by curious visitors. A lookout is therefore a person defined on the ground of his fundamental purpose of manning the lookout cabin. As in the case of the Chinese T’ang Dynasty recluse poet, Han Shan, whose poems Snyder translated and included in his *Riprap* collection, his place—Cold Mountain—informed his name as well as his state of mind. A lookout is the one whose existence is reduced to the essentials, such as fetching water or snow to melt for tea, preparing meals, cleaning four walls of windows, splitting wood, or trail maintenance work to be done on rainy days. Furthermore, this is somebody whose engagement with the outside world is continuous and sustained by a sense organ, the fire finder, by means of which the landscape is learned and mentally acquired, as though inscribed within the mind of the

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>117</sup> *Henry David Thoreau: On Mountains*, Wesley T. Mott (series ed.), J. Parker Huber (ed.), p. 2.

fire watcher. Thus, a lookout cabin is in a sense a unique carrier of space, where it has become reflected, and through which it flows while being subjected to changes of shifting light. At the same time, it is the mind on its way to enlightenment; the mind that works well on the darkened trails of seclusion which finally lead to the iridescent, gleaming mornings on peaks when the first “morning star” perceived was in fact Venus, “low in the east. First over Jack [Mtn], then over Crater Shan.” (PP, 75) Hence, Snyder begins his *Myths & Texts* with the words, “[t]he morning star is not a star,” (MT, 3) and ends the volume with the Thoreauvian thought, one of the most famous in the nineteenth century America, “[t]he sun is but a morning star.” (MT, 53-54) A lookout cabin comes to be somehow transfigured into a place of a literary ponderings upon Thoreau, Blake, the zen teachings, lookouting and poetry, which at one time began to fit together, as Suiter states, and open onto the notions of seeing and “being alive to what [was] about.” (LJ, 2) It was an imaginary space within the glass walled cabin when the literary voices from the past and Snyder’s own voice surfaced out of the *mélange* of his readings and thoughts, and would later be transplanted into his poems. As an example may serve the last poem from *Myths & Texts*,

*The text*

Sourdough mountain called a fire in:  
Up Thunder Creek, high on a ridge.  
Hiked eighteen hours, finally found  
A snag and a hundred feet around a fire:  
All afternoon and into the night  
Digging the fire line  
Falling the burning snag  
It fanned sparks down like shooting stars  
Over the dry woods, starting spot-fires  
Flaring in wind up the Skagit valley  
From the Sound.  
Toward morning it rained.  
We slept in mud and ashes,  
Woke at dawn, the fire was out,  
The sky was clear, we saw  
The last glimmer of the morning star.

*The myth*

Fire up Thunder Creek and the mountain-  
troy’s burning!  
The cloud mutters  
**The mountains are your mind.**  
The woods bristle there,  
Dogs barking and children shrieking  
Rise from below.

Rain falls for centuries  
 Soaking the loose rocks in space  
 Sweet rain, the fire's out  
 The black snag glistens in the rain  
 & the last wisp of smoke floats up  
 Into the absolute cold  
 Into the spiral whorls of fire  
 The storms of the Milky Way  
 "Buddha incense in an empty world"  
 Black pit cold and light-year  
 Flame tongue of the dragon  
 Licks the sun

The sun is but a morning star (Crater Mt. L.O. 1952-Marin-an 1956) (MT, 53-54)  
*(emphasis mine)*

As the above poem suggests, Snyder alludes to the "store-house-consciousness mind" (MT, viii) and ascribes certain fragments to the text part and others to the myth part, in other words, to symbols and sense-impressions, as he explains in the introduction to the volume. As the text refers to a particular experience of chasing the fire, dealing with the elemental force, the fire fills the background of the poem and pervades the mind of the observer as "the valley was filled with the churning fog from far up in British Columbia all the way down the Skagit, with tributary arms reaching far up into all the drainages so that only the highest peaks and ridges were visible, looking exactly like islands floating on the rising mist." (PP, 75) The lookout as the person who observes, the fire-watcher, the fire-chaser, looms as distanced from the life of indifference and comforts flattened to one's own needs and desires. The observer is a persona who is enriched due to the simple, the elemental, the real work, and the terrain sustained and sustaining all the living. The sense-impressions are therefore built upon the structure of the mind which is the store-house brimming with images, thoughts and emotions aroused by particular experiences. The mind is the flexible ground registering and storing the changes, keeping the patterns and joining them with other, already inscribed and engraved within the structure of that which has been hitherto experienced. Furthermore, it is the mind that reaches for the infinite, breaks open the new roads and envisages them as being prolonged in space just as the fires have their counterparts in the "spiral whorls... The storms of the Milky Way." Thus, a lookout cabin provides an important context in the understanding of the mind that a lookout may well stand for. Though initially seen as dwelling on a dichotomy of the interior and the exterior, a lookout tower functions as a transition image in one's way to grasp



the essence of the zen mind. Endistanced from the world miles down, perched on cliffs where roads and paths end or not even reach that far; yet beyond abstractions and far-fetched notions, beyond the time-bound, the space-bound, beyond the self, the lookout cabin—a house within a larger house, the universe—represents the mind which is not constrained, and not limited to the marked trails, but opens itself into the empty world reflecting itself in the mind. The mind is therefore like cool water, a tarn, mirroring the mountains piling around it; the lookout cabin whose shutters are open and the views stretch infinitely farther across the landscape. Such mind is “clear and attentive,” (RCM, 8) as the poet writes in “Piute Creek;” it reflects everything but stays unmoved, “has no meaning but that / Which sees is truly seen.” (RCM, 8) The mind non-attached is the Zen mind. The lookout cabin seen in this way reveals a certain condition of being which is intertwined with seeing into the nature of things, as well as onto the nature of the elemental, the living, the earth turning and whirling.

### **4.3. Lookouting in the Cascades (1952-1953).**

#### **4.3.1. The Changing Terrain.**

In the year 1951 Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen, Reed friends and housemates for three years, graduated from Reed College in Portland, Oregon. Whalen, seven years older than Snyder, was a World War II veteran studying on GI bill. They both reunited in the spring of 1952 when they came to San Francisco's North Beach, and rented an apartment in an old stucco building high on the south slope of Telegraph Hill, which gave the impression of "living on a bow of a ship," (PP, 6) surrounded by San Francisco's fog, with a light beaming from Coit Tower on top of the hill (photo 11) Snyder later wrote:

West Coast of those days, San Francisco was the only city, and of San Francisco, North Beach. Why? Maybe no place else in urban America where a district has such a feel of on-foot: narrow streets, high blank walls and stairstep steps of alleys and white-wood houses cheap to rent; laundry flapping in the foggy wind from flat topped roofs. Morocco; or ancient terraced fertile crescent pueblos." (PP, 7)

Snyder wrote of their place in terms of the terrain, "on the Montgomery Street drainage – at the top of a long scree slope just below a cliff." (PP, 7) Walking and climbing were intricate parts of living in San Francisco, and upper streets of Telegraph Hill were some of the steepest in the city. However, the way of negotiating the terrain has become a simultaneous, gradual process of working out a language which would not be enddistanced from his backcountry experience. It would rather integrate physical work and intellectual life. Hence, the rhythms of his poems follow the rhythms of his work which would go farther back to backcountry trail-crew work, and up high northern peaks of Oregon and Washington states; whereas intellectually spread across the Pacific Rim area – in Timothy Gray's terms – "a space where distance between East and West magically collapsed." (GSPR, 5) Outlooking into the San Francisco's "urban-natural" terrain, Snyder had a glance at the vast panorama beyond which his summer lookouting experience awaited him as if on the edge of the horizon's further end. John Suiter depicts the view in the following way:

From above the Montgomery steps, at the crest of Union Street, Gary could look down to the palm-lined Embarcadero and the stone-arched facades of the waterfront piers slanting out toward the flats of Treasure Island. To the east lay the hump of Yerba Buena Island, with the steel of the Bay Bridge bending to it, and Oakland and Berkeley on the far shore, the gray stone spike of the Campanile at UC Berkeley, small but distinct against the dark green of the background hills. For a full three-sixty, Gary could always climb a few more blocks to Coit Tower, take the elevator to the top, and peer out the arched windows at one of the most dramatic urban-cultural panoramas on the continent, east to Mount Diablo, north to Point Richmond, west to the fresh green breast of Mount Tamalpais (with a fire watch tower – Gardner Lookout – on its East Peak, if one knew to look), south to San Bruno Mountain. Only Seattle rivaled it. (PP, 8)

However, up “high still air” of the Cascadian rugged terrain wound Snyder’s way up to the “big country to the north.” (PP, 8) With the advent of the winter of 1952 Snyder applied to Marblemount, headquarters for the Skagit District of the Mount Baker Forest, for the “highest, most remote, and most difficult-of-access lookout in the district,” (PP, 3) and soon he was accepted and assigned for the season to the Crater Mountain fire lookout in the North Cascades Primitive Area. That place, precipitous, alienated and craggy, along with the vastness of the northwest landscape, has become his personal terrain, a profound map of the terrain, being at the same time a spiritual dimension of the country he has entered, the back country or the “Buddha land,” ascended due to the disciplines he practiced there. However,

[o]n his green quad map of the forest, spread out on the floor of his Montgomery Street flat in early April, Crater Mountain had looked very good. The L.O. was marked with a triangle at 8,129 feet. The interval lines defining the bald summit ridge were very, very close together on the map, and there were blue and white patches showing glacier ice on the north slopes. He could visualize the whole scene: a craggy, precipitous, barren, wind-swept place, with lots of good rock. The dotted line of the lookout trail scaled out to seven and a half miles, wriggling down through the green of dense forest to a small square indicating a guard station at the foot of the mountain. (PP, 10)

Nonetheless, Crater – “fifteen miles from the nearest roadhead, . . . the last of 8,000-foot fire lookout in the whole state,” (PP, 3) opened into the vast horizon with its wide and deep view down and across the country when looking north. Before snow on trails to Crater Mountain melted, Snyder was sent twenty-five miles farther away from Marblemount Ranger Station to the Granite Creek Guard Station, at the foot of Crater Mountain, “deep in the back country behind Ross Dam,” (PP, 4) in the heart of

what was known earlier as the Skagit mining country. The guard station was located in the shady valley where creeks, Granite and Canyon, issued together to form Ruby Creek, one of the tributaries of the Upper Skagit. There he did trail crew work for a few weeks until snows melted enough for him to get through to his lookout.

The Granite Creek Guard Station was originally a miners' cabin, erected in 1902 on the banks of the creek by "three shipwrights, who had come up the gold rush from Seattle shipyards on the advice of a waterfront fortune teller," (PP, 11) However, the gold rush days had started as early as in 1897, when a prospector from Seattle, Jack Rowely, embarked on a first Skagit gold rush, having been first led to the lucky diggings by a God-like "Hidden Hand," as Suiter briefly recounts the story in his *Poets on the Peaks*. In fact, it was the Hidden Hand Pass with Hidden Hand Creek that Jack Rowely had initially dreamed of. There was a 9,000-foot mountain looming over the scenery. The mountain was Nokomokeen, became known as Jack Mountain. With first "rubies" (garnets embedded in schist) found in the stream, the rush days dawned in the area, later called Ruby City (actually, an encampment of tents, a bunkhouse, blacksmith's and a whorehouse) with the promising Ruby Creek offerings. The peak of gold rush days spread during 1880s and lasted till the Second World War when the Skagit mines were closed. Throughout the years miners invaded from all directions, many of them packed down from British Columbia using the old Indian trail which led along the east bank of the Skagit. The Goat Trail, as it was called, led through the precipitous gorge above Newhalem, where packers constructed an "insane route of rope ladders and flimsy plank bridges." (PP, 10)

Snyder's *Lookout's Journal*, divided thematically into two subsequent lookout years, on Crater Mtn. in 1952 and on Sourdough Mtn. in 1953, opens with 22 June 52 entry, on his arrival at Marblemount Ranger Station, Skagit District, Mt. Baker National Forest.

Hitchhiked here, long valley of the Skagit. Old cars parked in the weeds, little houses in fields of bracken. A few cows, in stumpland.

Ate at the "parkway café" real lemon in the pie  
"—why don't you get a jukebok in here"  
"—the man said we weren't important enough" (LJ, 1)

The initial sparseness of the back country seems to be go well with the economy of language in the first entry. “Here” becomes now a space higher than the valley, opening itself more to experience and perception than closing itself in details; things furnishing a place, covering the surface in a sense. Things are grasped quickly, registered like spots on the overall back country territory. The space is vaster and greater than perceived, yet things are arranged in a particular way; whereas, a reader is presented with some objective fragments. So is the page of the first journal entry. The syntax becomes abbreviated and – as Sherman Paul notices – it works “by means of the art of omission”<sup>118</sup> by what the objective fragments suggest. They depict old cars in the weeds, little houses, a few cows in the stumpland, namely, fragments of a place that seems not important enough, “frequented and commercial enough for a jukebox, but still backward enough in its values.”<sup>119</sup> With each entry being a “formal design,” “a field of experience,”<sup>120</sup> Snyder talks of things as of parts constituting a larger whole. The entries, arranged irregularly, relate to rhythm, or rather create a manner of reading the journal. The ground for understanding it seems to issue from the 9 July entry, and will be clarified later on with the words of Hui-nêng.

the boulder in the creek never moves  
the water is always falling  
together (LJ, 2)

All the fragments, namely, things perceived, things thought, and things noted down, come to “fall together” to become whole. In other words, the essence of the world never dissolves, though all things flow incessantly, and in effect, impermanence is the only stable thing one can be sure of.

The second journal entry noted down at Marblemount, 28 June, refers to speech by Blackie Burns, to whom – among other foresters – *Riprap* was dedicated. Burns was the Assistant Ranger at Marblemount, one of the roughs (in Whitmanian’s terms), a forester, who greeted Snyder on his arrival at Marblemount in such a way: “Boy, you

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<sup>118</sup> Sherman Paul, „From Lookout to Ashram. The Way of Gary Snyder” in CE, p. 63.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

have no idea what you've gotten yourself into." (PP, 3) However, his strong speech is referred to by Sherman Paul as the one touching upon Snyder's ecological concerns.

Blackie Burns:  
"28 years ago you could find a good place to fish.  
GREEDY & SELFISH      NO RESPECT FOR THE LAND  
tin cans, beer bottles, dirty dishes  
a shit within a foot of the bed (LJ, 1) (*spacing original*)

The above lines serve as a kind of announcement of Snyder's concerns, and bring forth his discipline to be practiced when being up on the lookout, and his attitude of mind when looking for enlightenment. Sherman Paul explains that greed and selfishness, the prime causes of suffering and dissatisfaction on earth, as Buddha taught, were to be overcome by disciplining the mind, by changing one's point of view, ("From Lookout to Ashram," CE, 64) by "adjusting the mechanism of perception." (LJ, 4) Burns' speech is studded with notions which are of significance to Snyder, and these are: "greed" and "selfishness" to be battled by "respect" of the "land," the body humans walk on. They are also the visions of his poetry incorporated in Buddhist thoughts, zen discipline, real work as they revolve around his daily experience on Crater and Sourdough.

In early July Snyder arrived at Granite Creek Guard Station. The trail to Crater Mtn. L.O., inaccessible till the end of June, finally let him pack to his lookout cabin, though the way led through – in a sense – an envisaged trail with some marks painted on the rocks to show the way up. The trail was gradually altering its form, wriggling up, narrowing, till it finally melted with the shapes of the rocks. Suiter gives the following description of Snyder's way up to Granite Creek Guard Station:

From the Forest Service compound in Marblemount there was a paved road only to Newhalem; after that a rough gravel road wound through the Skagit Gorge to Diablo. After Diablo there was no road at all; a funicular lift took Snyder to the lake above Diablo Dam, and from there a tugboat ferried him for a half an hour to the foot of Ross Dam. There, a "sky hook" crane hoisted him up the 650-foot face of the dam on a wooden platform – quite a ride, but at the top of the dam it was still another day on foot through the woods of Ruby Mountain and up Ruby Creek to the guard station. (PP, 4)

There he met Harold Vail and Jim Baxter who had already made their way to the guard station. Vail was a nineteen-year-old fellow from Marblemount, who had manned a lookout on Hidden Lake the year before; Baxter was a seasonal man with a lot of backcountry skills, a sort of a “fruit tramp,” as Suiter puts it, who “was temperamentally unsuited to holding down a straight job in the towns, or even in the woods for very long.” (PP, 4) In his 9 July entry Snyder notes:

A ramshackle little cabin built by Frank Beebe the miner.  
Two days walk to here from roadhead.  
Arts of the Japanese: moon-watching  
insect-hearing (LJ, 2)

The above reference to the Guard Station at the Granite Creek is a description of the miner’s cabin from 1902, which – in the early twenties – was “taken over by one Frank Beebe, who had first come to Washington from Ohio in 1895 at the age of twenty.” (PP, 13) Having met some prospectors striving for the “Glory Hole” on Ruby Creek, Beebe went along and spent a season panning for gold until he finally got back to Bellingham, and after that went to Alaska. However, after some time Beebe returned to the Ruby Creek area, claimed the cabin and relocated it to the “shady flat in the fork of Granite and Canyon Creeks.” (PP, 13) After his decision to work for the Forest Service the cabin became a guard station which was maintained until late 1950s. These were the last years when the cabin served its purpose. Snyder observes places, people and thoughts very carefully so as to register all objective fragments fitting in his backcountry experience. Fragmented cabin somehow enlivens with stories which it strangely encapsulates and liquidates as the gold rush days had floated off about twenty years ago. So too was Ruby City under water at that time. Yet other objective fragments seem impermanent and stable in the scenery, such as the glow of the moon and the insects’ sounds reverberating their inconspicuous life. There’s place for the Japanese art of moon-watching, as well as the Buddhist religious practice of putting up prayer flags – all other fragments come to enrich the scenery, and yet they are left out “at the right spot.” (LJ, 5) Patrick D. Murphy refers to it in *A Place for Wayfaring* as a combination of an “observation-of-the-phenomenal-world orientation” with a “religious-philosophical orientation.” (PFW, 91) The ground for this attitude may be found in Snyder’s interview from 1985, when he said that “Buddhism is not

just a religion or practice of personal, psychological self-knowledge and enlightenment, but it is also a practice of actualizing personal insights in the real world.”<sup>121</sup> These insights emerge when speaking of form, which is emptiness, yet it is the ultimate fullness of life. The ponderings on form appeared in Snyder’s 3 August journal entry:

form—leaving things out at the right spot  
ellipse, is emptiness

these ice-scoured valleys  
swarming with plants (LJ, 5)

Considering the fact that “Lookout’s Journal,” part A. Crater Mountain, consists of sixteen entries for a period of end of June till mid-September in San Francisco, it is not a diary or a daybook, as Sherman Paul claims. Dated entries revolve around Snyder’s ascent, stay at a guard station, stay on top, and descent. These events are endistanced from one another by way of isolated space, the graphic and the temporal one, where ellipse functions as a supposed measure of the distance, the eraser of form and approach to emptiness which is the vast space of the north Cascadian craggy terrain. Therefore, words that come to fill the pages of his journal seem to be cascading up and down empty pages; they are experience grasped and made palpable, to some extent, for the readers as well as for the poet himself. Sherman Paul says of “fertile emptiness.” (“From Lookout to Ashram,” CE, 65) It lurks somewhere at elevation of complete nocturnal silence and darkness, and numbing freeze in mid-summer time. Therefore, the elliptically fertile emptiness is spacious enough for Snyder to read, write in his journal, ponder on the nature of things, do the physical work, meditate, to “think like a mountain,” – in Aldo Leopold’s words, and reject the world spreading down the mountain’s trails. At Granite Creek Guard Station Snyder read the Sutra of Hui-nêng, the illiterate woodcutter who became one of the greatest Zen masters. Hence the second part of 9 July entry is as follows,

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<sup>121</sup> Snyder, quoted by Patrick D. Murphy, PFW, p. 90.



Reading the sutra of Hui Nêng,

one does not need universities and libraries  
one need be alive to what is about

saying “I don’t care” (LJ, 2)

It was shortly before Snyder together with Whalen first encountered D. T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism. First Series*, and the *Manual of Zen Buddhism*. Both Suzuki’s writings and Hui-nêng’s sutra were always at hand, near the top of Snyder’s backpack. Many of Suzuki’s writings emphasized the essence of self-knowledge as opposed to book learning. So did Hui-nêng’s teachings.

### 4.3.2. No Importance Upon Words and Letters.

The history of Zen begins with the coming of Bodhidharma (the twenty-eighth patriarch of Zen in the orthodox line of transmission) from India to China at the beginning of the sixth century at the time of Emperor Wu’s of the Liang Dynasty (502-556) reign (r. 502-549). Bodhidharma’s purpose was to spread the special message, “to transmit the wordless insights of meditation as a means of salvation,”<sup>122</sup> which is conveyed in the following lines, though they were formulated later, and not by Bodhidharma himself, as Suzuki claims.<sup>123</sup>

A special transmission outside the scriptures;  
No dependence upon words and letters;  
Direct pointing at the soul of man;  
Seeing into one’s nature and the attainment of Buddhahood.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Joan Qionglin Tan, *Han Shan, Chan Buddhism and Gary Snyder’s Ecopoetic Way* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), p. 33. Hereafter as HCBS and a relevant page number.

<sup>123</sup> For a more detailed account see: D. T. Suzuki, “History of Zen Buddhism from Bodhidharma to Hui-nêng (Yenō) (A.D. 520 – A. D. 713)” in *Essays in Zen Buddhism. First Series* (New York: Grove Press, 1949), pp. 163-228.

<sup>124</sup> D . T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism. First Series* (New York: Grove Press, 1949), p. 176. Hereafter as EZB and a relevant page number.

Nonetheless, the dispute on the origin of Zen has long been divided whether its Indian origins are germane to its essence, or it can be separated from them, for – as Suzuki puts it – Zen is the product of the Chinese mind, and a practical interpretation of the Doctrine of Enlightenment. (EZB, 163) Joan Tan adds that Zen (Chinese *Chan*), typical branch of Chinese Buddhism, absorbed influences from the Chinese philosophy and religious ideas, but also from Mahayana Buddhist doctrines (dwelling on the essence of the Buddha Mind within Confucianism and Daoism) being parts of other branches of Chinese Buddhism (*Tiantai, Huayan, Qingtu* schools). (HCBS, 33) Having arrived in the southern parts of China, Bodhidharma, after his unpleasant meeting with the emperor, traveled north to Shaolin Temple on Mount Song. There he spent nine years on wall contemplation in a cave. Hence, known as *Biguan Brahmin* – due to his practice known as *biguan* (gazing at the wall in meditation) – Bodhidharma transmitted the *Lankavatara Sutra* to his disciple Hui-k’o (487-593). Next in succession were: Seng-ts’an (d. 606), Tao-hsin (580-651), Hung-jên (601-674), and Hui-nêng (638-713).<sup>125</sup> Tao-hsin introduced some innovations to Zen Buddhist mode of life and meditation by founding a first Zen community on Mount Shuangfeng. Thereafter, in the Tang and Song periods, daily activities, with the slogan “sweep the garden, any size,”<sup>126</sup> were part of communal monastic life.

Hui-nêng came from Hsin-chou in the southern parts of China. After the death of his father he supported his mother by selling wood in town. One day as he was leaving a house where he had sold some firewood, he heard a traveler passing by and reciting a Buddhist Sutra. The words of the sutra deeply touched his heart, as Suzuki recounts. The sutra was the Diamond Sutra (*Vajracchedikā-sūtra*), and the master was the fifth patriarch residing at Yellow Plum in Chin-chou. In effect, Hui-nêng set off to reach Yellow Plum, which took him almost a month. Once he found himself there, he proceeded to see Hung-jên (Hong Ren) who immediately asked him where he came from. Hui-nêng responded: “I am a farmer from Hsin-chou and wish to become a Buddha.” (EZB, 206) Hung-jên’s reaction was the following, “So you are the Southerner, but the Southerners have no Buddha-nature; how could you expect to attain Buddhahood?” However, it did not discourage Hui-nêng, who pleased the

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<sup>125</sup> For a more detailed study see: Suzuki, “History of Zen Buddhism from Bodhidharma to Hui-nêng (Yenō) (A.D. 520 – A. D. 713),” pp.163-228; Joan Qionglin Tan, “Chan, Mind and Nature,” (HCBS, 32-47).

<sup>126</sup> The slogan quoted by Snyder in his “Four Changes” in *Turtle Island*, p. 91.

master with his witty answer, “[t]here may be Southerners and Northerners, but as far as Buddha-nature goes, how could you make such a distinction in it.” (EZB, 206) In Hui-nêng’s “Personal History” he emphasizes the fact that Buddha-nature has neither south nor north. Since that time Hui-nêng became a rice-pounder for the Brotherhood and was employed there for more than eight months until there came time for Hung-jên to select his spiritual successor. The story, recounted in many Chan history books, refers to the selection on the basis of disciples’ thorough understanding of the religion. The supposed successor was thought to be Shên-hsiu (606-706), the most learned disciple practicing under the guidance of Hung-jên, who composed a poem on the wall of the south hallway<sup>127</sup>, and in this way, presented his view. The poem read,

‘This body is the Bodhi-tree,  
The soul is like a mirror bright;  
Take heed to keep it always clean,  
And let not dust collect on it.’ (EZB, 206)

The body is the tree of enlightenment,  
The mind is like a clear mirror-stand.  
Polish it diligently time and again,  
Not letting it gather dust. (SH, 8)

Nonetheless, it was not until two days later when Hui-nêng heard a boy reciting the verse, which made him realize that Shên-hsiu’s poem had not revealed the “fundamental essence.” (SH, 9) The rice-pounder asked the boy where he knew the verse from, upon which he replied impertinently: “You aborigine! Don’t you know that the Grand Master said for people in this world the matter of birth and death is serious—if they want to get the transmission of the robe and the teaching, he had the disciples compose verses. If anyone has realized the great meaning, he will transmit the robe and the teaching and make him the Sixth Grand Master.” (SH, 9) Wanting to be led where the verse was written, Hui-nêng asked the boy to take him there, and to

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<sup>127</sup> Suzuki refers here to the outside wall of the meditation hall, where the first poem appeared, whereas Thomas Cleary, in his translation of Hui-nêng’s sutra writes: “The senior monk Shên-hsiu wrote this formless verse on the wall of the south hallway; the Grand Master had everyone memorize it, saying that if one puts this verse into practice one will avoid falling into evil ways, and if one puts this verse into practice one will gain great benefit.” In Thomas Cleary (trans.) “Personal History. Realization of the Teachings and Inheritance of the Robe” in *The Sutra of Hui-neng Grand Master of Zen. With Hui-neng’s commentary on the Diamond Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1998), p. 9. Hereafter as SH and a relevant page number.

read the poem for him, as he was illiterate. At that time, there was also the lieutenant military inspector of Chiang Province, Chang-Chih-yung, who read the verse aloud. On hearing it Hui-nêng had his own verse and made the lieutenant write it on the wall by saying: “If you want to learn supreme enlightenment, don’t slight beginners. A person of the lowliest rank may have the very highest knowledge, while a person of the highest rank may lack practical wisdom. If you slight people, you will have done incalculable wrong.” (SH, 9-10) Joan Qionglin Tan, in her thorough study on Chan, ecology and Snyder, explains that in the Southern School of Zen (led by Hui-nêng), there is “no longer a gap between the sage and the ordinary, for everyone has the Buddha Mind: perfect, complete and inherently pure [and] a practitioner only needs to find the Buddha Mind by sudden enlightenment.” (HCBS, 37) In the same study we find Bodhidharma’s words coming from the treatise *Erru sixing lun*,<sup>128</sup> accepted under his name, “One must believe undoubtedly that all sentient beings, both the ordinary and the sage, possess the same True Nature, which is, however, falsely covered up by adventitious dusts of ignorance [‘false sense’] and makes indiscernible to the ordinary.” (HCBS, 33) Hui-nêng’s verse went as follows,

‘The Bodhi is not like the tree,  
The mirror bright is nowhere shining;  
As there is nothing from the first,  
Where can the dust itself collect?’ (EZB, 207)

Enlightenment originally has no tree,  
And a clear mirror is not a stand.  
Originally there’s not a single thing—  
Where can dust be attracted? (SH, 10)

Having acclaimed the verse as “still not perception of essence,” (SH, 10) the Grand Master erased it with his shoe; however, surreptitiously met Hui-nêng at night and explained the Diamond Sutra to him. A sentence he heard, “[y]ou should activate the mind without dwelling on anything,” (SH, 11) made him realize that “all things are not

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<sup>128</sup> Joan Qionglin Tan notes that *Erru sixing lun* (*Erh-ju ssu-hsing lun, Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices*), that is two ways of entering into enlightenment, and four practices, such as, the recompense of enmity, the acceptance of circumstances, the absence of craving, the accordance with the Dharma. The treatise is recorded in *Lengqie shizji*, vol. 1., and it is generally regarded as the rejection of traditional complexity of Indian style practice, such as scriptural recitation, repentance rituals, and contemplative techniques, HCBS, p. 77.

apart from inherent nature.” (SH, 11) The robe of the office and the scripture were, in consequence, secretly entrusted to this unpretentious woodcutter and rice-pounder; however, to the most of disciples, the lines were simply matter of deep religious intuition rather than true understanding of the religion. Therefore, Hui-nêng was told to hide until the proper time for his “public appearance and active propaganda” (EZB, 207) came, and since that moment the robe, originally handed down from Bodhidharma, who made his way from India to China A.D. 520, should no longer be given as Zen was then fully recognized by the outside world in general, and therefore there was no need to symbolize the faith by the transference of it. “The robe is a bone of contention; let it stop with you and not be passed on. If you were to pass on this robe, your life would be in danger. You must go away immediately, for I fear people may harm you.” (SH, 11) Nevertheless, even a thought of enlightenment could not combat human passions, however irrational or elemental they were, and some of the indignant monks pursued Hui-nêng when he was taking his leave from the Brotherhood. Hui-ming was one of them though as he approached Hui-nêng, he heard, “When you do not think of good and do not think of bad, what is your original face?” (SH, 13) Upon these words Hui-ming was greatly enlightened, then asked: “Is there any further secret idea besides the secret idea just secretly spoken?” (SH, 13) The sixth patriarch’s response was, “What I have told you is no secret. If you reflect inwardly, the secret is in you.” (SH, 13) Hence, the essence of Zen message here surfaces with seeing into one’s nature.

After the death of Hung-jên, Zen split into the Northern School (‘the Gradual School’) and the Southern School (‘the Sudden School,’ or ‘Subitism’)

Gradualism (*chien*) was an approach to the ultimate reality (*li*) by analysis, the accumulation of particulars, long study.

Subitism (*tun*) . . . meant the one as opposed to the multiple, totality as opposed to particulars, the complete apprehension of reality in a sudden and complete vision.<sup>129</sup>

The Northern School was represented by Shen-hsiu, whereas, the Southern School was led by Hui-nêng, whose sudden realization upon hearing a verse from the *Diamond*

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<sup>129</sup> Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 48.

*Sutra* paved him the way to becoming the sixth patriarch. The fact that he was entrusted with the *Diamond Sutra* instead of the *Lankavatara Sutra* stood for a revolutionary change in Zen theories. The Diamond Sutra's emphasis is on 'mind' and "enlightenment" and its basic doctrine touches upon "nothingness" and "emptiness," not relying on any external objects; whereas the *Lankavatara Sutra* (which played an important role from Bodhidharma to Hung-jên) stresses the "Mind-Only," which meant the mind as "ultimate reality," and "true nature of dharmas." From Bodhidharma to Hung-jên, there was emphasis on "mind" and its ability to meditate without adhering to words and letters. Referring back to the two poems presented on the wall by Shen-hsiu and Hui-nêng, the first one compares man's body to the Bodhi-tree, and man's mind to a mirror which needs to be constantly polished in order to keep it pure, bright and shining; whereas, the latter one maintains that the mind is fundamentally pure and there is not any need to polish it since there is no dust. However, both hold it true that all sentient being possess Buddha Nature/Mind. All in all, Shen-hsiu's poem brings us closer to sitting meditation (Japanese *zazen*) and the need to fend off false thoughts, which lead to gradual enlightenment, while Hui-nêng's poem opens up a vaster space and maintains that the mind is free from any restraints, and it should be manifested naturally and directly, which brings sudden enlightenment. (HCBS, 33-37)

With the advent of the sixth patriarch's sermons Zen reached its unique form as he was predominantly concerned about "seeing," and "mind." Hence, Hui-nêng's comprehension of Zen lies in "seeing into one's own Nature." (EZB, 219) By Nature he meant Buddha-Nature, or Prajna, which was possessed by everyone, though most people fail to see it. This nature knows no multiplicity, as Suzuki recounts, it is absolute oneness. (EZB, 220) Hui-nêng was an opponent of wall meditation. He believed in the mind which was forever engaged in creative work rather than in dormant sitting meditation. Similarly, instead of book learning he encouraged to gain experience through direct encounter with the world, through mind's working and functioning. Therefore, words and letters became replaced by experiencing the world such as it was. Suzuki concludes, "[d]o not depend upon letters but let your own Prajna illuminate within yourself." (EZB, 220) Nevertheless, it needs be clarified that letters were not entirely detached, rather, they needed their mental component, for

verbal repetition without any mental realization of it was in fact ephemeral and illusory.

For Snyder, reading Hui-nêng's discourse on "Prajna" at Granite Creek, it was a sort of corroboration of the rightness of his decision to break with academia, which literally refers to the time when he had been offered an assistantship at Indiana University (where he had been in graduate linguistics and anthropology, and wrote a senior thesis on a Haida version of the Swan Maiden myth) by the chair of the anthropology department. Yet, as Suiter stated, his voice was too poetic and potent for academe. (PP, 7)

### **4.3.3. On a Spiritual Path.**

11 July journal entry reads like a transition between the terrains left behind and those to come so as to climb to the summit of Crater Mountain.

Cut fresh rhubarb by the bank  
the creek is going down  
last night caught a trout  
today climbed to the summit of Crater Mountain and back  
high and barren: flowers I don't recognize (LJ, 3)

Snyder, together with Harold Vail, Jim Baxter and Andy Wilcox, the packer, bringing mules behind them, followed a steep Forest Service trail, originally built for pack stock, Crater Mountain Trail, going up the densely wooded southern flank of the mountain, wriggling through old-growth conifer, Douglas fir, ponderosa, lodgepole pine and silver fir as they moved higher. The mountain, "socked by clouds" (PP, 24) did not offer any view of the summit. After some time, there appeared a "shallow, green tarn rimmed by a mile-long amphitheater of steep talus slides and metamorphic crags piling up the Crater's cloud-hidden summit." (PP, 24) Crater Lake, the one not be looked upon in the beliefs of the Klamath Indians since, according to one of the legends, the Chief of the Below World was driven into his home through the opening in the mountain which led to the lower world. Afterwards, the opening fell upon him forming a hole in it. The rain fell for many years and filled the hole with water since

when peace and quiet finally covered the earth and never did the Chief left his home. Other legend tells of the lake as the home of the Spirit, therefore it was forbidden to look upon sacred places. With all the beliefs now resting at the bottom of the lake, or in the world below, the shores offered a short break on their way up the mountain. After that the pack trail transmuted into a narrow path, too difficult for the mules, so they were off-loaded on a protruding flank of basalt since when Snyder and Harold, with their mules and supplies, heavy radio batteries and kerosene cans, were hoisted on a stone platform with a cable line piercing higher into the invisible, foggy space. Then the trail turned into the one with “eye-bolts drilled in the rocks with fixed ropes to haul themselves up.” (PP, 25) Next an exposed ledge with yellow paint blazes showed the way up until there was a windlass for hoisting up the load. “Off the trail,” since then it was just the marks that pointed the way up the rocks, yet “on the path” to the lookout cabin which would offer new notions of seeing, both outside as well as inside one’s nature. The perception, estranged with the bizarre rock apparitions, barren, treeless terrain, was existent due to the space elongating still somewhere higher, as if awaiting another eye-bolt or rope to cling to something seemingly fixed.

The first journal entry written on the summit did not appear until 23 July, when Snyder’s language is gradually eroding, giving way to descriptions of harsh conditions in a lookout cabin secluded on the far side of the freezing North Cascadian ridges.

Crater Mountain                      Elevation: 8048 feet                      23 July

Really wretched weather for three days now – wind, hail, sleet,  
snow; the FM transmitter is broken / rather a receiver is /  
what can be done?

Even here, cold foggy rocky place, there’s life—4 ptarmigan by the A-frame,  
cony by the trail to the snowpeak.

Hit my head on the lamp,  
the shutters fall, the radio quits,  
the kerosene stove won’t stop, the wood stove  
won’t start, my fingers are too numb too write.

& this is mid-July. At least I have enough energy to read  
science fiction. One has to go to bed fully clothed. (LJ, 3)



The first days on the lookout were gradually stripping Snyder of any essentials needed to spend days and nights in a cabin, where ice formed on the north side, shutters kept slamming down due to wind, and the two-way radio kept breaking down. The only contact with the headquarters he had was dependant on the equipment he had brought with him up the Crater. However, it was part of the “zazen non-life” that kept Snyder in perfect concord with the place which itself felt as if hung above all daily life affairs. In fact, as Suiter puts it, Snyder came there “loaded for Zen” (PP, 29) with basic Zen texts, black tea, Japanese green tea, sumi brushes for doing Chinese calligraphy among others. Snyder remembers,

I really kept myself busy. I had a daily schedule which included certain periods of meditation. I did zazen certain hours, and then calligraphy practice, and then I would study a text, then zazen again, and then I'd go melt snow and bring it up and cook, and have tea and write some haiku and then do some more calligraphy practice and some more zazen, and the days just flew by. (PP, 30)

Snyder's lookout days revolved around practice and meditation as letters and words were slowly become more of an evanescent construction, or rather obstruction to the reality of that place. His daily schedule shows the mind at work, creative and flowing, close to what Hui-nêng's notion of the mind was. Rather than enclosed within itself and latent in the ongoing meditation, his mind was restless, disciplining itself in practice, detaching itself from objects, fixed notions and desires, whereas the life of it was not devoid of its content but opening and freeing itself from delusions – mere abstractions of the educated mind. It was a process of developing a regular practice, self-disciplining oneself and distancing from any attachments. It was also a process of reconfiguring perception, and learning to see when the space all around the cabin was milky-white, thick and concealed.

The stove burning wet wood—windows misted over giving the blank white light of shoji. Outside wind blows, no visibility.  
I'm filthy with no prospect of cleaning up.  
(Must learn yoga-system of Patanjali) (LJ, 4)

A place of seclusion, such as a lookout, would offer an enormous change of mind and perception. When all concepts melt in the milky fog outside, the sudden and all-

enveloping oneness, redirects experience inwards, and puts great effort to make oneself real in a world devoid of any life one used to know before. “[R]eject the human; but the tension of human events, brutal and tragic, against a non-human background? Like Jeffers? (LJ, 4) Caught in somewhat non-verbal conversation with the inconspicuous landscape existing *a priori*, the poet was in fact part of the “collective landscape” taken for granted by other fire-watchers on tops of other mountains (Sourdough, Desolation) constituting the community of lookouts, dormant to the world below though vibrant and engaged in their own activities. The community’s only thread of belonging to a single, diversely-experienced, Cascadian space holding them dispersed, was based on communication among lookouts. Snyder observes in his journal that “the moral imperative is to COMMUNICATE.” (LJ, 9) In the enormous vastness of space encompassing them all around, to communicate means to “view language as an incarnate medium, . . . an expressive gesture, . . . as active sensuous presences afoot in the material landscape” (SPS, 89) David Abram, whose study is predominantly based on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, aimed at reestablishing connections between the human and more-than-human world by reconfiguring perception and language. Of language he says, “[a]t the heart of any language . . . is a poetic productivity of expressive speech.” (SPS, 84) Yet to communicate involves the act of speech which is made audible by means of a piece of technology; it is fully dependent on the equipment, the radio waves spreading voice through space and making it real, yet disembodied, miles away from where it originated. Voice is then a living matter, priceless entity evoking the need to confirm one’s presence among rocks and fog surrounding the lookout during first days. Following Abram, one begins to see his point when approaching the description of a language which is woven anew and issues from silence.

A living language is continually being made and remade, woven out of silence by those who speak. . . . And this silence is that of our wordless participation, of our perceived immersion in the depths of an animate, expressive world. (SPS, 84)

Those depths of the world are recognized by experiencing and becoming an integral part of its silence at highest elevations which render being a concatenation of experience (“that drug” LJ, 9), notes Snyder in the 12 August journal entry. Series of things to be done on the lookout come to envisage a trajectory of the real work

compiled with the intellectual life he maintained there. In the same entry he says, “. . . the poor lonely lookouts, radioing forth and back.” (LJ, 9) However, the loneliness he experienced on Crater was shared by lookouts, hence they considered themselves parts of the community whose members stayed in contact based on “radioing forth and back.” On his first freezing day on Crater, Gary was “welcomed to the community of lookouts” (PP, 42) by the Desolation lookout, Jack Francis – “an Army Air Corps veteran who taught high school down in Bremerton and worked for the Forest Service during his summers off.” (PP, 42) A unique conception of community joins fire watchers on the ground of their work and place, no matter how many miles away from one another they were scattered. Therefore, the feeling of loneliness, which might have also been experienced by Thoreau, Muir or Dillard, is a prerequisite element, an introductory phase, an interlude to a larger community encompassing the human as well as the more-than-human world. Hence, the initiatory solitude reveals the necessity to “be present in nature,” (PP, 43) to learn what is around, to sit still, to be quiet, to watch and listen to the buzz of the flies, the flapping of prayer flags, the scream of a hawk or an eagle. (28 July, “Pair of eagles soaring over Devil’s Creek canyon.” LJ, 4) Nonetheless, this solitude is not to be endured, rather, it is rather to be savored, as Suiter points out,

Sitting still with eyes half open, or leaning in the lookout door, observing this vast spectacle of change across a visible mass of three million unbroken acres became for Snyder – the art of mountain watching. . . . (PP, 45)

Out of the solitude emerges a new sense of time enveloping all cycles of the metamorphic rock as well as lives of innumerable organisms: lichens, bacterial entities, respiring plants, butterflies, chipmunks, all composing a vast breathing earthly life. In 6 August entry the poet observes,

Clouds above and below, but I can see Kulshan, Mt. Terror,  
Shuksan; they blow over the ridge between here and  
Three-fingered Jack, fill up the valleys. The Buckner Boston  
Peak ridge is clear.

What happens all winter; wind driving snow; clouds—  
wind, and mountains—repeating

this is what always happens here,  
and the photograph of a young female torso hung in the lookout  
window, in the foreground. Natural against natural, beauty.

                          Two butterflies  
                          a chilly clump of mountain  
                          flowers.

*zazen*                  non-life.          An art:          mountain-watching.

                  leaning in the doorway whistling  
                  a chipmunk popped out  
                  listening. (LJ, 7) (*spacing original*)

“There is more than enough time for all things to happen,” (LJ, 11) asserts the poet later in his 21 August journal entry, which somehow underlies Leopold’s phrase saying “think like a mountain.” Yet, “mountain watching,” claims Snyder, “is like mountain being or mountain sitting.” (PP, 45) An exercise of observing the landscape whose changes, slow and gradual, are mere shifts of light, is close to meditation. Therefore, the lookout’s task, which was scanning the mountains for fires, proceeded by thorough learning “every peak, ridge, hill, trail, lake, creek, building and false smoke,” (PP, 31) transmuted into the *zazen* of mountain watching. The entire terrain becomes gradually inscribed in memory by recognition of its visual structure, part by part, and its mental structure, that is one’s knowledge of names. Mentally and verbally acquired landscape presents itself to the observer as interconnected space of the land’s flesh and his own flesh.

                  Comparing the panoramic Lookout View photo dated 8 August  
                  1935: with the present view. Same snowpatches; same shapes.  
                  Year after year; snow piling up and melting. (LJ, 5)

That vast topological network of peaks, ridges, trails existed as if only due to observation which rendered the supposedly stagnant landscape into a meditative realm juxtaposed with the thoughts which – like light – shifted and darkened as days went by. It looked as if the almost inert terrain at daybreak remained unmoved till dusk, when the magenta and orange light vanished along with the faintly beaming lights of Jack Francis’s and Shubert Hunter’s lanterns on Desolation, thirteen miles to the north, and on Sourdough, nine miles to the west, respectively. Perception, dormant at night,

is therefore entwined in continuation of the world which is seen. Simultaneously, the sentient bodies are therefore consanguineous with the body of the land stretching in front of their eyes across the visible and the invisible, the daytime and the nocturnal. In the 15 August entry Snyder ponders on the nature of change drawing from concepts such as the mind, language, emptiness, time, which – annihilated high in the Cascades – eventually bound for the void.

Cratershan      15 August

When the mind is exhausted of images, it invents its own.

Orange juice is what she asked for  
bright chrome restaurant, 2 a.m.  
the rest of us drinking coffee  
but the man brought orange pop.      Haw!

Late at night, the eyes tired, the teapot empty, the tobacco damp.

Almost had it last night: no identity. One thinks, “I emerged from some general, non-differentiated thing, I return to it.” One has in reality never left it; there is no return.

my language fades.      Images of erosion.

“That which includes all change never changes; without change time is destroyed. Thus we arrive at the void.” (LJ, 10) (*original spacing*)

Perception comes to reveal its reciprocal nature since “the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh.” (SPS, 69) This brings forth Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the flesh and the world, as well as the notion of the reciprocity of perception along with the consanguinity of the human and the world. Abram, inspired by Merleau-Ponty, says of the flesh as a “mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies or gives rise to both perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity.” (SPS, 66) The interdependent aspects of seeing interweave images with thoughts and delusions formed in consequence of seeing. The reciprocal presence is therefore transitory as it becomes endowed with the elements inherent to both the observer and the observed. Since the landscape is seen from a particular perspective, that of a lookout, and thus the senses become implicated in the landscape. In effect the landscape, mentally and verbally acquired by the observer, thus becomes an elemental part of his mind, which – devoid of images – invents new ones out of the previously perceived field or out of the dearth of those he

needs. Language decomposes itself into non-differentiated elements until it erodes and fades as the observer is no longer dependent on words and letters. As a result images feel as unstuck from language that gave them their names, yet they are changing their shape and finally, as shapeless entities, melt into one infinite void. “Is chemical reaction a type of perception?” (LJ, 11) asks Snyder in the 21 August journal entry. Perception is certainly a fundament of lookouting, hence, a tool, an artifact of spotting the patterns, detecting the relationship between objects and the subject. It is a stimuli for change, that “run[s] through all things motion and reacting, object against object. . .” (LJ, 11) It is a constant discovery (“Still discovering new confrontations . . .” LJ, 11), a projection of objects once seen or envisaged upon that which is seen at each particular time.

#### **4.3.4. Crater Shan Revisited.**

As in the walking experience, the turning earth reenacts events, whereas the human mind projects images stocked therein. In this way, Crater Mountain’s lookout perched on top, grows into a Cold Mountain “spacious home.” (HCBG, 199) The mentally intermingled summits change words and hence we arrive at the Crater Shan entries in Snyder’s *Lookout Journal*. Though Snyder did not translate Chinese Cold Mountain poems until his final year at the Oriental languages program at UC-Berkeley in 1955, the ‘shan’ component had appeared earlier, in 1952, and it referred to the Chinese ‘mountain’ as such. However, this initial “fusion of horizon[s]” (HCBS, 142)—which may also refer back to the similarity of the Han Shan’s surrounding mountainous landscape with Snyder’s terrain of his early years in American western mountains, as well as to his familiarity with the Zen aesthetics and his encounter with Zen texts, and translations of Zen texts in the 1950’s as he was employed by Mrs. Ruth Fuller Sasaki)—brings forth Snyder’s method of translation, which is “visualization,” (HCBS, 143) to which he refers to in his letter to Herbert Fackler in 1967. Crater Mountain’s visualization is enacted by the very encounter with its terrain, and follows imagery applied to Cold Mountain seen as a place in terms of location and a place of the mind. The first Crater Shan entry in the published version is dated 28 July, where Snyder simply invokes images from his way down to fetch a new radio, and to his three days walking time up the mountain, after which there appears the following

reflection: “Strange how unmoved this place leaves one; neither articulate or worshipful; rather the pressing need to look within and adjust the mechanism of perception.” (LJ, 4) Place seems to be melting its boundaries and instead encompasses both his experience, as well as attempts to translate it to words which somehow release verbal equivalents and leave images which instantly need to be translated and transmuted into the space within, the place of the mind. Snyder, influenced by Pound’s ideogrammic style and introduced in some sense to the Chinese poetry, aims at exploring his own style, which would be a mirage of threads spun from divergent literary, religious and philosophical traditions, all incorporated within the “real work” of body and mind. Therefore, Crater Shan offers an overall look within the Chinese tradition of poet hermits, among whom Han Shan and his *Cold Mountain Poems* become interwoven into the American life in the early 1960’s. Gray comments, “[t]he various Han-shans Snyder claims to have seen, be they laconic loggers in Oregon or ‘wild haired’ Beats in San Francisco, are simply latter-day manifestations of the ‘Immortal’ Chinese recluse.” (GSPR, 133) That the poet was a part of the American community is revealed in Snyder’s half-serious assertion, as Gray recounts, that he as if ran into Han Shan in workplaces of America, and also merged his mountain experience into his work of translation.

#### **4.3.5. Han Shan, a Place and a Poet.**

The coastal range of the T’ien-T’ai mountains, south of Shanghai near the East China Sea, is associated with the place of retirement of Han Shan. This mountainous area was well-known due to mountain men hiding there, mystical spirits dwelling on its cliffs, as well as Buddhist and Taoist monasteries situated there. In a preface to *Cold Mountain Poems* by Lu Ch’iu-yin, Governor of T’ai Prefecture, which Snyder placed along with his translation, there is a bracketed introduction to the persona of Han Shan,

Kanzan, or Han-shan, “Cold Mountain” takes his name from where he lived. He is a mountain madman in an old Chinese line of ragged hermits. When he talks about Cold Mountain he means himself, his home, his state of mind. He lived in the T’ang dynasty—traditionally A.D. 627-650, although Hu Shih dates him 700-780. This makes him roughly contemporary with Tu Fu, Li Po, Wang Wei, and Po Chü-i. His

poems, of which three hundred survive, are written in T'ang colloquial: rough and fresh. The ideas are Taoist, Buddhist, Zen. He and his sidekick Shih-te (Jittoku in Japanese) became great favorites with Zen painters of later days—the scroll, the broom, the wild hair and laughter. They became Immortals and you sometimes run onto them today in skidrows, orchards, hobo jungles, and logging camps of America.<sup>130</sup>

Yet Han Shan is believed to have been a government official, or even a military general, as Gray recounts, who left his family life and retreated into the mountains, which in East Asia are often synonymous with wilderness, where those who sought for peace and enlightenment would often go. In *The Practice of the Wild* Snyder explains,

The lowlands, with their villages, markets, cities, palaces, and wineshops, are thought of as the place of greed, lust, competition, commerce, and intoxication—the “dusty world.” Those who would flee such a world and seek purity find caves or build hermitages in the hills—and take up the practices which will bring realization or at least a long healthy life. These hermitages in time became the centers of temple complexes and ultimately religious sects. Dōgen says: “Many rulers have visited mountains to pay homage to wise people or ask for instructions from great sages. . . . At such time these rulers treat the sages as teachers, disregarding the protocol of the usual world. The imperial power has no authority over wise people in the mountains.” (PW, 100)

Since Han Shan's background is not clearly stated as the exact dates are difficult to pinpoint, Gray admits that it appears to him as though Han Shan lived sometime during the T'ang Dynasty (618-907). In the Lu Ch'in-Yin's preface to Cold Mountain poems we read “[n]o one knows just what sort of man Han Shan was.” (RCM, 35) John Blofeld, in his introduction to the poems translated by Red Pine (Bill Porter), claims that “so little biographical evidence has survived that what is known about his life, is shorn of myth and conjecture, would scarcely fill a page;”<sup>131</sup> however, hermits formed a regular feature of Chinese society, as he adds. This was very true during the turning point in the T'ang Dynasty fortunes, the An Lu-shan Rebellion of 755, which occurred a traumatic event, and as a result many T'ang Dynasty officials offered their posts—Cold Mountain's employer might have been among them, Porter maintains—

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<sup>130</sup> Gary Snyder, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), p. 35. Hereafter as RCM and a page number.

<sup>131</sup> John Blofeld in *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain* (trans. Bill Porter) (Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 2000), p. 19. Hereafter as CSCM and a page number.



though the faux-dynasty lasted not more than a few years. Bill Porter asserts that after the T'ang forces recaptured Loyang in 757, "the court pardoned all but the highest officials who had served the rebels," (CSCM, 14) and supposedly Cold Mountain's employer was among those not pardoned, is what Porter suggests. In order to avoid capture, which was likely to include Han Shan, he fled to one of the most remote parts of the country. (CSCM, 14) Blofeld (in an introduction reprinted from the 1983 edition) sketches the outline of the Imperial China and gives possible reasons for Cold Mountain's retreat into the mountains, which may have been due to his dissatisfaction with the system. Blofeld therefore ponders, "[w]as he at one time a young official on his way up the ladder of fame who drew down upon himself the anger and jealousy of his superiors, or who voluntarily opted out of the system on account of revulsion against its rigidity and extravagance? Or was he merely an unsuccessful candidate for the higher examination?" (CSCM, 20) The same period of Han Shan's life is depicted as "the pre-Cold-Mountain stage" by Joan Qionglin Tan, at which point he was influenced by Confucianism. It accentuated education and service as a means of entering the society. His failure in the annual Civil Service Examination was due to his appearance rather than lack of knowledge. Therefore, from family and society (according to Confucianism, training places for self-cultivation) he transmogrifies into nature/shelter phase, which makes him follow the Confucian-Daoist path—interlaced with some Buddhist ideas—in a village at the foot of Cold Mountain, where he lived with his family a somewhat half-hermit life. After that time—"the Towards-Cold-Mountain Stage"—he began his move toward the Daoist-Buddhist way, deepened the notion of immortality and liberation from cycles of reincarnation, until the final transition into Zen phase—"the Upon-Cold-Mountain Stage."<sup>132</sup> Whatever his true reason was, Han Shan seems to have followed the way many Chinese disillusioned scholars chose in the long history of China, and joined the world of mountain men, hermits or sages as they were called, but also mountains were independent of the role of the central government thus many of them might have been fleeing jail, taxes or conscription. Hence, Snyder refers to mountains as "a heaven of spiritual and political freedom all over," (PW, 101) which for Han Shan meant the Enlightenment stage. On the one hand, Han Shan affiliated to the community of

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<sup>132</sup> For a complete description of Han Shan's transitions, see: Joan Qionglin Tan, „Han Shan's Poetic Way to Cold Mountain," in *Han Shan, Chan Buddhism and Gary Snyder's Ecopoetic Way* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), pp. 84-131.

mountain men, but on the other hand—when calling on Dōgen’s words—“[one] may think that in mountains many wise people and great sages are assembled. But after entering the mountains, not a single person meets another. There is just the activity of the mountains.” (PP, 249) Therefore, “the world of mountain men” was in fact a “free society of eccentric recluses,” who belonged to “secluded communities in relatively inaccessible places, preferably well-wooded hills. . .” (CSCM, 20) This occurred true for Han Shan (“Men don’t get this far into the mountains,”<sup>133</sup> as well as for Snyder on top of Crater Shan, where the only visitors throughout the entire season were Jack Francis and Harold Vail, who hiked up to pay him a visit late in the third week of August, when Snyder’s lookout season was coming to a close. Interestingly, the community of mountain men and the one of lookouts shared the same fundamentals of disciplining the mind. “Discipline of self-restraint is an easy one,” admits Snyder in his *Lookout Journal* not until 9 August at Sourdough, “being clear-cut, negative, and usually based on some accepted cultural values.” (LJ, 18) In the same entry he writes,

Discipline of following desires, *always* doing what you want to do, is hardest. It presupposes self-knowledge of motives; a careful balance of free action and sense of where the cultural taboos lay—knowing whether a particular “desire” is instinctive, cultural, personal, a product of thought, contemplation, or the unconscious. Blake: if the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite, For man has closed himself up, ‘til all he sees is through narrow chinks of his caverns. Ah. (LJ, 19)

Disciplining the mind was certainly a practice of the Way (“hsiu Tao”), which was what the majority of mountain men most probably did, no matter if they were overtly religious or not. (CSCM, 21) Bill Porter explicates that the term itself (Way, Tao) was used for two millennia by Chinese of all religions and philosophies, and it pointed to “the highest good,” “ultimate truth,” “the absolute,” “the goal of existence,” among others. (CSCM, 21) Cold Mountain somehow entered the inconspicuous assembly of mountain men who practiced the Way.

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<sup>133</sup> Han Shan (trans. Gary Snyder) *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*, p. 45.

Mountain men were variously motivated . . . Some were Buddhist monks who had turned their backs on “the world of dust,” bent on treading the rugged path towards Enlightenment that led to Nirvana’s bliss. Some were Taoist recluses cultivating joyous tranquility by studying nature’s cyclic changes and learning to flow effortlessly with life’s current, instead of battling upstream against formidable odds like the status-minded, power-and-wealth-hungry city-dwellers. Yet others were people of no particular religious faith, who like our own hippies, had decided to sever the restraints of conventional and social ties and create a new life in accordance with their dreams. (CSCM, 21)

However, mountain men were even far more unconventional than the hippies. Porter holds that Cold Mountain had some characteristics of all various types of them. In Lu Ch’iu-Yin’s preface, translated by Snyder and placed in the Riprap collection, we encounter references as a “poor man,” “crazy character,” who “looked like a tramp,” whose “hat was made of birch bark, . . . clothes were ragged and worn out, and his shoes were wood;” “his body and face were old and beat.” However, “in every word he breathed was a meaning in line with the subtle principles of things. Everything he said had a feeling of the Tao in it, profound and arcane secrets.” (RCM, 36) Han Shan is therefore referred to as Manjusri (the Bodhisattva of wisdom). Before he finally retreated into the mountains, Han Shan—in company of Feng-kan and Shih-te (referred to as Samantabharda – the Bodhisattva of love)—was seen in the Kuo-ch’ing Temple’s kitchen, tending the fire or picking up leftovers left for him in bamboo tubes, and singing or calling Ha! Ha! It was Feng-kan who rescued the prefect from his illness, and said “[t]he four realms are within your body; sickness comes from illusion. If you want to do away with it, you need pure water.” (RCM, 36) It seems that beliefs and logically trodden roads stand on the side of illusion and it being the source of misbeliefs must be treated with purest possible means. Therefore, pure water cleanses the body and washes things which dwell in the mind and thus transforms it into “cool water” itself, that is a “cool mind” free from preconceptions, which is close to the Buddha-mind. Those words made the governor set out to find the Kuo-ch’ing Temple of T’ien-t’ai to search for wise men whom he could look up on as masters. At the back of his mind, the words heard from Feng-kan whirled and gradually paved the way to the temple, “[w]hen you see him you don’t recognize him, when you recognize him you don’t see him. If you want to see him, you can’t rely on appearances. Then you can see him.” (RCM, 36) Han Shan and Shih-te, when encountered in the kitchen, facing fire and laughing, both shouted HO! at the governor who had bowed when entered the kitchen. Unduly laughing and shouting the

insouciant hermits ran out of the temple and did not return there. In Feng-kan's room (in back of the library) only tiger tracks were seen. Their retreat into the mountains was somehow a retreat into nature, into the solitude of one's thoughts and ideas as contrasted with the indifferent to a certain extent landscape holding and weighting myriads of lives. The tracks after the two lunatics or clowns—as they are variously referred to in Snyder and Porter—disappeared completely, yet the harsh land, inscribed with words found on various rocks, stones, bamboo, trees, walls around the temple and the nearby villages, preserved over three hundred poems as though they were humming and breathing along with the earth its perennial song. Han Shan's and Feng-kan's songs were tracked down, collected by Lu Ch'iu-Yin who provided them with a preface.<sup>134</sup> Joan Qionglin Tan says after Andrew Schelling that Han Shan's poems might be regarded as commencing the “rock-and-bark poetry,” taking Han Shan as its “most notorious practitioner.” (HCBS, 120) At this juncture, Han Shan's rock poem-songs relate, in a sense, to Snyder's “riprapping style” in his poetry, or in other words, the “trail-building poetry,” where the poet integrates the world of matter with that of the mind, and simultaneously gives components that pave way to better comprehension of his poetics. To Han Shan it meant grasping his thoughts, feelings, things perceived and sensed at the moment when he was inspired; moreover, it reflected his state of mind captured at one particular moment.

#### **4.3.6. The Laughable Path and a Sense of Place.**

Out of the three hundred and eleven poems, Snyder chose twenty-four which predominantly deal with such notions as the trail, the habitat, and the mind. His selection of poems may be dictated by his own journey he had begun, as Sherman Paul suggests, since they deal with the descriptions of the isolated habitat. I would add that they somehow resonate with his later *Mountains and Rivers...* poems due to their mind-scape depiction by creating space in the mind both on a spiritual and poetic levels, that is clearing it of the affairs of the “dusty world.” When the trails to Crater Shan and Cold Mountain are projected upon each other, we come to think of them as

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<sup>134</sup> For a detailed account on Han Shan's identity and inconsistencies in dating see: Timothy Gray, “Who was Han Shan” in GSPR, pp. 136-140.

interchangeably connected due to the mind space that Snyder and Han Shan had in common.

The path to Han-shan's place is laughable,  
A path, but no sign of cart or horse.  
Converging gorges – hard to trace their twists  
Jumbled cliffs – unbelievably rugged.  
A thousand grasses bend with dew,  
A hill of pines hums in the wind.  
And now I've lost the shortcut home,  
Body asking shadow, how do you keep up? (no.1, RCM, 39)

Searching places envisaged as representations of certain terrains inhabited by masters, poet-hermits, or lookouts, is always transformed in speaking of them in terms of conditions of being within their mental excursions to a land rugged and quite inaccessible due to the absence of logical and representative elements, such as signs or mountain trails, landmarks for newcomers, to orient themselves to the unknown land. It is at the same time the harbinger of the mind cleansed and spacious enough to adapt oneself to the remote land. Such mind is the attribute of an arduous seeker of enlightenment. Snyder's lookouting experience was his "first venture into the challenge of interweaving physical life and inward realms," as Joan Qionglin Tan puts it. (HCBG, 210) In the same way, Cold Mountain can be read as a place conditioned by mental and experienced realms, whose paths need to be searched below words and phrases, and below fixed ways of describing, deconstructing and reconstructing meanings, and paving thus the way to a different ways of looking. It rather takes the opposite, which brings it closer to ways of Zen and makes us suspend our ordinary habits of perceiving, thinking and experiencing the world. Place rethought looms as a place vaster than the one enclosed within the supposedly familiar world. Moreover, it merges the inside with the outside, and thus gives prerequisites for proper understanding of the notion of home, which does not confine ourselves to being surrounded and enclosed. Once the trails open before him, he is on a way to enlightenment. Those poems which accentuate the trail to Cold Mountain reflect Han Shan's relentless spiritual quest, and in the main focus on the topographical features of his retreat, which in fact—as Snyder admitted—are based on his knowledge of the Cascades and the Sierra Nevada rather than the T'ien-t'ai Mountains. Thus, the descriptions combine the Eastern mind with a Western-inspired place, which was also

proposed in Gray's study on Snyder. The path which cannot be seen and the one whose "jumbled cliffs," and "unbelievably rugged" terrain comprise Han Shan's way, are in fact, components of his way to enlightenment whose ways seem to be leading through this world while being embodied in the world's interweaving field of forces that one encounters on his way. Once it is read as one's way to enlightenment satori in Zen, the way transmutes into a trackless route. Among poems presenting the way one finds the following,

In a tangle of cliffs I chose a place—  
Bird-paths, but no trails for men.  
What's beyond the yard? White clouds clinging to vague rocks. (no. 2, RCM, 40)

Men ask the way to Cold Mountain  
Cold Mountain: there's no through trail. (no. 6, RCM, 44)

Men don't get this far into the mountains. (no. 7, RCM, 45)

Clambering up the Cold Mountain path,  
The Cold Mountain trail goes on and on . . . (no. 8, RCM, 46)

Rough and dark—the Cold Mountain trail,  
Sharp cobbles—the icy creek bank. (no. 9, RCM, 47)

In my first thirty years of life  
I roamed hundreds and thousands of miles.  
Walked by rivers through deep green grass  
Entered cities of boiling red dust. (no. 12, RCM 50)

The above fragments present the reader with myriads of ways, roads, trails, routes all interlacing at particular levels of understanding. Men are engrossed in traversing divergent ways; however, Han Shan points to the "right way;" the one that is elusive, nonexistent in any real way, reaching far beyond conventional understanding, yet clinging in a sense to the elemental, and one's relationship with it. The "right way" certainly alludes to the pervasive *dao* and stands for Han Shan's spiritual way to enlightenment; nonetheless, it is the road through the real-world obstacles, hence not entirely illusory. Cold Mountain is therefore a place suspended in the two realms, one is the physical world's tranquil presence and the other is the spiritual world's unending walk up the mountain. Yet to achieve enlightenment, one needs to be there, on the real life trails going on simultaneously with the innermost ones. In other words, the

slippery paths of understanding are as important as the physical walking while questing for the right place.

Snyder's approach to translating Han Shan's poems is a method of "linking East and West" to use Gray's words. It translates Snyder's lifelong process of walking and finding his own trail; furthermore, he selects and visualizes the poems whose landscape aligns with his own vision of the Sierra Nevada. Thus, the original eight-line poems with five ideograms each are gradually transformed into syntactical units of coherent phrasal structure. Seeing as how both visual and the syntactic elements come to work together, there looms a very clear picture of his rippapping style, and "Riprap" in particular where the poet makes a concerted effort to present an ongoing play of the word-mind images, grounded in the natural and out of these issuing endlessly. In a poem "Above Pate Valley," comprising the *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*, Snyder follows his own trail, the one crossing and being crossed by multitude of others, simultaneously traversed ones. ("A land of fat summer deer, / They came to camp. On their own trails. I followed my own / Trail here." RCM, 11)) So too is the distinction between real and spiritual trail surfacing in a closer look at *Riprap and Cold Mountains Poems* (1959), a book of poems that gathers Snyder's early backcountry experience and transmutes into the spiritual zennist quest for "the right path." Yet tantalizingly elusive as the persona of Han Shan may appear, it does dwell Snyder's other volumes of poetry. In *Myths & Texts*, when reflecting upon his logging experience, Snyder admits, "Han Shan could have lived here." (MT, 13) In *Earth House Hold*, on noting his impressions of Kyoto, we read a description, "old, dark smoky kitchen where Han Shan might have worked," (EHH, 36) or in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*, where Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder) is compared to Han Shan whose poems he has translated.

Joan Qionglin Tan maintains that "Cold Mountain is not only a geographical place, but also an abstract symbol." (HCBS, 116) Its extraordinarily rich imagery endows the mountain with the romantic beauty, the elements of the sublime, and also arouses a sort of alienation, estrangement and awe.

The long gorge choked with scree and boulders,  
The wide creek, the mist-blurred grass. The moss is slippery, though there's been no  
rain The pine sings, but there's no wind. (no. 8, RCM, 46)

Cold Mountain has many hidden wonders,  
People who climb here are always getting scared.  
When the moon shines, water sparkles clear  
When the wind blows, grass swishes and rattles.  
On the bare plum flowers of snow  
On the dead stump, leaves of mist.  
And the touch of rain it all turns fresh and alive  
At the wrong season you can't ford the creeks. (no. 14, RCM, 52)

On top of Cold Mountain the lone round moon  
Lights the whole clear cloudless sky. (no. 22, RCM, 60)

It is therefore, an “inclusive nature image” (HCBS, 116) and a “single image” unifying nature's features with conditions of the mind (“The moon is the hinge of our mind.” HCBS, 112) As the moon foretells the state of emptiness and enlightenment, it also redirects perception inside. It encourages to look within and “adjust the mechanism of perception” (LJ, 4) and to see the Buddha nature as reflected in things. As a “single image” it stands for a “place of seclusion”, “a spiritual abode,” (HCBS, 117) an estranged vision of one's inner landscape, “a hidden place,” a mind empowered to see into one's nature, the mind at the same time purified and cool, unattached to things and ideas, untied to the “dusty world” affairs, yet free-flowing, “no more tangled, hung-up mind,” “taking whatever comes, like a drifting boat. (no. 19, RCM, 57) Eventually, Cold Mountain is a house in which the entire earth encompasses itself.

#### **4.3.7. “Ever, Ever Be On the Lookout!” (Daito Kokushi).**

“Them guys're Buddhists,” (PP, 56) exclaimed one of the people on the crew while referring to Snyder and Whalen, who were huddled over some Chinese text, both back in the Skagit in the summer of 1953. Snyder's assigned mountain was Sourdough, whereas Whalen's was Sauk, “a distinctive front-country peak overlooking the junction of the Skagit and Sauk rivers.” (PP, 59) Passions back from their Reed College time, when they lived together at Lambert Street, such as poetry, drama, mythology, and Oriental literature, culture and religion, brought them to the Skagit and provided much of the joinery for their friendship.



Sourdough Mountain lookout “unobtrusively perched on a rough summit shelf of Skagit gneiss [with] red shutters still down for winter,” (PP, 62) came into view after crossing five thousand feet elevation. John Suiter describes the trail as follows,

The lookout trail began inconspicuously behind some low-roofed Seattle City Light sheds along the rail siding at the foot of the mountain, then climbed abruptly up the southwestern flank in a repetitive series of long switchbacks, gaining 2,500 feet elevation in the first mile. Except for an occasional glimpse of snow-capped Davis Peak through the trees, there were no views for the first hour or so on the trail. . . After five thousand feet . . . [there loomed] the Sourdough Creek basin. . . After the creek, the trail climbed hard into south-facing meadows, abloom with wildflowers and opening on steep views of sinuous green Diablo Lake and Thunder Arm 5,000 feet below. On the far side of the lake was a stunning array of glaciers. . . At the top of the ridge the panorama was a sweeping visceral hit. . . (PP, 61-62)

In his first entry from July, 17, written on top, Snyder notes, “this is the place to observe clouds and the gradual dissolution of snow.” (LJ, 15) When compared with Crater Mtn, Sourdough is described as mild and pleasant. Conversely, due to its austerity Crater had at time felt Tibetan, whereas Sourdough was idyllic, as Snyder admits. In yet another attempt to describe the mountain Snyder recounts that it was “like the suburbs.” (PP, 66) Distinguished by its beautiful alpine landscape, wonderful and heavenly, it gave opportunity to go on much longer walks and explore the area around, while Crater always made him walk down as there was nowhere else to go. Furthermore, Sourdough had many more visitors, among whom there were: Baxter who came from Granite Creek, Jack Francis from Diablo, Roy Raymond, old friends from Reed, and a painter Dick Brewer (subletting Snyder and Whalen their North Beach apartment), whom Snyder mentions in a letter to Shandel Parks.<sup>135</sup>

To the astonishment of everyone the artist Brewer appeared here; horrifying the rugged inhabitants of the upper Skagit valley by appearing in street shoes & with a suitcase, asking where is Sourdough Lookout. Having hitch-hiked from Saffron-cisco. So convincing him agunny-bag bindlestick w’d be nicer than a suitcase to carry, & pointing him train-tracks & trail departures, he arrived at this remote mountain but one

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<sup>135</sup> Shandel Parks introduced Snyder to Kenneth Rexroth.

morning (2 days past) & has been instructed in the secret lore of snowfields, rocks, alpine fauna, & wood-choping since.<sup>136</sup>

Sourdough could be regarded as sort of a transition phase in Snyder's way to community which was gradually opening up, however, at the same time taking root in the Skagit, where first tenets of looking were formed, and have stayed firm in the poet throughout his life. With Crater always visible in the background, perception was becoming elemental since grounded in the "sensorial landscape"—to use Abram's phrase—but simultaneously growing deep inside one's interior life, as well as into the past being sieved through the mind. In the 17 July entry Snyder admits,

Keep looking across to Crater Mountain and get the funny feeling I am up there looking out, right now, "because there are no calendars in the mountains" —shifting of light & cloud, perfection of chaos, magnificent *jiji mu-ge* / interlacing interaction. (LJ, 15-16)

Embedded in the open moment of the present, Snyder recalls the image of Crater anchored in his mind and projects the past upon the present, since when these two spheres are envisaged as happening simultaneously. Abram, in his chapter entitled "[t]he Earthly Topology of Time," ponders upon the nature of time past and present as "located" within the visible landscape. In calling on Merleau-Ponty's words we are faced with the question,

In what sense the visible landscape under my eyes is not exterior to . . . other moments of time and the past, but has them really *behind itself* in simultaneity, inside itself, and not it and they side by side "in" time.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Gary Snyder, letter to Shandel Parks, 12 August 1953, Gary Snyder Papers, Mandeville Special Collections, Giesel Library, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>137</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Abram, SPS, p. 207.

Making an attempt at answering the question where, within the visible landscape, the past and the future may reside, Abram states that “they are strangely commingled within all that we perceive.” (SPS, 207) The present is therefore a capacious terrain, vast and open, preserving individual remembrances which become mentally called on to exist simultaneously, just as Snyder did when he watched Crater Mountain from his lookout on Sourdough. Thus, the category of “right now” emerges as though spun from the past but, at the same time, aspires to prolong onward. It rejuvenates the past moments with the freshness of views, even though these views are seen for the second time or more. The succession of objects seen brings back that which is allegedly gone. This is what Snyder calls “interlacing interaction.” The landscape becomes multiplied by human perception, whereas that which we remember is sieved through time, fragmented by human capacity to store images and emotions. However, the visible landscape functions as a stimuli for the mental release of images sunken within. This corresponds with Abram’s assumptions,

The visible horizon, that is, a kind of a gateway or threshold, joining the presence of the surrounding terrain to that which exceeds this open presence, to that which is hidden *beyond* the horizon. The horizon carries the promise of something more, something *other*. . . . [t]he way that other places—places not explicitly present within the perceivable landscape—are nevertheless joined to the present landscape by the visible horizon. (SPS, 210)

The visible landscape provides a certain opening up for the stored images, which are immediately conjoined with the now of the present moment. Therefore, returning to the quotation by Merleau-Ponty, two words stand out as essential to one’s understanding of the visible and the invisible aspects of landscape. These are the “behind” and the “inside.” Nevertheless, in Abram those two words refer to the landscape itself which is evident in the following statements, “[t]he visible landscape has the other moments of time ‘behind itself,’ . . . and ‘inside itself.” (SPS, 215) The past preserves itself, Abram explains, in every object one sees. However, it is also preserved in the mind among images known and experienced as real parts of the present, now sunken into the past, yet not entirely gone, but co-existing in a way which was once described by John Muir, who said,

These beautiful days must enrich all my life. They do not exist as mere pictures—maps hung upon the walls of memory to brighten at times when touched by association or will, only to sink again like a landscape in the dark; but they saturate themselves unto every part of the body and live always.<sup>138</sup>

While Crater offered more concealed views since it was too high to be dependable, Sourdough Mountain—“at the hub of six valleys: Skagit, Thunder, Ruby, Upper Skagit, Pierce Creek, Stetattle creek” (LJ, 21)—was at optimal elevation. The above quotation was repeated by Snyder many times as it were his own mantra informing the space he was part of. The perceived landscape opened its plenitude of colors that the shifting light endowed it with. Thus, the descriptions in the Sourdough part of the journal brim with multitude of objects perceived as though they were traveled through by different intensities of light. The beguiling light as it were the maker of colors, which also enchanted Muir in his observations of woods and Yosemite valley, is caught in some of his journal entries capturing its momentary nature.

White quartz veins on the rocks out the south window look like a sprinkling of snow. Cones on the top boughs of the Alpine fir at the foot of the rocks a DARK PURPLE, stand perfectly erect, aromatic clusters of LINGAMS fleshy and hard. (19 July, LJ, 16)

Right now looking down on the Skagit—pink clouds—oale rose-water pink, with soft shadings of gray and lavender, other combinations of pastel reds and blues, hanging over Pyramid Peak. (23 July, LJ, 17)

Last night: thunderstorm. A soft piling of cumulus over the Little Beaver . . . —a gradual thickening and darkening. A brief shower of hail . . . went up Thunder Creek valley: long gray shreds of it slowly falling and bent in the wind. . . . Velvety navy blue over Hozomeen, with the sun going down behind Mt. Terror and brilliant reds and pinks on the under-clouds, another red streak behind back Hozomeen framed in dark clouds. Lightning moving from Hozomeen slowly west into red clouds turning gray, then black; rising wind. (25 July, LJ, 17-18)

At this juncture perception sharpens, senses make the visible landscape more prominent, the mind registers the changes and very precise descriptions are formed in effect. Almost a month later Snyder notes down in his journal, “[n]ature [is] a vast set of conventions, totally arbitrary, patterns and stresses that come into being each instant; could disappear anytime; and continues only as a form of play: the cosmic /

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<sup>138</sup> John Muir. *To Yosemite and Beyond. Writings from the Years 1863 to 1875* (Eds. Robert Engberg and Donald Wesling), (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1999), p. 62.

cosmic delight.” (LJ, 21) The ephemeral, yet effervescent landscape is subjected to constant changes, fleeting fragments that come to live their momentary lives, then darkened and muted to forms they had known before. Due to the arbitrariness, and the presence and sudden disappearance of fragments comprising the visible, breathing landscape, it is plausible to think of Nature as performance, not a book—a statement that Snyder would repeat in his writings, in “Writers and the War against Nature,” (2007) among other essays.

Apart from various notes on the changing weather that would bring light and darkness, the journal is filled with divergent names of the surrounding mountains, valleys and rivers. As a lookout he was conversant with each and every peak, ridge, valley, creek or trail. As in the case of the Crater Journal, Sourdough is a day-book consisting of fifteen entries done throughout the season. It is a dense record where perception plays an essential part in his detailed notes which concern: the weather changes, small talks with other lookouts on the Motorola radio, thoughts inspired by what he read on top (Suzuki’s *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, selections from Huang-Po, Matsu, Daito Kokushi, Thoreau’s *Walden*, prophetic selection from Blake, Faulkner’s *Sartoris*, plays by Brecht and Artaud, Japanese grammar not to mention all he had taken with him). The famous Blakean “doors of perception” passage (the important psychedelic aphorism of the 1960’s) appears in the same entry as the zennist thought, “(an empty water glass is no less empty than a universe full of nothing) —the desk is under the pencil.” (LJ, 19) His thoughts on the “reconfiguration of perception” and “adjusting the mechanism of perception,” which started his Crater Journal, now seem to have undergone the basic transformation, and allow for insight, a slow, careful observation of the exterior as well as the interior world, both the literal lookout’s interior and the mind’s innermost spacious terrain. Abram’s “other side of many visibles that surround [us]” comes to correspond with the “empty glass” extract. One is not able to perceive the relation until the landscape becomes experienced as sensorial, flexible terrain; hiding and hidden; issuing out from the inside. “The desk” therefore speaks for the alleged stability of things which endure in their immense relation to other forms. In this way, the “living terrain is supported not only by that more settled or sedimented past under the ground, but by an immanent past resting inside each [thing].” (SPS, 215)

From the lookout cabin, a hub of the Cascadian terrain, there radiated expanding views to the six major drainages, to Crater—which was never manned again since Snyder’s last season; to Whalen’s Sauk Mountain, which was the most zen-looking mountain in the area, “a small dark hump,” “small but remarkable.” (PP, 67) Inside each lookout there “rested an immanent past,” to use Abram’s words, encompassing the nearby area. Suiter brings the bygone Sourdough lookout days closer. In 1890 Lucinda Davis came from Colorado and moved in to the abandoned Indian cabin, which she soon turned into a roadhouse, where miners would stop in the Gold Rush years. The mountain was named Davis Peak; however, in the old days it was known as Stetattle Peak, which referred to another name, Lushootshead, which stood for the grizzly bear. Lucinda Davis and her son Glee made the first trail for horses up Sourdough Mountain and stacked a cairn on top where the lookout was later on erected since at that time fire lookouts were unknown in the Northwest. The whole Upper Skagit is “mottled with old and ancient burns, a tapestry of vast conifer stands in various stages of succession,” (PP, 62-63) Suiter depicts. Thus, the ice and lightning were forms inherent in the terrain which shaped it for ten thousand years—“the perfection of chaos,” (LJ, 16) thus refers to those forming elements which gave rise to the Cascades. The promontory on Sourdough came to be the place for the first fire lookout cabin in the North Cascades. However, Snyder’s Sourdough lookout was not the original one that stood there, but the one that replaced the Glee Davis lookout in the summer of 1933. (PP, 65) Sourdough, the premier site for a lookout in the area, 2,000 feet lower than Crater, was perhaps for Snyder a sort of prototype of a place which in a sense endowed the watcher with a broad vista of the endless mountains and rivers, and simultaneously, it provided a view of the world that was mirroring and mirrored within his mind. In one of his essays from *Back on the Fire* (2007), Snyder recollects his thoughts on the nature of peaks by saying, “[i]f you want to get a view of the world you live in, climb a little rocky mountain with a neat small peak.” (BF, 65) The view from Sourdough spread across all the directions and encircled a vast space, upon which other lookout cabins marked the presence of fire watchers. The peculiar community of bodies dispersed across the visible landscape—all alone in their “glass houses” on the ridges, engaged in their presences dependent on communication between harsh voices coming out of the Motorola radio—was in fact true to each season. Thus, the community kept changing throughout the years; it was provoked by gathering of people whose objectives fit the lookout season. Many of them were poets

who indulged in tranquil solitude by meditating the landscape and places which had no actual borders, but stretched farther beyond all notions of a house and a place, transcended each lookout cabin's shutters and walls of windows, transpiring at the same time to grasp the essence of places and inner spaces, intimate, secluded but certainly striving for some indefinite oneness with all the living. Philip Whalen's poem, composed during his lookout season on Sourdough in 1955, addresses his own mental condition when doing the lookout season,

Then I'm alone in a glass house on a ridge  
Encircled by chiming mountains  
With one sun roaring through the house all day  
& the others crashing through the glass all night  
Conscious even while sleeping.<sup>139</sup>

In yet another fragment,

What we see of the world is the mind's  
Invention and the mind  
Though stained by it, becoming  
Rivers, sun, mule-dung, flies—<sup>140</sup>

Some mental preparation, cleansing preceding the adjustment of perception and its reconfiguration needs be done in order to see oneself as an inseparable element perched above the fundamental and provided with a vaster scope of seeing. The cleansed mind allows for realization of one's existence as though one among many beads in a chain of repeated comings and goings, mirrored in each bead and reiterated; however the center is the void, the essence, the empty world forever multiplied in each person's mind. So too does the mind reflect rivers and mountains. The above image of beads with the center nothing relates to the lookout's location on top, surrounded by piling mountains, yet empty inside, constantly infusing images and storing them in the mind, which reflects everything and is therefore reflected itself.

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<sup>139</sup> Philip Whalen, „Sourdough Mountain Lookout” in *On Bear's Head* (Harcourt, Brace & World Inc. and Coyote, 1969), p. 46.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

I'm surrounded by mountains here  
A circle of 108 beads, originally seeds  
of *ficus religiosa*  
Bo-Tree  
A circle, continuous . . .  
In the center of the circle,  
A void, an empty figure containing  
All that's multiplied;  
Each bead a repetition, a world  
Of ignorance and sleep.<sup>141</sup>

However, it need not be neglected that those visions or “identifications,” a term Whalen used to refer to things he had already seen, evoked by peyote, provided another sort of door to the realm he experimented with. Practiced along with his zen sittings (which were in fact sporadic in 1955), peyote let him imagine himself as the central, empty point which reflected all things, surrounded by peaks as a vast *mala* – a Buddhist rosary. To Snyder, he wrote, “[p]eyotl is another finger pointing someplace;” (PP, 126) whereas the finger was an often used zen image.

Lookout cabins certainly take on multiple resonances, their imagery bifurcates into the inner and outer realms which seem to hide and open up, like peyote, other layers of seeing, being, and experiencing things at elevation which comes to be read as a condition of being, which instantaneously evokes the need for looking into the inner landscapes, or inscapes of one's mind. Whalen's view from Sourdough is part of his vision enhanced by peyote and met on the edge of being and dreaming while still being set in the center of the circle, which in fact was the center of Sourdough Mountain L.O.; whereas Snyder's “Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout,” the first poem in *Riprap*, speaks for the elevation as the poet's state of mind, which clearly corresponds with the fourth poem, which is “The Piute Creek.” In Sherman Paul's words, “the initial poem . . . establishes the elevation he seeks.” (“From Lookout to Ashram,” CE, 69) The elevation is that of the “clear, attentive mind,” which substantively pervades the glass-walled cabin and, simultaneously, the mind of the observer.

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<sup>141</sup> Whalen, “Sourdough Mountain Lookout,” p. 50.



Down valley a smoke haze  
Three days heat, after five days rain  
Pitch glows on the fir-cones  
Across rocks and meadows  
Swarms of new flies.

I cannot remember things I once read  
A few friends, but they are in cities.  
Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup  
Looking down for miles  
Through high still air. (RCM, 3)

Time and place seem clearly stated at the beginning of the poem, yet, at the same time, they remain inconspicuously folded within the interior of the observer. As an intrinsic part of his inscape they unfold down for miles and touch upon places once encountered and people met. Though they stay nameless, their presence encloses itself in the sheer fact of living somewhere else. The poet's state of mind allows for reflection. It evinces tranquility and serenity of the higher land. It releases tension and desperation, and evokes one's unison with the infinitesimal world he inhabits which infinitely grows out of its fixed forms and prolongs above the horizon. I concur with the view of Timothy Gray, who regards the Cascades as Snyder's primary influence, and states that the first stanza introduces the poet's attempt to "refine himself out of existence, or rather *into* the plural existence of his place." (GSPR, 107) The first stanza depicts a landscape by way of spotting the elements which in effect loom as fragmentary when juxtaposed with the overwhelming views. Yet by distinguishing them the poet makes the locodescriptive verse, as Gray says, possible. The landscape is therefore characterized by gentle processes captured as "a smoke haze," heat that comes after rain, the glowing of pitch on fir-cones, the "swarms of new flies." However, these features are ephemeral, fleeting, and conditioned by patterns that are here dictated by weather and altitude. They speak for the microscopic lives going on around the mind emptied and cleared, able to register those tiny presences and take them as the natural phenomena that mould his consciousness. He is, therefore, a part of the living, whose existence is an integral part of his own. He is moved by this fact but somehow acquires the zen way of looking at things and into their essence now that "the words and letters" are left down the valley, in time distant and gone. Gray ascribes this stage of life to the fruition of the process of de-education to which Snyder referred to after having completed his formal education at Reed. Certainly,

de-education turned him into the communion with the natural world as well as the real work of hands and the mind though not on separable levels, but fully integrated. This brings the notion used by Gray, “the plural existence of place,” which at the same time leaves off the Romantic anthropomorphic tendencies. But still, wild landscape is a force pushing Snyder to “take on new identities;” (GSPR, 108) that is to move within while being emotionally moved. It is not until the second stanza that the poet somehow introduces himself. The pronoun ‘I’ seems dormant in the first stanza, or sharing in his presence in the perception process which involves the reciprocity of this act. Nonetheless, once it overtly appears, it immediately distances the speaker from any abstract notions and conceptions learnt before. Rather, it is the landscape that becomes translated into his thoughts. The mind and body are therefore shown as non-dual in nature; moreover, the mind and landscape are terrains not particularly different but co-existent and sustaining each other. Patrick D. Murphy ascribes the non-occurrence of the pronoun ‘I’ in the first stanza to the degree of isolation that affected the poet as well as to the linguistic influence of his style, which was the Asian one, where the pronoun ‘I’ is seldom used except for emphasis. Other indicators of the Chinese and Japanese poetic structures that affected Snyder’s style include “the dropping of articles, the frequency of participles and infinitives, and the use of sentence fragments.” (PW, 45) However, the reader encounters enjambment (which—according to Robert Kern—never occurs in Asian poetic forms, the Chinese *shih* and the Japanese *hokku* that Snyder studied at UC-Berkeley)<sup>142</sup> offering multiple interpretations. The Japanese and Chinese forms are in effect modified. Laszlo Géfin says, “even strict oriental forms such as the haiku become in his hands singularly Snyderian.”<sup>143</sup> The lines—two through five—are thus transfixed into something “more elusive and unfixed.” (GSPR, 105) Enjambment seems to be playing an important role in the second line of the first stanza, where the prepositional phrase “after five days rain,” can compliment the “three days heat,” which is strengthened by the caesura after the third syllable, as Gray suggests. However, it might also transmute to the third line depicting “the pitch glow[ing] on the fir-cones.” Gray maintains that the rainstorm is not merely an isolated incident but it establishes weather patterns (three days heat, five days rain), which come to sustain divergent forms of life (GSPR, 105) The first stanza

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<sup>142</sup> Robert Kern, „Silence in Prosody: The Poem as Silent Form,” in CE, pp. 105-122.

<sup>143</sup> Laszlo Géfin, quoted by Timothy Gray, GSPR, p. 105.

may also open into the notion of perception and of the one that perceives. Certainly, the relationship between the two allows for better insight into the essence of things, and holds it true that the one observing is being observed at the same time. Hence, the poet's communion with the land that surrounds him alienates him from the cities far down the place he dwells, and present him different layers of looking, which is his exposure to the process of adjusting the mechanism of perception. Another instance of enjambment is explicit in the line, "across rocks and meadows," which may refer to the "swarms of new flies," as well as to the previous line, "pitch glows on the fir-cones." Swarms and meadows speak for the vastness of space, the "creaturely community," Gray refers to in his study. Fittingly, the means to understand and pervade this place involves a sort of meditative exercise to cleanse the mind and see oneself as immersed in a nameless state of being, when "all the junk that goes with being human / Drops away, hard rock wavers. . ." (RCM, 8) "High still air," is therefore a "place for meditation and observation," (PFW, 46) and understanding looms at elevation, where human actions are brought to simple acts necessary to survive, to the "be-here-now attention,"<sup>144</sup> depicted by the end of the poem, "[d]rinking cold snow-water from a tin cup / Looking down for miles / Through high still air." (RCM, 3)

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<sup>144</sup> James Martin, „Lookouts: Poets and Monks," in *North Cascades Crest*. . . , p. 62

## **Chapter 5**

### **Riprapping in the Sierras (1955).**

## 5.1. Riprap, Cobbles and Words.

Thinking I'm unable to see it or know it  
—this enormous inhuman beauty—and yet,  
letting go, I am simply it, being part of it, in me as well as outside.  
How not to understand it? And yet, how hard. (August 27, 1955)<sup>145</sup>

“High still air” became a sort of condition Snyder planted into his mind, the cleared space able to reflect the interconnected beads, the peaks, valleys and gorges of the Skagit. However, in the summer of 1954, when Whalen was assigned to Sourdough, Snyder was dismissed by the US government “for his general unsustainability.”<sup>146</sup> (PP, 91) His previous contemplative period of lookoutting crashed with the chokersetting time in the woods of rolling logs, toppling snags and giant caterpillars. (PP, 104) In a letter to Shandel Parks, he describes the situation as follows,

After a pleasant hitch-hike up the coast, and an uneventful arrival at my place – of employment – and two days of work, I was rudely fired on orders from above. I returned to Portland and rented my spleen on a hapless F.B.I agent, but this only led me farther from a job. I then prepared to go to work logging, only at this very time the entire Northwest lumber industry went on strike, and has remained so since. So I wandered disconsolately about for three weeks morning from the ocean beaches to the Mountains, from there to Seattle, and thence to the Mountains near Canada, and back to mountains in central Washington, and again to Seattle, and then to a stretch of beach in Oregon, wondering always “whence?” and “whither?” until one day in Portland I chanced on a job at the Employment Agency working at this very place, Timberline lodge. . .

I quit Timberline lodge soon as I learned the strike was over and hitchhiked. (30 July, 1954)

This is the warm springs Indian reservation, about 40miles south of Mt. Hood, and on the east slope of the Cascades, hence dry. Most of the reservation is sagebrush,

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<sup>145</sup> Gary Snyder, “Yosemite Solo Trip: Lyell and Ritter Backcountry,” in *The High Sierra of California* (ed.) Gary Snyder, Tom Killion (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002), p. 75. Hereafter as HSJ and a page number.

<sup>146</sup> Snyder got his seaman’s papers through the Maritime Cooks and Stewards, “a union famous members included stewards, chefs, cooks, bakers, butchers etc. MC&S had gays at every level of membership. . . The MC&S was also integrated ethnically and racially. . . [It was] built on the solidarity of its multi-ethnic rank-and-file, which included many Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and Latino members. In 1938, when most American labor unions still refused workers of color, the MC&S had integrated itself with 1800 black stewards from a private union. . . . [Its] policies were largely the influence of the Communist Party, which became a leading force in the MC&S before, when the union had been in the thick of the great Pacific coast maritime strikes of the mid-1930’s.” More a more detailed account on the MC&S see: Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks*, pp. 87-90.

canyon, and juniper-covered hills, with wild horses and near-wild cattle roaming at complete freedom. . . . Am doing a logging job called chokersetting. (29 August, 1954)<sup>147</sup>

Warm Springs was already an important poetic ground underlying his “Berry Feast” poem from 1951, which Snyder would read at the famous San Francisco Six Gallery reading in 1955. It was also the terrain that provided much of the grist for his *Myths and Texts*, as well as the in-between period, with the Cascades gradually afar and the Sierras to loom on the horizon. As a poet, Snyder negotiates the terrain and transforms it into thoughts and then into words that would combine the harsh, tricky trails, the landscape’s “inhuman beauty,” the grandeur of the Sierras—the “dead” hills, which had “nothing of the alpine quality of even Sourdough, and a much less entertaining purview. Awful old hard granite rock, though.” (GSPR, 108) Nonetheless, the Sierras were brimming with that which John Muir noted in his account, *My First Summer in the Sierras*, namely, the intense, bright light as if pouring into the granite which gained an illuminating quality. Unsettling as the feeling of being in the Yosemite Sierra was for Snyder, there was an instantaneous need to adjust to it, to adapt himself to the “very sharply contrasted, definite, even harsh” land. These adjustments had some psychic analogues, as Snyder admitted.<sup>148</sup> They also foretell of the esthetic value of the poetry which interweaves the real and the intellectual work. However, *Riprap* is not a refined game of intellection and work; it is rather a game of awareness and creativity which brought down to essentials makes human endeavors mere parts of the whole of the living. The volume certainly touches upon the “beyond word and letters” of which the poet wrote in his *Lookout Journal*. The message, surfacing in “Piute Creek” with the lines, “[w]ords and books / Like a small creek off a high ledge / Gone in the dry air,” (RCM, 8) seems to be grasping something of the condition of being in the Sierras, the real work—placing with hands, walking, climbing, building a trail for oneself to convey a message, a way for words spun from the fact of being there and anchored in the ground under one’s feet as well as in the ground of the sky above one’s head.

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<sup>147</sup> Gary Snyder, letters to Shandel Parks, Gary Snyder Papers, Mandeville Special Collections, Giesel Library, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>148</sup> Gary Snyder, quoted in David Robertson, „Gary Snyder Riprapping in Yosemite, 1955,” *American Poetry* 2, no. 1 (1984), pp. 52-53.

Among the simplicity, the “complexity [lies] beneath the surface structure,” (GSPR, 111) and “poetry [becomes] a riprap on the slick rock of metaphysics” (MT, 48)

*Riprap* (1959) looms as a book of trails composed of things “at once different and similar in nature” (“Ellipsis and Riprap,” CE, 125) set in the rough terrain as well in the mind. From the still-point on Sourdough (“Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout”) to Mt. Baker and Shuksan ridges (“The Late Snow & Lumber Strike of the Summer of Fifty-Four”), Piute Creek (“Piute Creek”) Pate Valley (“Above Pate Valley”), Nooksack Valley (“Nooksack Valley”), through Kyoto (“Kyoto: March”), a sample of Japan (“A Stone Garden”), the Sappa Creek tanker – Colombia and Arabia (“Cartagena”) are among places laying the lines of the poems from *Riprap*. The final poem, “Riprap,” crystallizes Snyder’s lessons of “being-in-the-world” which is a constant process of traversing divergent paths, linked elsewhere, but reflected within the relations between things scattered across the land yet reaching as far as the universe. Snyder pays close attention to parts of this world like rocks, cobbles, stones; how they are placed and become a trail; how they are traveled over by people and animals; and finally, how they convey meaning and explicate that place is ultimately a net of relations between individual beings and the ground that turns under their feet. Laszlo Géfin claims Snyder’s method is close to the ideogrammic tradition of Pound, Williams and of Projectivists, yet he transfixes the line and presents his own composition which has its origins predominantly in the work and his research. In an afterword to the collection Snyder explains,

So in the summer of 1955 after a year of Oriental languages graduate school, I signed on with the Yosemite National Park as a trail crew laborer. They soon had me working in upper reaches of the Piute Creek drainage, a land of smooth white granite and gnarly juniper and pine. It all carries a visible memory of the ice age. The bedrock is so brilliant that it shines back at the crystal night stars. In a curious mind of renunciation and long day’s hard work with shovel, pick, dynamite, and boulder, my language relaxed into itself. I began to be able to meditate, nights, after work, and I found myself writing some poems that surprised me. (RCM, 65)

Therefore, “Riprap” depicts the “real work”—which is “what we really do. And what our lives are. And if we can live the work we have to do, knowing that we are real, and it’s real, and the world is real, then it becomes right. And that’s the *real work*: to make

the world as real as it is, and to find ourselves as real as we are within it.”<sup>149</sup> Moreover, the real work involves play as well. (“work and play are one” RW, 81) Thus, the poem “represents the effort to link poetry to the body, to work, and thus to what is taken as the immediacy of the real;”<sup>150</sup> whereas the whole collection is grounded in the Sierras.

*Riprap* is really a class of poems I wrote under the influence of the geology of the Sierra Nevada and the daily trail-crew work of picking up and placing granite stones in tight cobble pattern on hard slab. “What are you doing?” I asked old Roy Marchbank.—“Riprapping,” he said. His selection of natural rocks was perfect—the result looked like dressed stone fitting to hair-edge cracks. Walking, climbing, placing with hands. I tried writing poems of tough, simple, short words, with the complexity far beneath the surface structure. In part the line was influenced by the five and seven-character line Chinese poems I’d been reading, which work like sharp blows on the mind.<sup>151</sup>

It is a permanent process of the world going on. Similarly, in poetry “riprapping” is “the re-creation of an ongoing, ceaselessly unfolding movement of things and events, . . . ‘thing-events,’ an act of conscious and intuitive participation in the universal scheme of eternal change.” (“Ellipsis and Riprap,” CE, 124) The position of the poem in the book is the transitory place between verses that treat about mountains, making trails, travelling, observing the changing landscapes, and Snyder’s Cold Mountain translations which go beyond trails, leave off the fixed ones and move onto the unknown ones till one reaches the peak, which is home and the mind at once, the “mind-stop” place, an observation point and a sort of enlightenment. On an onomatopoeic level, the very term is a medley of “things-events;” which in certain circumstances may be dissimilar though “they all diffuse energies according to the natural law,”<sup>152</sup> as Géfin maintains. On a literal level riprap, as Snyder explains, is “a cobble of stone laid on steep, slick rock to make a trail for horses in the mountains.”

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<sup>149</sup> Gary Snyder, „The Real Work,” in RW, p. 82. Paul Geneson’s interview first appeared in the Ohio Review (Fall, 1977).

<sup>150</sup> Tim Dean, *Gary Snyder and the American Unconscious. Inhabiting the Ground* (Pelgrave Macmillan: The John Hopkins University, Macmillan, 1991), p. 189.

<sup>151</sup> Donald M. Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 420-421.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.



In *Dimensions of a Life*, a compilation of essays-recollections on Gary Snyder, submitted by befriended people from various walks of life, Jim Snyder—a riprapper in Yosemite—presents a sort of a background essay on the work of riprapping and some of the backcountry people to whom Snyder dedicated this book of poems.

Riprap is a kind of rock pavement that can be laid in just about any rough or eroding trail. The technique came to Yosemite from Scotland and England with people for whom working with stone was as much second nature as is working with wood in the Northwest. A man who manages trails in England's Lake District has been studying riprap laid by monks for burro trails to their mines a thousand years ago; he calls it by its older name, "pitching," rather than "riprap."<sup>153</sup> (photo 12)

However, the tradition antedates those monks and reaches back to the Roman roads. Due to the migration of people the laying of riprap (based on a long oral tradition) was carried across the ocean and preserved in trail-crew work; it became "a single most important erosion-control trail technique in the Sierra."<sup>154</sup> Snyder's "Riprap" takes on the following shape,

Lay down these words  
Before your mind like rocks.

        placed solid, by hands  
In choice of place, set  
Before the body of the mind

        in space and time:  
Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall

        riprap of things:  
Cobble of milky way,

        straying planets,  
These poems, people,

        lost ponies with  
Dragging saddles

        and rocky sure-foot trails.  
The worlds like and endless

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<sup>153</sup> Jim Snyder, „Riprap and the Old Ways: Gary Snyder in Yosemite, 1955” in *Gary Snyder. Dimensions of a Life*,” John Halper (ed.) (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), pp. 35-42.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

four-dimensional  
Game of *Go*.  
  
ants and pebbles  
In the thin loam, each rock a word  
  
a creek-washed stone  
Granite: ingrained  
  
with torment of fire and weight  
Crystal and sediment linked hot  
  
all change, in thoughts,  
As well as things. (RCM, 32)

In his discussion with David Robertson, Snyder relates to a certain sense of mobility that the Sierras offer; a movement, free and unconstrained, dictated by choice and spirit, reveals space as multitude of paths to choose from: “In the Sierra I . . . got a sense of mobility that I had never experienced before. . . . I just reveled in the freedom of movement.”<sup>155</sup> In his Sierra journal, Snyder ponders on the nature of paths,

. . . the rhythmic, deliberate picking of steps – not following a trail, but free in a wide space to choose a path over rock, seeing the route far ahead, selecting an invisible precise route that is rhythm and ease to the body, each foot on a solid place, never slowing. A kind of flying. (July 27, 1984)<sup>156</sup>

The solid place, the “sure-foot trail” enhances the metaphor “each rock a word,” and emphasizes Snyder’s work of materializing the language. The fundamental element of the poem, the rock, is at the same time, the cosmological element that lays the universe. Granite, both word (a linguistic unit) and rock (formed by the “action of volcanic heat on rock, compressing different elements—chiefly feldspar and quartz—so that the geology of each element is implicated in the other.”) (GSAU, 189) As Dean continues, granite’s physical force of its history is locked within its substance and name. “‘Granite’ derives from the word for ‘ingrained’—Latin *granum* stands for grain,” explicates Dean; whereas the shape of a ‘creek-washed stone’ is an outcome of

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<sup>155</sup> Snyder, quoted in Robertson, „Gary Snyder Ripping in Yosemite,” p. 53.

<sup>156</sup> Snyder, „Desolation Valley Wilderness with Gen,” in *The High Sierra of California* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002), p. 102.

the opposite process in nature. His study of the poem is engaged with the nominalization of structural components; the links between etymology and natural processes in nature. Fittingly, Dean's interpretation moves toward the naming process, which has been for Snyder an essential part of learning a place by returning to original names and uncovering the real meanings and referential objects hidden within. The name is that which speaks for what is really there. It is the very beginning of the re-inhabitation idea; moreover, it reverses the process of perception by initial defamiliarization of the imposed names which—contrasted with the original ones—lack the primary relation with what they refer to; Turtle Island, Kitkitdizze, may serve as examples Snyder explicates in his essays and poetry. Therefore, the solidity of things is to be searched for in that which has long been subjected to formative processes, like the “nearly anagrammatic” (GSPR, 124) granite “ingrained.” The unsurpassed creativity lies within the nature's own rights, in “the torment of fire and weight / Crystal and sediment linked hot” that shaped that rocky landscape.

The laying of rock to form a trail is, on a linguistic level, joining the similar-sounding syllables to form a word; on a poetic level, the placing of words onto the ground of prosody. The rocks have their equivalents in the universe of stars, the galaxies. In “Koip Peak with Kai” the poet says, “[t]hese cliffs and stars belong / to the same universe.” (HSJ, 99) This universe is a sphere of man's “infinite belonging,” transcending the visible and the tangible and stretching toward “the sky whose bottom is pebbly with stars,” in the Thoreauvian words. Riprap conjoins the real work, the skill since “rocks are laid tightly, joints broken, spaces chinked . . .”<sup>157</sup> to lay riprap one must know the nature of rocks, the way they link. Furthermore, it paves the way to “knowing the ‘where’ of who we are,”<sup>158</sup> which is a sort of the point of departure that is “hitched to everything else in the universe,”<sup>159</sup> as Muir says. In this way, the trail is finally the “cobble of milky way,” suspended in the vastness of space, among the turning, straying planets. It is marked with traces; the imprints of those who traveled it before, packers and hikers; horses and mules dragged high up the trails, lost. Marked with myriads of interlacing trails, the land is as if projected upon the universe where

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<sup>157</sup> Jim Snyder, „Riprap and the Old Ways,” p. 36.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> John Muir, quoted In Jim Snyder, p. 36.

paths reflect larger sparkling ones, cobbled-starry galaxies, which look like a four-dimensional game of *Go*. From the riprap of the poem there issues a world of interconnected spheres; the microscopic loam, the formation of granite, ants and pebbles all come to relate to things larger and moved farther away. The words, flattened to the size of a sheet of paper, cascading down though still enclosed in the poem, have their equivalent rock structured, sure-foot trails above any worldly limits, in the openness of space rich in dimensions. The act of hopping down with the words of the poem seems to have a reverse movement, which—when implanted in cosmos—represents the “interconnectedness” of being, that which Snyder described as “the wonderful, empty, intricate, inter-penetrating, mutually-embracing, shining single world beyond all discrimination or opposites.” (“On ‘As For Poets,’” TI, 113) The game of *Go* depicts its “structural image”—(GSPR, 123) white and black stones on a board which is a place of intersection abundant with lines, which reminds of Indra’s net. The universe is thus “like a huge network with crystal beads at each juncture. Each of the beads contains within itself the entire universe by reflecting all the others.” (GSPR, 123) Therefore, words of a poem as rocks that form a trail, as beads-pebbles in the universe all mirroring the ancient geological processes make the way to one’s understanding of “infinite belonging.” Change, intricate in all the living, is therefore mirrored within each being and affects all as the beads reflect each other in the infinite chain of being, seeing and being seen. “Riprap” ultimately is a poem of relationship and belonging which is fluent and changing though ongoing. Place is also an activity (PFW, 61), and one’s experience of place is tied with the work this place engages. Snyder has been claim the “ethnographer of trails,”<sup>160</sup> which is grasped in Wendell Berry’s words from “A Trail Maker,”

This is a trail both to be thought about and to be walked over. From his first book until now, Mr. Snyder has been cobbling together a riprap of words, images, poems, tales, arguments, facts, ideas, and actual rocks, laying down a trail over a steep slick place. Those below him on the slope will be grateful.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Jim Snyder, „Riprap and the Old Ways,” p. 42.

<sup>161</sup> Wendell Berry, „A Trail Maker” in *Gary Snyder. Dimensions of a Life*, John Halper (ed.). pp. 252-253.

The poem conjoins the acts of thinking, writing, placing with hands, walking. “In space and time” these become the real work tinged with meditative look and touch; the “thinking without thoughts,” a perpetuation of the skill, the oral tradition, and the old ways; “a dark lurking” to what is off the trail. All that might be mere abstraction is purposefully brought down to depict a thing, a rock, a “sure-foot trail.” Thinking becomes materialized, infused in things as representations of constructs which might have been evanescent and gone. Yet with the rirap of things thoughts are made real, initially fragmented, then tightly joined, wend a real way of worldly hardships and passions. There is no place for constructs of the mind since the world is real such as it is, offering roads aplenty. Hence, word, idea and object are given equal status, importance and dimension.

## **Chapter 6**

**At Home in the World.**

**Snyder's Mind and Berry's Window.**

The mind, unfurnished with desires and convenient theories, but furnished austere with the fundamental elements, “solid and sharp; leaning on a stone” (no. 21, RCM, 59) has become one of the most important concepts for Snyder; the essence underlying all human endeavors, and—according to the Buddhist philosophers of India—the sixth element that constitutes the world, that is consciousness, or Mind. Snyder explains,

Our most intimate and immediate access to the natural world is ourselves. Our closest wilderness area is our body. We are animal organisms, carrying around within us a huge flora of microfobes, as well as a gigantic space of imagination, which, like a wilderness area, includes all kinds of territories we have never visited before. This wilderness is bringing up ideas, images, and memories that we didn't consciously call forth. So, in a sense, we live in a natural world of the mind itself.<sup>162</sup>

By tracing one's access to the natural world Snyder shows that a link holding the inner and the outer world together is the mind, which—brought closer to the notion of consciousness—acquires the attributes of the compassionate one. It means the mind is part of the sensuous world, yet it is not “some otherworldly essence that comes to house itself inside our physiology. Rather, it is instilled and provoked by the sensorial field itself, induced by the tensions and participations between the human body and the animate earth.” (SPS, 262) I, therefore, concur with Abram that the body of thoughts is aroused by shapes, smells, rhythms and movements registered to be coming from the exterior. A subtle play interchanges the two worlds and endows each one with some components of the other. The play of reflections which loom as thoughts and shapes mirrored in the structure of the mind comes to intensify the relation which may be well depicted in juxtaposing the notion of the mind explicated by Snyder, Han Shan and Hui-nêng, and Berry's window-“the wind's eye.”<sup>163</sup> The tangible frame of the window seems to infiltrate things as they happen outside and come through to the interior terrain, and thus provides “a grid with more than two dimensions, a way to measure & to frame anything of his choosing.”<sup>164</sup> (photo 13, 14) The mind is the pure

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<sup>162</sup> “A Wilderness Journey with Gary Snyder” in: *Inquiring Mind* (1994), vol. 11, No. 1, p. 15.

<sup>163</sup> Wendell Berry, *Window Poems* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2007), unpaginated. Hereafter as WP and a poem number.

<sup>164</sup> James Baker Hall, „Wendell's Window & the Wind's Eye,” a foreword to *Window Poems*, unpaginated.

continuation of the exterior, its intensification and subjectification. Abram has found an accompanying verse in Rainer Maria Rilke and made it the motto to his coda. The verse expresses the wish of a sensitive mind, “not to be cut off, / not through the slightest partition / shut out from the law of the stars. / The inner—what is it? / if not intensified sky, / hurled through with birds and deep / with the winds of homecoming.”<sup>165</sup> It keeps the bond between man and nature taut; the mind – swarming with thoughts of belonging and overflowing into space that surrounds him. The space as mosaics of places “riprapped” with each other fits the general pattern that each landscape has as its offering to all the living. The visual feast, the living space, the “earth-house-hold” to those living within is perceived anew in Berry’s *Window Poems* as well as in Snyder’s “As for Poets.” Seeing nature perform, a poet is the one who registers the changes and the general flow of things. Yet, he is not only the observer or the reader of nature’s trails, but his role is multiplied by the elements that bring forth the material he is working with. The poet is not an individual living solely in a place, but the persona of the poet is an intersection of the elements such as the earth, air, water, fire, space and the mind. Playing with them individually, he traces the lines of poems already grown into each one’s terrain, be it rocks, earth, mud, water or air. As “each place its own mind, its own psyche,” (SPS, 262) the emerging poems bear features of places, the elements and – simultaneously – endow the poet with the place-specific intelligence that dwells therein. Thus, the inner of the man interweaves with the inner of the elements; poems go across each other, interlace their lines, intermingle the patterns, intersect with each other’s beginning and ending. The landscape, which is the outcome of powers, the natural and the human ones, surfaces with its hidings and offers that which has lived or remained there for eons of time. “As For Poets” has its prose component and both comprise the Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Turtle Island*. As Snyder is considered by Jim Snyder—veteran trail crew foreman, now historian—“the ethnographer of trails,”<sup>166</sup> the quotation of the poem crisscrosses here with the prose fragments.

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<sup>165</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, quoted by Abram, SPS, p. 261.

<sup>166</sup> Jim Snyder, “Riprap and the Old Ways: Gary Snyder in Yosemite, 1955,” in *Gary Snyder. Dimensions of a Life*, p. 42.



As for poets  
The Earth poets  
who write small poems,  
Need help from no man. (TI, 87)

*Earth is our mother and a man goes directly to her, needing no  
intermediary. (TI, 114)*

The Air Poets  
Play out the swiftest gales  
And sometimes loll in the eddies,  
Poem after poem,  
Curling back on the same thrust.

*Air is our breath, spirit, inspiration; a flow which becomes speech when  
“sounded” – the curling back on the same thrust” is close to what is meant  
in the Japanese word Fushi (bushi . . . ) – knot, or whorl in the grain, the  
word for song.*

At fifty below  
Fuel oil won't flow  
And propane stays in the tank. Fire Poets burn at absolute zero  
Fossil love pumped back up.

*Fire must have fuel and the heart's fuel is love. The love that makes poetry  
burn is not just the green of this spring, but draws on the ancient web of  
sympathetic, compassionate, and erotic acts that lies behind our very  
existence, a stored energy in our genes and dreams—fossil love a sly term  
for that deep-buried sweetness brought to conscious thought.*

The first  
Water Poet  
Stayed down six years.  
He was covered with seaweed.  
The life in his poem  
Left millions of tiny  
Different tracks  
Criss-crossing through the mud.

*Water is creation, the mud we crawled on; the wash of tides in the cells. The  
Water Poet is the Creator. His calligraphy is the trails and tracks we living  
beings leave in each other; in the world; his poem.*

With the Sun and Moon  
In his belly,  
The Space Poet  
Sleeps. No end to the sky—  
But his poems,  
Like wild geese,  
Fly off the edge. (TI, 88)

*But swallow it all. Size is no problem, a little space encloses a huge void.  
There, those great whorls, the stars hang. Who can get outside the universe?*

*But the poem was born elsewhere, and need not stay. Like the wild geese of the Arctic it heads home, far above the borders, where most things cannot cross.*

A Mind Poet  
Stays in the house.  
The house is empty  
And it has no walls.  
The poem  
Is seen from all sides,  
Everywhere,  
At once.

*Now, we are both in, and outside, the world at once. The only place this can be is the Mind. Ah, what a poem. It is what is completely, in the past, present, and future simultaneously, seeing being, and being seen.*

The poet finally melts within the elemental world and its meanderings through time. It is the intimate reciprocity of the world that a poem ultimately becomes. A living entity, the flow, the fuel, the mud, the space all bear witness to a poem being performed at divergent levels of evolution, transformation and mere changes that life is subjected to. The inconspicuous lines reveal themselves as trails, paths and roads. The poet works through them and thus brings the “work of seeing the world *without* any prism of language,” (RCM, 67) Only then is seeing brought to language, the engraved lines take shape of letters; trees take form of pieces of paper, fragments of the world—“cut off,” “shut out from,” ‘out-formed’ from the world, reminiscent, remaining, fading. Yet, “neither the self nor the visible world is passive, as in the Cartesian paradigm, for sensible things are alive in the moment of perception.” (SP, 231-232) The mind is therefore not Cartesian immanence, but “the entire living field of the living world in which the human mind/body complex participates.” (SP, 271) It is the mind that beholds the world in a particular integrated way; mirrors its nuances yet remains untouched, knows multiplicity yet is oneness. “It fills the universe and never rests from work. It is free, creative, and at the same time, it knows itself. It knows all in one and one in all.” (EZB, 220) With no fixed abode it is like space, as in meditation, “yet without any notion of space.” (SH, 58) The force that integrates the mind with the universe is perception, man’s reconfigured ability to see into the nature of things and see them as parts of the “intricate,” “mutually-embracing” web of relations that form the universe, outlay its patterns in the field of perception. Berry’s *Window Poems* enhances in a sense the registered changes in the area observed from his desk at the window of a cabin. While Snyder’s vision goes freely onward without

obstacles, Berry's is initially enclosed within the window frame to be only then released gradually outward but retreating inward for an active interplay of the past and the present time—which is also tinged with a sense of history, both of himself and the Kentuckian hill. In Berry, the window becomes stripped of being read as a barrier, and thus is endowed with a reading of a subjective tool through which the land and its life comes and goes. As in Snyder, seeing bifurcates into two directions, the inside and the outside, which afterwards forms a uniform pattern that links the two territories.

The wind's eye  
to see into the wind.  
The eye in its hollow  
looking out  
through the black frame  
as the waves of the wind  
drives up the river,  
whitecaps, a wild day,  
the white sky  
traveled by snow squalls,  
the trees thrashing,  
the corn blades driven,  
quivering, straight out. (no 1, WP)

The outward movement; the eye, from its hollow, beholding the emerging world; the outside grows wild yet enlightens with each spotted thing while “the black frame” is left off, the person is forgotten, as the “I” of the speaker remains hidden within the cabin. The long poem, “Window. Window,” that constitutes the book, opens up the play of landscapes and introduces the window as a visual tool—a form, a pattern—whose black grid stays unmoved yet allows for seeing the outside.

The window has forty  
panes, forty clarities  
variously wrinkled, streaked  
with dried rain, smudged,  
dusted. The frame  
is a black grid  
beyond which the world  
flings up the wild  
graph of its growth,  
tree branch, river,  
slope of land,

the river passing  
downward, the clouds blowing . . . (no 3, WP)

The window is a form  
of consciousness, pattern  
of formed sense  
through which to look  
into the wild  
that is a pattern too,  
but dark and flowing,  
bearing along the little  
shapes of the mind  
as the river bears  
a sash of some blinded house. (no. 3, WP)

Looking out is a meditative exercise of a man conscious of his history and the history of the land he has known for many years and has belonged in along with his ancestors – “[h]is ancestor is the hill / that rises in the winter wind / beyond the blind wall / at his back. It wears a patched robe / of some history that he knows / and some that he does not . . .” (no. 5, WP) The pattern that the present has to offer is not new, but trodden by the past days and stories. Still, it bears their imprints and provides a link with his interior, his memories of place and people it once had – “[t]he hill has known / too many days and men / grown quiet behind him.” (no. 5, WP) The window is also “a seeing into days to come,” (no. 4, WP) a thorough reflection as he breathes the landscape in, learns its shape, land formation, its trees, the river, and the sky—the pattern that is flowing, evanescent and dear to him. As he is looking out the river is coming up to him, “a sort of vertical geography that portions his life,” (no. 9, WP) as “the life in him / grows and subsides / and grows again.” (no. 4, WP) The rising river is described as wild, as his imagination wanders freely upon the land—half-submerged, thus flowing and melting the border between the land and the river. The observer suddenly ceases to be enclosed within the cabin, the “sheltering,” and “clear” window, but comes to belong in that place as tree trunks and the cabin itself, and therefore he cannot leave. He has grown out of its soil and there he stays—“[i]n Port Royal, that begins / a submergence of minds.” (no. 10, WP) Yet in another poem we read,

His mind contains  
the river as its banks  
contain it, in a single act  
receiving it and letting it go. (“Observance,” CP, 7)

The relation between place and man is intricate, phenomenological and non-Cartesian, due to its complete absorption in the physical, the elemental which penetrates his mind and his body as he sits “in the long-legged cabin / above the water, there is / an influence of the rise / that he feels in his footsoles / and in his belly / even if he thinks / of something else.” (no. 10, WP) Therefore, the window—once again reiterated as a “form of consciousness”—“looks out / like a word, / upon the wordless . . .” (no. 10, WP) It is only an intermediary, a space in-between that makes the interior of the cabin brim with the element from the world exterior. In Berry, as in Snyder, the cabin and the lookout, are places influenced greatly by the outside, while they both stand for the interior of man. They are places subjected to elemental changes, such as the flood, the darkness of the night, the storm, the fog. The interior is uniquely yet temporarily transformed by forces different from itself, whereas the man at work becomes a mere repetition of the processes happening outside, between the exterior world and interior of the cabin, and then, his exterior world—now shifted as the interior of the cabin, and his own interior. Similarly, as the categories of “here” and “there” may shift from their present interpretations, so too can be done with the exterior and the interior. Therefore, space, as well as place, are transitory in nature, subjected to the persona of the observer, to that which stretches beyond him, and the relation between the two. This shifting is felt throughout the poem, which itself is flowing along with the rising river, flooding the pages, and in this way it reminds the scroll of the mountains and rivers without end. Here, the potential end is the wall and the window of the long-legged house; in Snyder, it is the four walls of windows in the case of a lookout cabin; furthermore, it is the actual end of the scroll that continued further on in front of his eyes beholding the landscape after he left the museum. As the window is the frame through which the landscape distills itself filling the inside, in Berry, the “swollen river” (no. 9, WP) becomes a “domestic thing.” (no. 10, WP) The house, “a place of change, changed,” (no. 10, WP) comes to be seen as a collage of houses that stood there before, erected in the mind’s eyes and weathered from there in bygone years.

But this is only for a while.  
This house was not always  
here. Another stood  
in its place, and weathered  
and grew old. He tore it down  
and used the good of it  
to build this. And further on  
another stood  
that is gone. Nobody  
alive now knows  
how it looked, though some  
recall a springhouse  
that is gone too now. (no. 11, WP)

Perception allows for a non-dualistic emergence of the seer and the seen as they combine and accentuate the passing of each moment into the invisible though crystallized in the conscious thought. A sense of perception is therefore conveyed as process, “the ongoing rush of the new that breaks through the sedimented, the old.” (SP, 143) As each house weathers and grows old a new one comes to replace it. Houses as well as people are mutable. They both are “given a fragment of time / in [a] . . . fragment of the world,” (no. 13, WP) whereas the window grows into something more insubstantial,

The window becomes a part  
of his mind’s history, the entrance  
of days into it. And awake  
now, watching the water flow  
beyond the glass, his mind  
is watched by a spectre of itself  
that is a window on the past. (no. 16, WP)

Yet to “see beyond his glances / the distorting geometry / of preconceptions and habit, / to know it beyond words,” (no. 16, WP) would be a look into “a world that preexists our contemplation.” (SP, 143) However, such a world, of undisturbed fusion of seer and seen, present only to the prophetic eye, looms as a look into the infinite. Still, the observer—humble and faithful to that which he sees—proclaims his lasting commitment to where he actually is. Hence, there are no arrivals for they are inherent to places themselves, Berry believes. This repercussion of Eliot’s ideas of beginning and end is in Berry a reconciliation of the goer and his destination. In his essay, “The Journey’s End,” Berry says,

Where I am going I have never been before. And since I have no destination that I know, where I am going is always where I am. When I come to good resting places, I rest. I rest whether I am tired or not because the places are good. Each one is an arrival. I am where I have been going. At a narrow place in the stream I sit on one side and prop my feet on the other. For a while I content myself to be a bridge. The water of heaven and earth is flowing beneath me. While I rest a piece of the world's work is continuing here without my help. . . . I am light and exultant here in the end and the beginning.<sup>167</sup>

The unification of the goer with his path and his destination is depicted in his bondage with the place itself. However, this bondage, which is a deep knowledge of relations between the human and nature, allows for impermanence or gradual transgression of things which, in a sense, interact with the bridge, yet flow on continuously. Nevertheless, in mind there is a continuation of things as well, for the mind is itself the continuity. It is the continuity in that it acknowledges the impermanence of things yet, on the other hand, has great potential of clinging to abstract ideas. Moreover, in mind there are images of things remembered and preserved, confronted with that which continues while taking different shapes. Mapped upon the maps that the mind is making, in "The Journey's End" Berry commemorates yet another place, the Red River Gorge, near the western edge of the Cumberland Plateau, Kentucky; a place gone and turned into another one, "lying potent in the ground like a deep dream," a lake. Thus, "the ongoing rush of the new" (SP, 143) has its equivalent in this last essay of Berry's *The Unforeseen Wilderness*, where he concludes,

[t]he image takes hold of me, and I suddenly realize that it is the culmination, the final insight. . . . It is the symbol of what I have learned here, and of the process: the gradual relinquishment of maps, the yielding of knowledge before the new facts and the mysteries of growth and renewal and change.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Berry, *The Unforeseen Wilderness* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006), p. 110.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

**Conclusions:**

**The Final Insight.**

**“Mind Has Mountains.”** (G. M. Hopkins)



As the poet continues walking, “more and more the mountains are [his] mind; an inner world to go to too.”<sup>i</sup> The territory of his mind reflects the vast and infinite terrain, the palimpsest brimming with trails and voices of all the living. The inner and the outer world are gradually enclosing themselves in one another’s reflections and repercussions; the visible and the invisible imprints left in particular places, which in turn compose the space that is spotted with innumerable zones, ecotones, realms, regions, bioregions and watersheds. Places with their stories implicit way down in the ground are planted in the mind as well, where the world is presented in its fullness—its delight, sweetness, love, compassion, but also its fierceness, wildness, and spirit. Therefore, the thesis explores the mind whose metaphors of a house, a cabin and a lookout tower speak against their detachment from the earth, and at the same time, against the mind/body dichotomy. As the house, the cabin and the lookout stand for the natural territories of observation, so does the mind. Yet its space is sacred, in a sense, since “there is a tame, and also a wild, side to the human mind. The tame side, like farmer’s field, has been disciplined and cultivated to produce a desired yield. It is useful but limited. The wild side is larger, deeper, more complex, and though it cannot be fully known, it can be explored. The explorers of the wild mind are often writers and artists. The ‘poetic imagination’ of which William Blake so eloquently spoke is the territory of the wild mind. It has landscapes and creatures within it that will surprise us. It can refresh us and scare us. Wild mind reflects the larger truth of our ancient selves, of our animal and spiritual selves.”<sup>ii</sup> Drawing from the wild side, Snyder attempts to restore the “great myths and folktales of human magic and nature’s power”<sup>iii</sup>—which were “human education for ten thousand years”<sup>iv</sup>—in order to enhance the state/level of mind which is not intellect but the “cool water” that reflects and feeds everything but is itself transparent and stays unmoved. Apart from these, the poet revisits the concept of a house on the grounds of the root meanings of the word “ecology,” hence, “Earth House Hold” upholds the “riprap of things” in the balanced, compassionate mind where the cobbles of milky way are reflected. Thus, the mind endowed with compassion is “like the earth – untroubled, free from enmity, vast, enlarged and measureless,”<sup>v</sup> which corresponds with Hui-nêng’s conceptions of the free, unfixed mind likened to space; whereas in Han Shan the household of the mind is transplanted into the world’s boundless corridors and rooms, “Cold Mountain is a house / Without beams or walls. / The six doors left and right are open / The Hall is blue sky. The rooms all vacant and vague / The east wall beats on the west wall / At the center nothing.”<sup>vi</sup> This unceasing coupling of the perceiving and the perceived is apparent also in Berry, and evoked by him in his careful observation and simultaneous recollection of the world outside the window of his long-legged

house—somehow empowered to be a household, “a place where family’s inward and outward needs and responsibilities could achieve an orderly meeting.”<sup>vii</sup> All in all, as in Snyder the scroll of the mountains and rivers continues outside the museum, Berry sees windows and doors as enlargements of the living space, “entrances into the mysterious world outside the walls, lessons in what to look for and how to see.”<sup>viii</sup> What Berry, as well as Snyder, offer are “spiritual landmarks” for those “on the path [and] off the trail.”<sup>ix</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Snyder, *High Sierra of California*, p. 85.

<sup>ii</sup> Snyder, „Writers and the War Against Nature,” in *Back on the Fire. Essays*, p. 62.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>v</sup> Khen Lampert, *Traditions of Compassion* (Houndsmills: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 76.

<sup>vi</sup> Snyder, „Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems,” p. 54.

<sup>vii</sup> Berry, “Poetry and Place” in *Standing by Words. Essays* (Washington D. C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005), p. 161.

<sup>viii</sup> Berry, „The One-Inch Journey,” in *The Unforeseen Wilderness*, p. 42.

<sup>ix</sup> „On the Path, Off the Trail” is the title of one of Snyder’s essays from *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 144-154.

## Streszczenie

Praca traktuje o pojęciu wspólnoty w ujęciu badań amerykańskich. Wspólnota rozpatrywana jest poprzez przecinanie się z takimi pojęciami jak: dom, miejsce, dział wodny, bioregion, które zestawione zostają z przestrzenią. Przestrzeń, postrzegana jako rękopis dziejów, odczytana zostaje poprzez ślady w nim zapisane, a zarazem wytłoczone w ziemi; są to ślady ludzi i zwierząt; prastare, niegdyś przebyte i odczytywane na nowo poprzez przywołanie pradawnych zwyczajów polowania rdzennych Amerykanów czy budowania szlaków górskich. Ślady i ścieżki, zarówno ich odkrywanie, interpretowanie, kierowanie się nimi, chodzenie i budowanie, stają się wewnętrzną strukturą dysertacji, która wspólnotę charakteryzuje jako tę, która nieustannie się przeobraża; nie tyle się rozrasta, co ujawnia się w pracy („the real work,” „the good work”), jak i przywiązaniu do miejsca. Jednakże, zarówno wspólnota, jak i przywiązanie nie są tutaj terminami określającymi stabilność czy też statyczność wspomnianych pojęć. Miejsca uczy się człowiek poprzez chodzenie. Jednakże, samo miejsce nie jest tylko ogrodzonym terenem, ale rozrasta się poza ten obszar, zarówno we wnętrzu człowieka, jak i jego zewnątrz. Dom-miejsce to co innego niż przestrzeń. Rysy miejsca są w końcu rysami regionu, tym samym, rysami świadomości pewnej przynależności. Percepcja domu przez Snydera i Berry’ego ukazuje, iż przestaje on być ugruntowanym miejscem, fundamentem, opoką, gdyż traci wszystko to, co stałe i niezmiennie, stając się w ten sposób procesem. Zatem dom to nie tyle miejsce rzeczywiste, namacalne, pozwalające na chwilowe odcięcie świata z zewnątrz i bytowanie we wnętrzu znanego nam świata, opatrzonego stałością i znajomością rzeczy w nim zgromadzonych, co pamięć miejsca, które – we wczesnych latach – człowiek poznał jako pierwsze, a następnie jest on wyrastaniem z tego miejsca, zamykaniem miejsca w umyśle anizeli siebie w miejscu. Jednak pamięć miejsca nigdy nie jest stała; ona się zaciera, płowieje, podlega zmianom. Jest niepełna, fragmentaryczna, wyrasta ze świata, ubywa wraz z ubywaniem człowieka. Przez miejsca człowiek przechodzi nie opuszczając jednak przestrzeni. Miejsca cechuje płynność. Kondensacją myśli na temat miejsca-domu-umysłu jest dom na palach („the long-legged house”) Berry’ego, wieża obserwacyjna („lookout tower”) oraz chatka Snydera u podnóża Sierra Nevada w Kalifornii. Wieże obserwacyjne stają się metaforą umysłu zen, który mieszcząc w sobie przestrzeń zaciera wszelkie dychotomie osadzone w kulturze zachodniej. Każde pozorne rozdarcie staje się bowiem miejscem zaczepienia o takie pojęcia jak bycie –

postrzeganie – bycie postrzeganym („seeing being and being seen”) i stanowi zarazem przedłużenie krajobrazu („enlargement of our living space”).

Wspólnota jest zatem formą bytowania i postrzegania; jest dbałością o miejsce, pielęgnowaniem i kultywowaniem miejsca-domu; jest wglądem do wnętrza i otwartością na przestrzeń oraz byciem wewnątrz raczej niż byciem „ponad”. We wczesnym etapie jest osamotnieniem, kolizją światów ludzi będących obok siebie. Jest wypatrywaniem więzi i potrzebą stworzenia czegoś stałego, a następnie spotkaniem iluzji i zawieszeniem wiary. Jest dostrzeżeniem swojej niepełności i chęcią bytowania pośród innych. Jest przechodzeniem przez miejsca przebyte i odczytywaniem więzi dawnych i nowych. Jest połączeniem tego, co rozdarte i zawieszane; zacieraniem dychotomii; jest nie tylko wspólnotą ludzi, ale wszystkiego, co żyje; jest byciem, postrzeganiem i byciem postrzeganym.

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*Photo 1: Jack Kerouac's Alley in San Francisco's North Beach adjacent to the famous City Lights – Booksellers & Publishers, one of the few truly great independent bookstores in the United States, founded in 1953 by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Peter D. Martin. (photo: Gabriela Marszolek)*



*Photo 2: 3117 Fillmore Street, San Francisco, former Six Gallery. On the left the tablet commemorating the poetry reading in October, 1955. (photo: Gabriela Marszolek)*



Photo 3: Fillmore Street, San Francisco. (photo: Gabriela Marszolek)

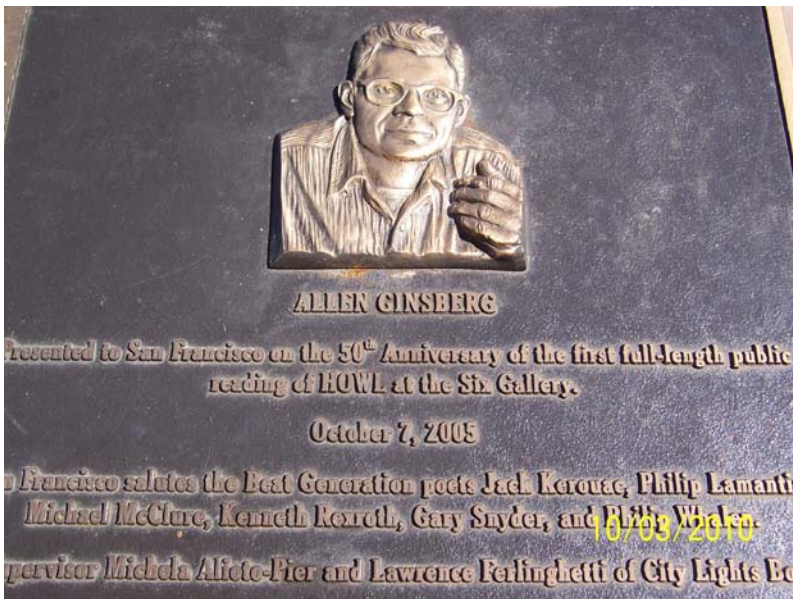


Photo 4: The tablet presented to San Francisco in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the famous poetry reading in 1955. (photo: Gabriela Marszolek)

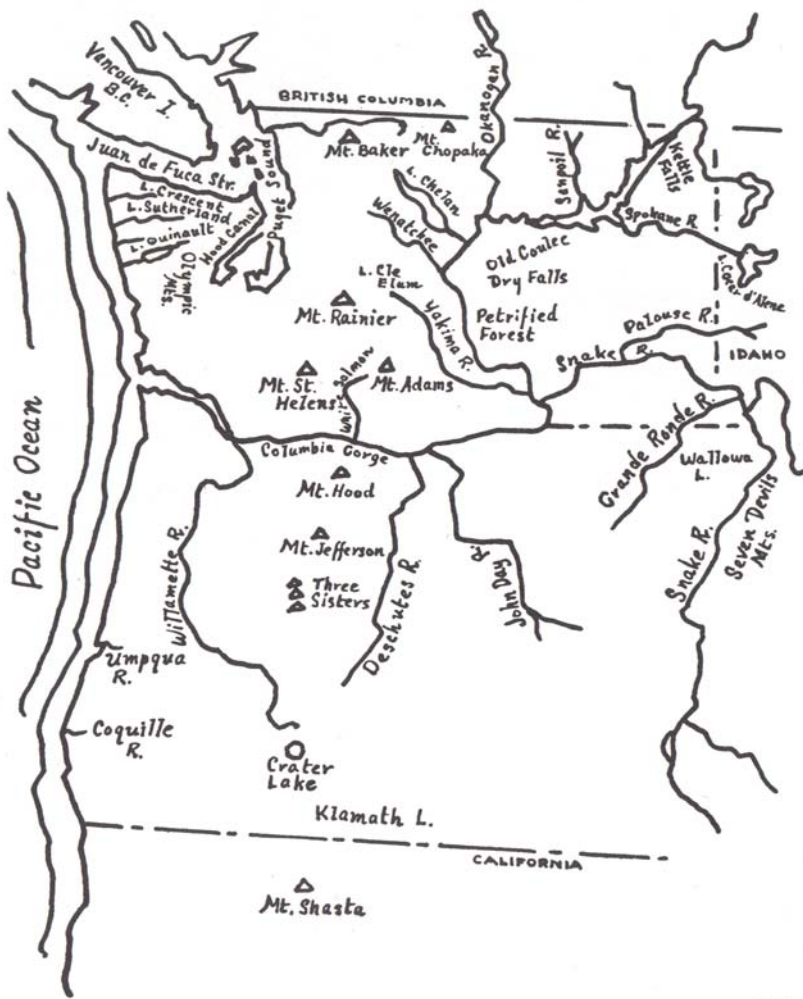


Photo 5: A map of the Washington and Oregon States depicting the location of the mountains. (source: Ella E. Clark, *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest*.)

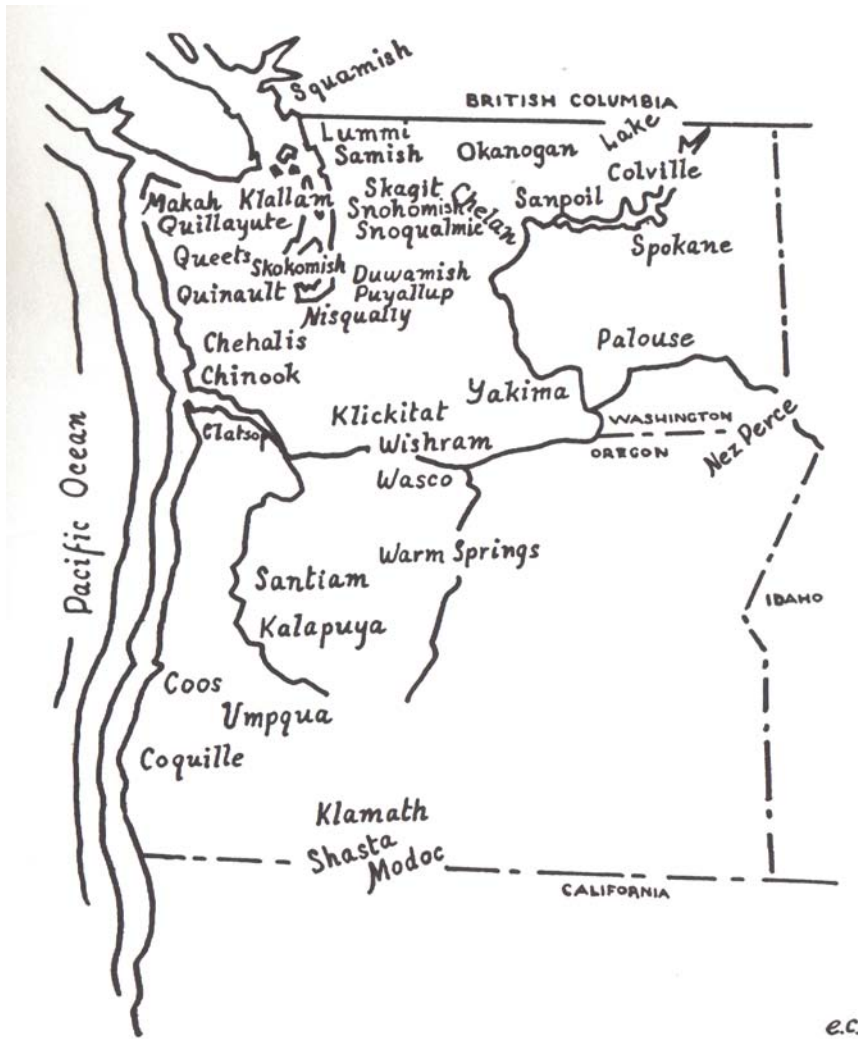


Photo 6: A map of the Washington and Oregon States with names of Native American tribes that inhabited these areas. (source: Ella E. Clark, *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest*.)



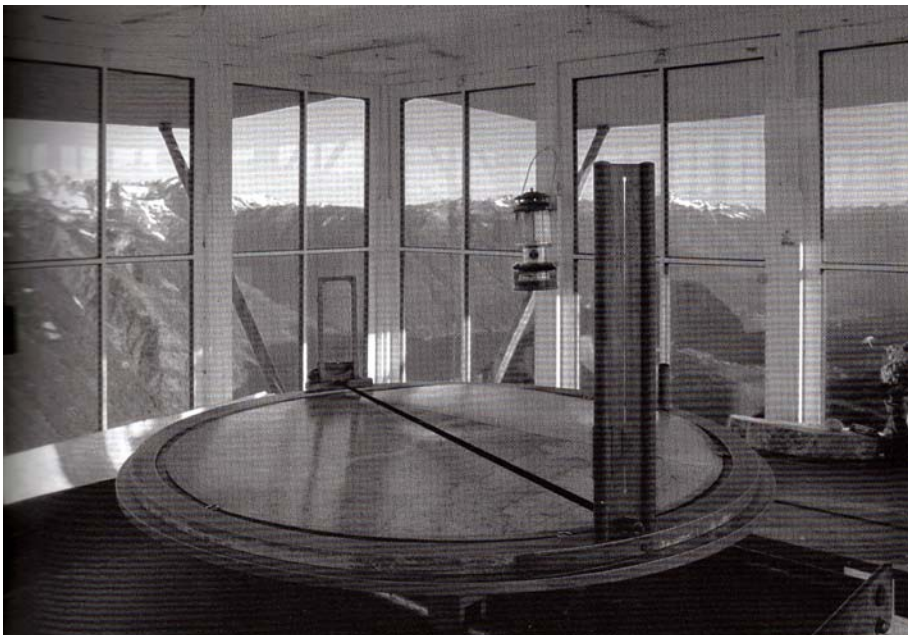
*Photo 7: Mount Tamalpais (Mt. Tam) (photo: Gabriela Marszolek)*



*Photo 8: Sourdough Mountain Lookout (photo: John Suiter, Poets on the Peaks).*



*Photo 9: Sourdough Mountain Lookout interior (photo: John Suiter, Poets on the Peaks).*



*Photo 10: Osborne fire finder, Desolation Lookout (photo: John Suiter, Poets on the Peaks).*

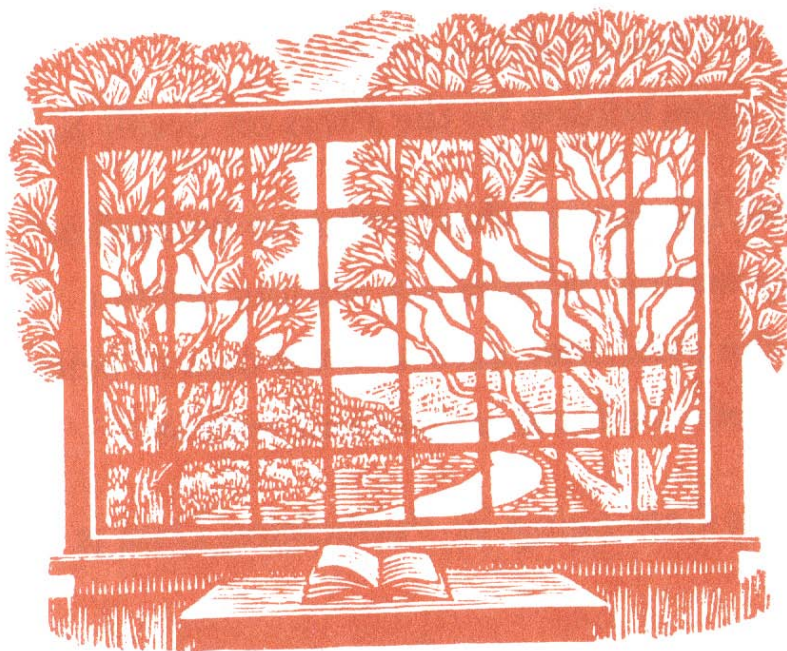




*Photo 11: Telegraph Hill, San Francisco, with the view of Coit Tower. (photo: Gabriela Marszolek)*



*Photo 12: Riprap trail. A cover from Gary Snyder's Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems (Washington: Shoemaker & Hoad, 2004).*



*Photo 13, 14: Wood engravings by Wesley Bates depicting Wendell Berry's window, the "Wind's Eye." (Window Poems, Emeryville, Shoemaker & Hoard, 2007).*



*Photo 15: Meeting the poet Gary Snyder in Davis, California, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010.*