2 Interpreting bioregionalism

A story from many voices

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> I doubt that many people have an easy feeling about the future . . or our ability to protect and maintain the networks of plant and animal life upon which the human future ultimately depends. Nor do I believe it likely that many of us believe that the hope for the future lies in more research, or in some technological fix for the human dilemma. The research already done has produced truths which are generally ignored. We are reaching the end of technological fixes, each of which gives rise to new, and often more severe problems. It is time to get back to looking at the land, water, and life on which our future depends, and the way in which people interact with these elements.
>
> (Dasmann 1975: 2)

Introduction

Bioregionalism is a body of thought and related practice that has evolved in response to the challenge of reconnecting socially-just human cultures in a sustainable manner to the region-scale ecosystems in which they are irrevocably embedded. Over nearly twenty-five years this ambitious project of "reinhabitation" has carefully evolved far outside of the usual political or intellectual epicenters of our so-called civilization. In urban neighborhoods, in raincoast valleys, in prairie hollows and on semi-tropical plateaus bioregionalist communities have painstakingly and joyously learned the cultural and biophysical identity of their home territories – their bioregions. They have also worked to share the lessons of this hard-won experience, developing intersecting webs of bioregional connection that now stretch across the planet. The challenging goal of this survey is to briefly outline the remarkable history of bioregionalism.

For a number of interrelated reasons it is a difficult task to provide a definitive introduction to bioregionalism. Its practitioners protect a defiant decentralism. There is no central committee or board of potentates that is easily accessible for interviews or other forms of mining by journalists or academics. The bioregional story can only be learned through long participation in local and continental bioregion gatherings, and by assimilating ideas penned in ephemeral journals and self-published books that rarely appear in libraries or mass distribution outlets. It is a story best learned by listening over a very long

period of time to many voices. To complicate matters further, bioregionalism is evolving both as a body of teaching and as a social change movement at such a fast pace that it is a fool's task to identify, understand and place in proper relationship all of its dimensions.

Within the limits of my twenty years' experience as a bioregional activist and scholar I will attempt to outline the theory and practice of biorcgionalism as best as possible from my own perspective. Although I have committed a considerable amount of time to thinking how to tell the story in as fair and comprehensive a manner as possible, it is ultimately only a studied opinion that I am relating. It is my hope that many others with whom I have shared the last decades of activism will tell the story from their own viewpoints. Only by allowing readers to layer what will no doubt be very different perspectives of the same events will the true layered richness of the story of bioregionalism be revealed.

This survey is restricted to review only major events and periods in the history of biorcgionalism. Reference will be limited to exposition or events that have, to a degree, contributed to *expanding* the *borders* of bioregional thought and practice. It is important to note that these major events are not perfectly discrete, and that activists who participated in one event or episode are also active in other periods of the history of bioregionalism. It should be made absolutely clear that many layers of detail in the bioregional story have been left out. These details, which would take many hundreds of additional pages to relate, add nuance and texture to the story and are fully as important as presentation of an overall plot structure. Having given a basic orientation to the structure of this exploration, it is now possible to begin the telling of the story.

From counterculture to place-based bioregional culture

Bioregionalism gestated in the culturally turbulent decades between 1950 and the early 1970s. This era, generally labeled the "1960s," is widely perceived as a period when social, religious and political convention was confronted by a post-Second World War "Baby Boom" generation swelling through a greatly expanded post-secondary education system. Starting in the late 1940s with the North American version of the Beat Generation, a long series of interrelated social change movements were vitalized by a student-led counterculture. At the conclusion of this period there were tens of thousands of veteran social change activists in North America with experience in a variety of movements including civil rights, anti-war, peace, feminism, conservation and appropriate technology. Social historian Theodore Roszak perceptively profiled them:

> At their best, these young bohemians are the would-be utopian pioneers of the world that lies beyond intellectual rejection of the Great Society. They seek to invent a cultural base for New Left politics, to discover new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual mores, new kinds of livelihood, new esthetic forms, new personal identities on the far side of power politics, the bourgeois home, and the consumer society.
>
> (Roszak 1969: 66)

As the 1960s and the war in Vietnam wound down to their concurrent conclusion, a period of dissolution and self-reflection occurred. Three general paths of action were taken by 1960s-era activists. Individuals either (1) relinquished their activist concerns in favor of utilitarian considerations related to family, career and personal wealth generation; (2) maintained a reduced level of commitment to a succession of social change "campaigns" by the environmental movement; or (3) searched for a philosophy that described how styles of sustainable life and livelihood could be integrated with commitment to achieve a more broadly defined and fundamental degree of social and ecological change.

In tandem with the post-university diaspora of the "Baby Boom" generation, a parallel social change phenomenon was occurring in the rural regions and marginalized urban neighborhoods of North America. A new awareness evolved among residents of these communities that human and natural resources were being extracted at accelerating rates with no resulting improvement in social and environmental quality of life. As hundreds of local efforts were mounted to protest this impoverishment, often with newly located back-to-the-land and urban pioneer components of the 1960s activist community as a catalyst, a gradual new synthesis of purpose appears to have been created. A social movement was connected to the politics of home place. It is at this nexus that bioregionalism was first informally conceived, and later emerged as an important evolution in the age-old struggle to balance machine-driven economic progress with cultural and ecological sustainability.

The development of the contemporary bioregional movement includes a number of major historical events. The story of a richly diverse social and ecological movement emerged from a variety of voices which exist in a number of diverse contexts and locales. A summary of the major historical events in the contemporary bioregional movement is depicted in Table 2.1.

The complexity of events and ideas that emanate from a bioregional commitment to fundamental social change are difficult for a newcomer. The usefulness of the following broad survey is that major events in the bioregional story will bc clearly revealed, and that the extensive bibliographic sources that are provided will allow access to deeper levels of exploration.

Tentative expression

The post- 1960s call to create newly "indigenous activist-cultures" can be traced to the written expression of two individuals – Peter Berg and Gary Snyder. Each of these men instinctively understands that the successful growth of socially-just cultures rooted in the protection and restoration of ecosystem health requires a deep understanding of cultural tradition. The way to the future can be found by adapting genetically familiar ways of life practiced by ancestors and surviving

Table 2.1 Events in the story of bioregionalism

- Tentative expression as intersection of concern for place, politics and ecology
- Spread beyond community of origin
- Coalescence and inspiration of a vocabulary
- Attraction of an artistic, intellectual and literary vanguard
- Articulation as unified theory informed by practice
- Expression of proposed methods of applied practice
- Regional and continental congresses/gatherings
- Exploration of a broad intellectual history
- Extension of definition to more firmly include a social/spiritual dimension
- Connection/integration with other social change movements
- "Discovery" by mainstream government institutions
- Broadening into a body of teaching with balanced social and ecological dimension

Source: Author's own.

indigenous peoples, not in **mutating** humans into endlessly replaceable cogs in a machine. The focus here is on a "tribe of ecology" instead of the nation -state; a campfire circle instead of the nuclear furnace; localized rituals instead of consumerized Christmas; touch, song and shared experience instead of the narcosis of television-induced monoculture.

Snyder is best known as a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and key participant in the San Francisco Renaissance, a West Coast manifestation of the Beat Generation. What is not as well understood is that he later became a critically important bridge between the San Francisco Renaissance and the political **counterculture**. Snyder's unique **blending** of intellectual literacy, place-centered poetics and teaching, Zen Buddhist scholarship and practice, and wilderness "savvy" are the ideal ingredients necessary for deep personal and, in many respects, cultural transformation.

Snyder's adaptation of a proto-bioregionalism first surfaces in his poetry, and in a more integrated fashion later in a widely circulated 1969 essay titled "Four Changes." After positing human overpopulation, waste and chemical pollution, and overconsumption as the root conditions of global environmental crises, Snyder pushes beyond complaint to explain how these conditions can be eliminated:

> *Goal*: nothing short of total transformation will do much good. What we envision is a planet on which the human population lives harmoniously and dynamically by employing a sophisticated and unobtrusive technology in a world environment which is "left natural." Specific points in this vision:

- A healthy and spare population of all races, much less in number than today.
- Cultural and individual pluralism, unified by a type of world tribal council. Division by natural **and** cultural boundaries rather than arbitrary political boundaries.
- A technology of communication, education, and quiet transportation, land-use being sensitive to the properties of each region.
- A basic cultural outlook and social organization that inhibits power and property-seeking while encouraging exploration and challenge in things like music, meditation, mathematics, mountaineering, magic, and all other ways of authentic being-in-the-world. Women totally free and equal. A new kind of family – responsible, but more festive and relaxed – is implicit.

(Snyder, in De Bell 1970: 330-l)

In a 1970 interview with Richard Grossinger in *IO* magazine, Snyder reinforces the connection he is making between place, politics and ecology as the touchstone considerations necessary to animate a new link between social activism and a sustainable life and livelihood. In explaining regionalism as a new and radically inclusive evolution in the North American social change community, Snyder believes that:

> [W]e arc accustomed to accepting the political boundaries of counties and states, and then national boundaries, as being some sort of regional definition; and although, in some cases, there is some validity to those lines, I think in many cases, and especially in the Far West, the lines are quite often arbitrary and serve only to confuse people's sense of natural associations and relationships. So, for the state of California . . what was most useful originally for us was to look at the maps in the ***Handbook of California Indians,*** which showed the distribution of the original Indian culture groups and tribes (culture areas), and then to correlate that with other maps, some of which are in Kroebcr's *Cultural **and** Natural Areas **of** **Native North America.*** . and just correlate the overlap between ranges of certain types of flora, between certain types of biomes, and climatological areas, and cultural areas, and get a sense of that region, and then look at more or less physical maps and study the drainages, and get a clearer sense of what drainage terms are and correlate those also. All these are exercises toward breaking our minds out of the molds of political boundaries or any kind of habituated or received notions of regional distinctions. . . . People have to learn a sense of region, and what is possible within a region, rather than indefinitely assuming that a kind of promiscuous distribution of goods and long-range transportation is always going to be possible.
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> (Snyder 1980: 24-5)

Since 1970, Snyder has utilized insights gained from inhabitation of a

homestead on San Juan Ridge in California's central Sierra Nevada mountains as gist for poems, interviews and essays that arc distinctively biorcgional in subject and texture. This expression has included poetry collections titled *Turtle* ***Island*** (1974) and ***Axe Handles*** (1983), interviews collected in *The* **Real *Wok*** *Interviews* ***and Talks*** *1964–1979* (1980), and essays included in *Earth* ***House Hold*** (1969) and *The* ***Old Ways: Six Essays*** (1977). In 1990 Snyder issued an anthology of essays titled ***The Practice*** *of* ***the Wild*** that powerfully synthesized his journeyman's knowledge of syntax, his tics to a uniquely broad range of social change movements, and reflection originating from a spirited dedication to learning "home place" (Snyder 1990). Snyder's evolving versatility as a poet and essayist is accented in his most recent prose anthology, ***A*** *Place* ***in Space*** (1995). He arguably has become the single most practical proselytizer of a uniquely hybrid intellectual/spiritual/rural bioregional vision.

Peter Berg, seven years younger than Gary Snyder, arrived to live permanently in San Francisco in the early 1960s, and was active in the local experimental theater scene by 1965. After honing skills as a radical street-theater actor and playwright in the legendary San Francisco Mime Troupe he was a founding member of the legendary "Diggers," the anarcho-political conscience of the Haight-Ashbury hippie community. He became the prolific author of a series of hundreds of broadsides collectively known as the "Digger Papers," issued free in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood between Fall 1965 and the end of 1967. One of the most celebrated of these polemics, authored by Berg, is a 23 June 1967 issue titled "Trip Without a Ticket." Berg projects an urban edginess that presages what will come later, a measured prescription for transformative change based upon connecting knowledge of place with sustained political resistance, with reintegration of human cultures into their supporting ecosystems:

> First you gotta pin down what's wrong with the West. Distrust of human nature, which means distrust of Nature. Distrust in wildness in oneself literally means distrust of Wilderness Gary Snyder
>
> Who paid for your trip?
>
> Industrialization was a battle with 19th-century ecology to win breakfast at the cost of smog and insanity. Wars against ecology are suicidal. The US standard of living is a bourgeois baby blanket for executives who scream in their sleep. No Pleistocene swamp could match the pestilential horror of modern urban sewage. No children of White Western Progress will escape the dues of peoples forced to haul their own raw materials.
>
> But the tools (that's all factories arc) remain innocent and the ethics of greed aren't necessary. Computers render the principles of wage-labor obsolete by incorporating them. We are being freed from mechanistic consciousness. We could evacuate the factories, turn them over to androids, clean up thrir pollution. North Americans could give up self-righteousness to expand their being.

> Our conflict is with job-wardens and consumer-keepers of a permissive loony-bin. Property, credit, interest, insurance, installments, profit are stupid concepts. Millions of have-nots and drop-outs in the US are living on an overflow of technologically produced fat. They aren't fighting ecology, they're responding to it. Middle-class living rooms are funeral parlors and only undertakers will stay in them. Our fight is with those who would kill us through dumb work, insane wars, dull money morality .
>
> (Berg "Trip Without a Ticket," see Grogan 1990: 300-3; Halper 1991: 380; Noble 1997)

From 1967 onward Berg sustained a calculated dual commitment to act *against* machine-culture and *for* a bioregional alternative. He instigated a metamorphosis of the Diggers into a "Free City" movement, and was instrumental in the creation and distribution of three legendary Planetedge posters that helped to irrevocably link New Left radical politics and ecological consciousness. Berg and dancer/actor Judy Goldhaft, who had become partners in late 1967, then moved to the Black Bear commune in the Klamath region of upper northern California, a celebrated outpost of intense social experimentation. In late 1971 the couple embarked on a journey across North America, visiting and video-taping life in a variety of counterculture communities. Their calling card a short poem/polemic called *Homeskin* (1971) – opened with the statement: "Your body is home. Any place on this spinning geo-creature Earth is part of the skin that grows us all."

The final proto-bioregional evolution occurred in 1972 when Berg traveled to the first United Nations Conference on the Human Enviromncnt held in Stockholm, Sweden. In challenging the mainstream agenda of the conference, and in meeting and acting in concert with place-based activists from across the planet, Berg conceptualized the goals of his life's work. A common global thread of resistance and decentralized political aspiration was revealed in Stockholm – by peoples of the ethnic regions of Europe, by surviving indigenous cultures scattered across the planet, and by emerging region-based cultures in North America.

In 1973, Berg and Goldhaft relocated and resettled in San Francisco, and worked to root the tenets of biorcgionalism in the tolerant cultural medium of Bay Area counterculture society. In 1973 they founded the Planet Drum Foundation, a clearing-house for a wide variety of bioregional writing and organizing activity. Between 1973 and 1979 the Planet Drum Foundation stewarded the creation of nine "Bundles" of bioregional lore. Each bundle consisted of a variety of individually printed poems, polemics, posters and essays. The first two issues of these eclectic collections were not specific to any particular locale. Later, the bundles were crafted to reflect the life and culture of specific bioregions, including the North Pacific Kim, the Rocky Mountains, and the Hudson River watershed. In 1978 the Planet Drum Foundation published an anthology of lore titled *Reinhabiting* ***a Separate*** *Country:* ***A*** *Bioregional Anthology* ***of Northern California.*** Edited by Berg, the expanded "bundle" was

printed in book format with financial assistance from the California Arts Council – a granting agency of which Gary Snyder was an influential board member.

In the same period the Frisco Bay Mussel Group (FBMG), a grass-roots organization active between 1975 and 1979, became arguably the most critically important incubator for early bioregional thought and practice. The FBMG booklet *Living Here* (1977) shows how the intellectual perception of place as a focus for sustained social change activism was first related to an actual bioregional territory. Prominently featured in *Living Here* is a reverence for the ability of prehistoric human communities to adapt culture to place. This deeply rooted respect for indigenous thinking and peoples is a tenet fundamental to bioregionalism. In this period individuals including Freeman House, David Simpson, Michael Helm, Peter Coyote and a score of others debated, consented, acted and celebrated their way into a deep familiarity with bioregional thought and practice.

In 1979 the Planet Drum Foundation began publication of the biannual networking periodical Raise The ***Stakes*** (RTS). With a stylish layout and a stimulating mix of theoretical, practical and directory offerings, RTS remains an indispensable meeting place for a highly decentralized bioregional community of activism. In reviewing the variety and quality of organizing accomplished by Berg, Goldhaft and their many colleagues between 1967 and 1979, one notices their focused and sustained determination to introduce bioregionalism to a wider audience. This extraordinary commitment, which continues to the present, is a factor that has been critical to the success of a diverse bioregional movement.

Berg and Snyder mutually influenced each other in the period when bioregionalism was coalescing into a body of thought and teaching. Berg quoted Snyder in his early "Trip Without a Ticket" essay. Snyder was influenced by Berg when he temporarily returned to the US in 1967 from a period of isolated study in Japan. Snyder has financially supported the work of the Planet Drum Foundation through donations and as a sympathetic board member of the California Arts Council. Although living almost 200 miles apart, and having cultivated public and private personalities that reflect very different temperaments and lifestyles, Berg, Snyder and bioregionalism have coevolved in fascinating juxtaposition. The older rural communal Buddhist and the theatrical and urban radical benefit from periodic intersection. Although their lives are immensely more complicated, each activist refers to the other as validation for the commitment they both have made to promote the practice of bioregionalism.

The spread beyond community of origin

Many social change movements originated and flourished in the northern California counterculture environment, most enjoying a brief popularity that failed to extend beyond the West. In its nascent stage, bioregionalism was not

to be so confined, spreading first into the US Northwest through the exceptional writing of Freeman House and Jeremiah Gorsline. The importance of this wider adoption of the place-politics-ecology theme cannot be overstated. House, a friend and activist associate of both Berg and Snyder, wrote his "Totem Salmon" essay after having relocated from San Francisco to commercially fish for salmon out of La Conner, Washington:

> Salmon is a totem animal of the North Pacific Range. Only salmon, as a species, informs us humans, as a species, of the vastness and unity of the North Pacific Ocean and its rim. The buried memories of our ancient human migrations, the weak abstractions of our geographies, our struggles towards a science of biology do nothing to inform us of the power and benevolence of our place. Totemism is a method of perceiving power, goodness, and mutuality in Locale through the recognition of and respect for the vitality, spirit and interdependence of other species. In the case of the North Pacific Rim, no other species informs us so well as the salmon, whose migrations define the boundaries of the range which supports us all.
>
> (House 1974)

A year later, House and Jeremiah Gorsline, a bookseller and self-taught forest ecologist, teamed up to add another eloquent layer to the expression of bioregional sensibility. Their coinage of the term "future primitive" reflects a vital extension of how the essential idea of bioregionalism is explained, suggesting that it will bc through the use of a new-old lexicon that the concept is best passed into wider social understanding and cultural application:

> Wc have been awakened to the richness and complexity of the primitive mind which merges sanctity, food, life and death – where culture is integrated with nature at the level of the *particular ecosystem* and employs for its cognition a body of metaphor drawn from and structured in relation to that ecosystem. We have found therein a mode of thinking parallel to modern science but operating at the entirely different level of sensible intuition, a tradition that prepared the ground for the neolithic revolution; a science of the ***concrete,*** where nature is the model for culture because the mind has been nourished and weaned on nature; a *logic* that recognizes soil fertility, the magic of animals, the continuum of mind between species. Successful culture is a semi-permeable membrane between man and nature. We are witnessing North America's post-industrial phase right now, during which human society strives to remain predominant over nature. No mere extrapolation from present to future seems possible. We are in transition from one condition of symbiotic balance – the primitive – to another which we shall call the *future primitive.*
>
> (House and Gorsline 1974)

The spread of bioregionalism beyond the west coast of North America was

assured when Gary Lawless returned to his home in Maine after spending time in California with Berg and Snyder. Lawless, a gifted poet and bookstore owner, edited an anthology of place-inspired poems, interviews, traditional songs, natural history profiles and photo essays that he self-published under the title The *Gulf* of ***Maine:*** *Blackberry* ***Reader One*** (1977). This work shows that bioregionalism can be transplanted from one regional place to others. Now firmly anchored on both coasts of the continent, bioregional approaches slowly began spreading inland, being adopted and adapted to meet the needs of those seeking a philosophical umbrella under which their place-ccntcred efforts could be organized.

Coalescence and the inspiration of a vocabulary

The term biorcgionalism was first conceived by Allen Van Ncwkirk, who had been active in eastern US radical politics, and who had met Berg in San Francisco in 1969 and again in Nova Scotia in 1971. In 1974-5, well-settled as an emigrant in Canada, Van Newkirk founded the Institute for Bioregional Research and issued a series of short papers. As conceived by Van Newkirk, bioregionalism is presented as a technical process of identifying "biogeographically interpreted culture areas . . called bioregions" (Van Newkirk 1975). Within these territories, resident human populations would "restore plant and animal diversity," "aid in the conservation and restoration of wild eco-systems," and "discover regional models for new and relatively non-arbitrary scales of human activity in relation to the biological realities of the natural landscape" (ibid.). Clear details of how these activities could be carried out were not elucidated by Van Newkirk, who, since 1975, has had virtually no influence on the idea he is responsible for naming.

The concept of biorcgionalism was greatly clarified in 1977 when Berg and the renowned ecologist and California cultural historian Raymond Dasmann joined to write "Reinhabiting California," the first classic bioregional polemic. The article was originally written and published by Berg under the title "Strategies for Reinhabiting the Northern California Biorcgion" (Berg 1977). Shortly thereafter, Berg was encouraged by Dasmann to submit the article for publication in the influential journal *The* ***Ecologist.*** After the piece was returned for redrafting, Berg and Dasmann worked on a major collaborative revision.

By synthesizing the experience of a cutting-edge place-based activist with that of a journeyman ecologist and experienced academic author, the bioregional vision was shown to be more than an obscure subset of the burgconing environmental movement of the 1970s. The influence of Dasmann is obvious. At the time of his work with Berg, Dasmann was completing a seven-year United Nations-sponsored process of identifying and mapping how biophysical phenomena interact to create interlocking biogeographical territories across the planet. Dasmann was also the author of many inspirational and intellectually rigorous books, the most noteworthy being *The* ***Destruction*** *of California*

(1965) and *Environmental Conservation* (1984), a textbook that explored issues related to the theory and practice of "sustainability."

In merging their very different sensibilities Berg and Dasmann confidently state the enduring principles of bioregionalism by explaining the meaning of new words that bear simple, yet powerful, intent:

> ***Living-in-place*** means following the necessities and pleasures of life as they arc uniquely presented by a particular site, and evolving ways to ensure long-term occupancy of that site. A society which practices living-in-place keeps a balance with its region of support through links between human lives, other living things, and the processes of the planet – seasons, weather, water cycles – as revealed by the place itself. It is the opposite of a society which makes a *living* through short-term destructive exploitation of land and life. Living-in-place is an age old way of existcncc, disrupted in some parts of the world a few millennia ago by the rise of exploitative civilization, and more generally during the past two centurics by the spread of industrial civilization. It is not, howcvcr, to be thought of as antagonistic to civilization, in the more humane sense of that word, but may be the only way in which a truly civilized existence can be maintained.
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> *Reinhabitation* means learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation. It involves becoming native to a place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around it. It means understanding activities and evolving social behavior that will enrich the life of that place, restore its life-supporting systems, and establish an ecologically and socially sustainable pattern of existence within it. Simply stated it involves applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its exploiter.
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> *Bioregion* refers both to a geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness – to a place and the ideas that have developed about how to live in that place. Within a bioregion the conditions that influence life are similar and these in turn have influenced human occupancy.
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> A bioregion can bc determined initially by use of climatology, physiography, animal and plant geography, natural history and other descriptive natural sciences. *The* ***final*** *boundaries* ***of a*** *bioregion* ***are best described by*** *the people who have Lived within it, through human recognition of the realities of* ***Living-in-place.*** All life on the planet is interconnected in a few obvious ways, and in many more that remain barely explored. But there is a distinct resonance among living things and the factors which influence them that occurs specifically within each separate place on the planet. Discovering and describing that'resonance is the best way to describe a bioregion.
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> (Berg and Dasmann 1977: 399; my emphasis)

In declaring that it will be reinhabitants rather than scientists who define "home place," bioregionalism was cut forever from the tether of a more sterile biogeography. In perceiving that bioregional governance could only be

established from the bottom up the bioregional movement was irrevocably put at odds with bureaucratic central government institutions (see Chapter 4). No amount of petty reform could appease a bioregional constituency that believed to the core of its collective being that democratically defined and ecologically decentralized governance was its unalienable right.

Berg and Dasmann explain how boundaries of a northern California bioregion could be defined. Their concluding judgment is that "Alta California" should be identified, both culturally and ecologically, as a separate state, a declaration that bioregionalism has an identity as a devolutionary political movement as well as that of a contemporary land ethic. Berg has utilized experience gained from intensive on-going bioregional thought and practice to write, or contribute to, important essays including "Amble Toward Continent Congress" (1976), "Devolving Beyond Global Monoculture" (198 1), "More Than Saving What's Left" (1983), "Growing a Life-Place Politics" (1986), and ***A Green City Program for the San Francisco Bay Area and Beyond*** (Berg, Magilavy and Zuckerman 1990).

Attraction of a literary, intellectual and artistic vanguard

In always seeking new ways to express dimensions of the intent and experience of bioregionalism, key participants in other related social and cultural movements also deserve a note. Poets Gary Lawless (1977; 1994) and Jerry Martien (1982; 1984) transformed everyday experience into crystal clear lessons about how to "see" the place where you live. Social ecologist Murray Bookchin (1982) and philosophers Theodore Roszak (1975) and Morris Berman (1981) critiqued the globalist status quo and blazed trails leading to new perceptions of spiritual and cultural integration. Essayist/autobiographers Stephanie Mills (1989) and Wendell Berry (1977) used landmark events from their own lives to illustrate the challenges and opportunities to "life-in-place." The "Ecotopia" novels by Ernest Callenbach (1975; 1981) vividly portrayed how bioregion-based societies could be created and sustained. Performances by ceremonial dancers Judy Goldhaft, Alison Lang, Fraser Lang, Jane Lapiner, as well as by actor Bob Carroll, animated the unifying totemic power of water and salmon cycles in ways that no dry scientific depiction could hope to contain. These individuals, and many others, provided nascent post- 1960s social change activists with a number of enticing access routes into bioregional perception and practice. Story-telling, ancient and new ritual, myth-making, theater, dance, poetry and prose all became the languages of bioregional expression.

Articulation as a unified theory informed by practice

In 1981, writer and northern California coast reinhabitant Jim Dodge synthesized a considerable body of bioregional thought, and contributed what is arguably the most compelling explanation of a bioregional vision. In a short article titled "Living By Life: Some Bioregional Theory and Practice," Dodge

begins by summarizing three central values that animate bioregionalism: the importance placed on natural systems as a reference for human agency, reliance on an anarchic structure of governance based on interdependence of self-reliant and federated communities, and rediscovery of connections between the natural world and the human mind. Dodge crosses into new territory, identifying bioregionalism as more than a philosophy to live by:

> Theories, ideas, notions – they have their generative and reclamative values, and certainly a loveliness, but without the palpable intelligence of practice they remain hovering in the nether regions of nifty entertainment or degrade into flamboyant fads and diversions. . . Practice is what puts the heart to work. If theory establishes the game, practice is the gamble.
>
> (Dodge 1981: 10)

Dodge then identifies the two broad categories of bioregional practice as being *resistance* and ***renewal.*** Resistance focuses against "the continuing destruction of wild systems" and "the ruthless homogeneity of national culture." Renewal is "thorough knowledge of how natural systems work, delicate perceptions of specific sites, the development of appropriate techniques, and hard physical work of the kind that puts you to bed at night" (Dodge 1981: 10-2). By adding this critical discussion of practice to what otherwise would have been yet another "New Left" or "rural populist" utopian manifesto, Dodge illuminates bioregionalism's most potent characteristic: ***It is an ideal that is continuously shaped and extended through experience. It is a broad practice that begets theory, not theory stranded only in intellectual rumination and debate.***

The open and egalitarian process of defining bioregionalism, as exemplified by Dodge's writing in "Living By Life," was sustained in the pages of the previously mentioned Raise *The* ***Stakes,*** a bi-annual periodical first published by the Planet Drum Foundation in 1979. Peter Berg, Judy Goldhaft, and a revolving cast of artists, poets, writers and correspondents created a regular meeting place for the widely dispersed hioregional community. Authors and correspondents were encouraged to explain their biorcgional pcrspcctive, and were empowered by the opportunity to layer their perspective and experience into the emerging mix. One of the most noteworthy issues of ***Raise The Stakes,*** edited by Dodge, includes submissions by seventeen contributors who offer self-criticisms relating to a variety of aspects of bioregionalism. This ability to publicly and constructively explore ***successes and*** weaknesses exemplifies the fact that the concept of bioregionalism is evolving through a process of place and context-driven adaptation.

Expression of methods of applied practice

The Planet Drum Foundation was instrumental in stewarding the next contemporary development in bioregional theory and practice. In a series of four short booklets written between September 1981 and January 1982 concepts geared

to the practical application of a bioregional vision were articulated. *Renewable Energy and Bioregions: A New Context for Public Policy* (Berg and Tukel 1980) introduces the bioregion as a territorial container within which energy self-reliance can best be stewarded. *Reinhabiting Cities and Towns: Designing for Sustainability* (Todd and Tukel 1981) explores ecological design practice, especially as it applies to retrofitted urban centers with a variety of appropriate technology-based support systems.

In *Figures of Regulation: Guides for Re-Balancing Society with the Biosphere* (1982) Berg proposes a technique whereby "customs" can be evolved that foster evolution of lifestyles that are consciously adapted to fit the limits and opportunities of localized ecosystem processes. Taken together, these "figures of regulation" will regulate bioregion-based human societies without ideological, legal or religious coercion. The last of the small volumes, titled *Toward a Bioregional Model: Clearing Ground for Watershed Planning* (Tukel 1982), describes planning and design processes that can be used to decipher ecological carrying capacity – the parameters within which "figures of regulation" will guide cultural and economic activity in any bioregion. The meeting of these two concepts – "figures of regulation" and "bioregional model" – is expressed by Berg as:

> *Figures of regulation* is a workable phrase for the new equivalents to customs that we need to learn. Late Industrial society with its misplaced faith in technological solutions (to problems caused by unlimited applications of technology in the first place) is out of control. Our social organism is like an embryo that is suffering damage but there are no internal checks on our activities to re-establish a balance with the capacities of natural systems. The point of figures of regulation is that they would incorporate the concept that individual requirements and those of society are tied to the life processes of a bioregion. A bioregional model can identify balance points in our interactions with natural systems, and figures of regulation can operate to direct or limit activities to achieve **balance.**
>
> The idea of a figure as a series of movements in a dance is useful for understanding the multilayered nature of figures of regulation. The performance of a dance follows a distinct sense of rightness that would otherwise exist only as an idea, and it suggests connectedness with many other activities and ideas. It is a process that makes the invisible visible. As a dance unfolds it implies further action that is self-referenced by what has gone before. Figures of regulation are assemblages of values and ideas that can similarly become ingrained in patterns of activity.
>
> (Berg 1982: Y-10)

Regional and continental congress

A major evolution in the bioregional movement occurred in the mid-1980s, and can be attributed to the organizing skills of homesteader and appropriate technology activist David Haenke. In the late 1070s Haenke and a small group of dedicated colleagues were instrumental in establishing the Ozark Area Community Congress (OACC), the first broadly-based bioregional organization. OACC's annual congress, held every year since 1980, provided a template for the practical application of a locally-oriented and place-based bioregionalism. As word of the success of OACC spread, similar organizations were established in a growing variety of locales, first in Kansas, and later across the continent. In many cases, representatives from newly organizing bioregions would either visit OACC annual meetings, or Haenke would travel to participate in a distant inaugural gathering.

These new bioregion-based groups spawned exotically titled periodicals – *Konza* (Kansas Area Watershed Council), *Katuáh* (Rioregional Journal of the Southern Appalachians), *Talking Oak Leaves* (Seasonal Newsletter of the Ozark Area Community Congress), *Mesechabe* (Mississippi Delta Greens) and *Down Wind* (Newsletter of the Wild Onion Alliance). Each of these publications represents grass-roots bioregionalism at its best, offering a mix of local news, place-related essays, poetry, announcement of community events, and carefully thought out consideration of aspects of bioregionalism. Several memorable issues of *Mesechabe*, arguably the most eclectic bioregion-based periodical, contained a first translation of a journal made during anarchist-geographer Elisée Reclus' 1855 journey to New Orleans.

As part of his legendary role as the tireless "Johnny Appleseed" of bioregional organizers, Haenke published a booklet titled *Ecological Politics and Bioregionalism* (1984). Where earlier bioregional polemicists had been preoccupied with ecological connection actualized by a renewed anarchic primitivism, Haenke expounds a more pragmatic variant of bioregional purpose. In a tone that epitomizes mid-continent pragmatism he invokes the existence of ecological laws that will guide the positive transformation of bioregion-based societies. By adopting a style of writing that mimics the rhythm of a fundamentalist sermon Haenke describes how bioregionalism involves strict use of regenerative agriculture, appropriate technology, renewable energy sources, cooperative economics, land trusts, ecologically-based health policy, and aggressive "peace offensives." Haenke's bioregional vision is rural, practical and focused – his focus is on the politicization and institutionalization of bioregionalism.

In 1984, Haenke utilized the bioregional vision that he developed in *Ecological Politics and Bioregionalism* as a framework for organizing and convening the first North American Rioregional Congress. Over 200 participants from several continents were attracted to this landmark event, in which policies in twenty-three areas of bioregional concern were developed by committees, debated in plenary sessions, adapted as deemed necessary, and adopted by consensus. These policies are depicted in Table 2.2. The written record of this gathering, *North American Bioregional Congress Proceedings* (Henderson *et al.* 1984), as well as the proceedings of four b-annual Continental Congresses/Gatherings that have followed (Hart *et al.* 1987; Zuckerman 1989; Dolcini *et al.* 1991; Payne 1992), are key sources that reveal

how the concept of bioregionalism has expanded. A second vital source of bioregional history emanating from the continental congresses are daily newsletters issued under the name *Voice of the Turtle*. Each issue summarizes reports from the previous day's events, as well as a variety of poems, personal statements and related important contextual material.

The published proceedings of congresses and gatherings held in scores of individual bioregions provide detail regarding ways in which the definition of bioregionalism has been adapted to suit the needs and nuance of different cultural and biophysical settings. Noteworthy publications, among many others, include *Kansas Area Watershed (KAW) Council Resolutions* (Kansas Area Watcrshcd Council 1982), *The Second Bioregional Congress of Pacific Cascadia: Proceedings Resources and Directory* (Scott and Carpenter 1988) and *Proceedings: First Bioregional Congress of the Upper Blackland Prairie* (Marshall 1989).

Table 2.2 North American Bioregional Congress (NARC) Committee Structure (1984-90)

Committee	*NABC1*	*NABC2*	*NABC3*	*NAHC4*
Agriculture/permaculture	x	x	X	X
Bioregional education	X	X	X	X
Biorcgional movement	X	x	X	X
Children's	—		—	X
Communication/media	X	—	X	X
Communities	X		X	
Culture and arts	X	X	X	X
Ecodefense	X	X	X	X
Ecofeminism	X	X	X	X
Economics	X	X	X	X
Evolving leadership		—	X	
Forests	X	X	X	X
Green cities		X	X	X
Green movement	X	X	X	X
Health	—	X	X	X
Indigenous peoples	—		X	
MAGIC (Mischief, Animism, Gcomancp and Interspecies Communication)	—	X	X	X
Mapping		—		X
Materials reuse/toxic waste			X	
Native peoples/people of color	X	X	X	X
Spirituality	X	X	X	
Transportation		—		X
Water	X	X	X	X

Source: Author's own.

Exploration of a broad intellectual history

In 1985, the Sierra Club published ***Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision,*** authored by respected cultural historian and bioregionalist Kirkpatrick Sale. In presenting bioregionalism for the first time to a mass literary audience he argues that:

- Machine-based civilization has abandoned the Greek mythological concept that the earth, Gaia, is a single sentient organism.
- As a result, multiple social and ecological crises exist that threaten the survival of human civilization.
- Bioregionalism offers an alternative paradigm based upon principles including:
  - Division of the earth into nested scales of "natural regions"
  - Development of localized and self-sufficient economies
  - Adoption of a decentralized structure of governance that promotes autonomy, subsidiarity and diversity
  - Integration of urban, rural and wild environments
- Bioregionalism is connected to anarchist, utopian socialist and regional planning traditions.

Sale's treatise is instrumental in introducing bioregionalism to the general public in two fundamental ways. First, Sale greatly expands upon Dodge's presentation of bioregionalism as a unified theory, or in Sale's terminology, as a "paradigm." Table 2.3 depicts the structure of the bioregional paradigm described by Sale.

Table 2.3 Events in the story of bioregionalism

	Bioregional *paradigm*	*Industrio-scientific paradigm*
Scale	Region	State
	Community	Nation/world
Economy	Conservation	Exploitation
	Stability	Change/progress
	Self-sufficiency	World economy
	Cooperation	Competition
Polity	Decentralization	Centralization
	Complemcntarity	Hierarchy
	Diversity	Uniformity
Society	Symbiosis	Polarization
	Evolution	Growth/violence
	Division	Monoculture

Source: Sale (1985: 50)

Second, Sale shows that the values of bioregionalism existed in the works of North American and European regionalists. Citing classic sources in regional planning history, including Carl Sussman's *Planning the Fourth Migration: The Neglected Vision of the Regional Planning Association of America (1976)* and Fricdmann and Weaver's *Territory and Function: The Evolution of Regional Planning* (1979), Sale identifies Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932), Howard Odum (1884–1954) and Lewis Mumford (1895–1990) as progenitors of American regionalism. Sale ties American regionalist thought to the earlier related European expression of Frédéric Le Play (1806–1882), Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918) and Patrick Geddes (1854-1932).

In tying bioregionalism to a 200-year tradition of resistance against machine- and metropolitan-dominated culture, Sale creates both challenge and opportunity. A challenge in that these relatively obscure intellectual and activist traditions required exploration so that the lessons of their successes and failures could be understood. An opportunity in that bioregionnlism could be viewed as only the latest reincarnation of a centuries long effort to define how socially-just and ecologically sustainable human cultures could be created and sustained. Sale single-handedly attempts to characterize the intellectual gcncnlogy of bioregionalism. The Sierra Club's book distribution network, and Sale's reputation as a respected cultural historian, ensured that *Dwellers* gained a much higher profile than any book on bioregionalism published before or since.

Dwellers became a lightning-rod for criticism from sources both within and outside the bioregional movement. Reviewers from inside the bioregional movement resented Sale's supposedly "dressed-up" intellectualization, and the lack of exposure given to less definitive and more anarchic strands of the bioregional vision (Helm 1986: 12; LaChapelle 1988: 1834). This criticism, to some extent unjustified in light of Sale's clear statement that the book represents only his own studied opinion, reacts against even the hint that any one interpretation of bioregionalism could be presented as being definitive. It also points to the existence of some level of tension between the most active bioregional theorists and organizers. *This tension, which remains today, appears to have evolved as an impediment against any single individual becoming a movement leader or independent spokesperson.*

The issue of Icadcrship in the highly decentralized bioregional movement bears further comment. Leadership is critically important to the success of any social change movement that confronts an opponent as insidiously powerful as globalism. Bioregionalists temper this understanding by remembering the fate of 1960s-era leaders who either succumbed to the vainglory of media-created charisma or treated dogmatic allegiance to indulgent rhetoric as more important than empowering a self-actualized citizenry. The compromise that seems to have been accepted is that leaders at the bioregional level will most likely be those who best put to practice of locally-focused resistance and cultural renewal.

Academics and ideologues attempting to tic bioregionalism into a variety of their debates have also made Sale's treatise a target for critique. A volume that

serves as an initial hopeful statement of purpose and that introduces bioregionalism in an accessible manner does not fare well when dissected by reviewers who arc comfortable with the intricacies of post-Marxist, academic anarchist, planning, or other variants of often obscure post-modern discourse. An initial *Dwellers*-inspired review of bioregionalism by James Parsons, protégé of revered cultural geographer Carl Sauer, was extremely positive (Parsons 1985). Reviewers have since been less supportive of Sale's bioregional vision.

Journal or anthology articles by Alexander (19YO; 1993), Atkinson (1992), McTaggart (1993) and Frenkel (1994) have all used *Dwellers*, and usually a relatively limited number of other references, to describe bioregionalism in essentially a simplistic manner. These authors arc intent to squeeze, or in Atkinson's view, to "sharpen" bioregionalism so that it properly fits into the framework of their narrower disciplinary interests in planning or geography. These articles arc written in a tone that communicate a hopeful interest in bioregionalism's future, but only if the concept can be perfectly purged of a variety of weaknesses, including that it is potentially or inherently reductionist, utopian, ahistoric, or ccologicnlly deterministic.

A final form of writing in which *Dwellers* is rcfcrcncd includes what can be labeled sustainability manifestos written by popular social theorists, for example Milbrath's *Envisioning a Sustainable Society: Learning Our Way Out* (1989) and Rifkin's *Biosphere Politics: A New Consciousness for a New Century* (199 1). In several pages within much longer works, bioregionalism is prcscntcd primarily as proposing the concept of a useful territorial container, the bioregion. In all the books and articles in which it is mentioned, *Dwellers In The Land* remains an influential, and controversial, source of bioregional lore.

Bioregionalism is best understood when viewed from the "inside," not from reading one or several texts. Gatherings should be attended, ephemeral periodicals reviewed, restoration projects participated in, and place-based rituals and ceremonies shared. Examples of critical appraisals which successfully adopt this approach can be found in the pioneering graduate theses of Aberley (1985) and Carr (1990). Abcrley details the historic exploitation of a rural bioregion, then explores how a bioregional alternative might be implemented. Carr interprets the social and philosophical evolution of bioregionalism based on a decade of taped interviews and wide participation in bioregional events.

Biorcgionalism did not emerge in the 1970s perfectly conceived or practiced. Intense and informed debate about the weaknesses of the essential tenets of bioregional living is constant. Without recognizing the diversity of voices from which bioregionalism originates, and the context-driven manner in which the biorcgional movement evolves, academic critiques can only be short-sighted and reductionist.

Extension to include social/spiritual definition

Another major development in the theory of biorcgionalism is Thomas Berry's *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), a collection of essays joined by a bioregional

theme. A theologian active in the Hudsonia bioregion in New York State, Berry is concerned with constructing a bioregional world-view firmly linking spirituality with a form of social organization. Berry describes a set of six "functions" which are necessary for bioregional living:

> The first function, self propagation, requires that we recognize the rights of each species to its habitat, to its migratory routes, to its place in the community. The bioregion is the domestic setting of the community just as the home is the domestic setting of the family . . .
>
> The second bioregional function, self-nourishment, requires that the members of the comtnunity sustain one another in the established patterns of the natural world for the well-being of the entire community and each of its members. Within this pattern the expansion of each species is limited by opposed lifeforms or conditions so that no one lifeform or group of lifeforms should overwhelm the others . . .
>
> The third function of a bioregion is its self-education through physical, chemical, biological, and cultural patterning. Each of these requires the others for its existence and fulfillment. The entire evolutionary process can be considered as a most remarkable feat of self-education on the part of the planet Earth and of its distinctive bioregional units . . .
>
> The fourth function of a bioregion is self-governance. An integral functional order exists within every regional life community. This order is not an extrinsic imposition, but an interior bonding of the community that enables each of its tnembers to participate in the governance and to achieve that fullness of life expression that is proper to reach .
>
> The fifth function of the bioregional community is self-healing. The community carries within itself not only the nourishing energies that are needed by each member of the community; it also contains within itself the special powers of regeneration. This takes place, for example, when forests are damaged by the great storms or when periods of drought wither the fields or when locusts swartn over a region and leave it desolate. In all these instances the life community adjusts itself, reaches deeper into its recuperative powers, and brings about a healing.
>
> The sixth function of the bioregional community is found in its self-fulfilling activities. The community is fulfilled in each of its components: in the flowering fields, in the great oak trees, in the flight of the sparrow, in the surfacing of the whale, and in any of the other expressions of the natural world. . . In conscious celebration of the numinous mystery of the universe expressed in the unique qualities of each regional community, the human fulfills its own special role. This is expressed in religious liturgies, in market festivals, in the solemnities of political assembly, in all manner of play, in music and dance, in all the visual and performing arts. From these come the cultural identity of the bioregion.
>
> (Berry 1988: 166-8)

Similar to Sale, Berry supplies an extensive bibliography as an integral part of his book. By availing easy access to the intellectual underpinnings of their exposition, both Sale and Berry reinforce the fact that bioregionalistn is connected to a larger and much deeper philosophical tradition than its most recent counterculture incarnation might indicate.

The characterization of the spiritual importance of bioregionalism has occurred in two other important areas. In Texas, Joyce and Gene Marshall grafted a radical Christian tradition with biorcgionalistn to create a dynamic grass-roots activist-spiritual movement whose work is expressed in the pages of a periodical titled *Realistic Living*, first published in 1985. On a parallel path, deep ecology's earth spirituality has been adopted by biorcgionalists who experiment with meditation, vision questing, celebration of seasonal cycles, and a host of other rituals. Inspirational books in this genre include *Thinking **Like a Mountain:** Towards **a Council** of **All** Beings* (Seed ***et*** al. 1988), *Sacred **Land, Sacred Sex:** Rapture of **the Deep*** (LaChapelle 1988) and *Truth or Dare: **Encounters with** Power, **Authority,** and **Mystery*** (Starhawk 1987).

Connection/integration with other social change movements

Since the late 1980s, the development of contemporary bioregionalism has not evolved so much in broad strokes as it has from an organic and incremental process driven by the experience of a spreading network of activists and organizations. The process of biorcgional dissemination and experimentation, although difficult to trace, represents the real current strength of the diverse biorcgional movement. In hundreds of towns, cities and rural enclaves, a parallel movement that supports bioregional governance is quietly and persistently taking root.

Bioregionalists need to explore their intellectual and practical relationships to a host of other vital social and ecological movements. No single movement can succeed in inspiring transformation of the "consumer-producer society" on its own. Nor can a single movement ovcrcotnc the politics of displacement and isolationism endemic to globalization. The bioregional movement remains open and inclusive. Bioregionalism embraces the values expressed in ecofeminism (Muller 1984; Plant 1986), earth spirituality (LaChapelle 1988), permaculture (Crofoot 1987), ecological restoration (House 1974; 1990), among others. This integration is reflected in an essay by Michelle Sutntner Fike and Sarah Kerr, who write:

> Bioregionalism and ecofeminism are two streams of the contemporary environmental movement that provide related yet distinct frameworks for analyzing environmental and social justice issues, as well as offering visions of more sustainable ways of living with the earth. Seeing the linkages between feminism, environmentalism, anti-racism, gay liberation, peace and justice work, and all of the other struggles for freedom and democracy is

critical to our work as community activists and organizers. We feel that a greater understanding of these interconnections is one of the most important lessons offered by a joint examination of ecofeminism and bioregionalism.

(Fike and Kerr 1995: 22)

Evidence of this process of constant connection and integration can also be found in the previously introduced published proceedings of six North American Bioregional Congresses/Turtle Island Bioregional Gatherings held since 1984, in the pages of twenty-five bi-annual issues of the Planet Drum Foundation's networking and biorcgional theory periodical *Raise The* ***Stakes,*** and in a growing variety of journals which carry articles with bioregional themes.

One future goal of bioregionalism is to successfully integrate with other social change movements (e.g. the environmental justice movement) to ensure that a more potent ability to affect social, political and ecological transformation can be achieved. Perhaps the greatest hope for biorcgional activity lies in this integration with other movements. Bioregionalism supports place-based cultural transformation. The bioregion could become the political arena within which resistance against ecological and social exploitation could be produced.

Mainstream "discovery" and (mal)adaptation

In the early 1990s, bioregionalism was "discovered" by politicians, natural resource managers and environmental policy-makers who primarily serve government institutions and corporate interests. In a range of national settings, the language of bioregionalism has been appropriated to assist in conceptualizing experiments in institutional and organizational reform. However, these government-sponsored developments have occurred *with* ***little*** *reference* ***to*** *or* ***contact with the grass-roots*** *bioregional movement.* Explicit uses of bioregional terminology include the September 1991 *Memorandum* ***of*** *Understanding* signed behveen heads of federal and state resource management agencies active within California state borders (California State Resources Agency 1991). In Ontario a joint Provincial-Federal task force identified a "Greater Toronto Bioregion" as best enabling management of a large metropolitan area (Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront 1992). Each of these initiatives have defined bioregion borders from the top down, and have not adequately explained the role communities should play in these alternative territorial regimes.

Implicit adoption of biorcgional tenets include the restructuring of regional governance units in New Zealand to match major watershed boundaries (Furuseth and Cocklin 1995; Wright 1990). In Nunavut, a new ethnic bioregion is to be proclaimed in the eastern Canadian Arctic in 1999; a man and a woman will be chosen to represent each new electoral area (Devinc 1992). Similarly, the Navajo Nation is evolving a "dependent sovereignty" relationship within its host jurisdiction, the United States of America (Commission on Navajo Government Development 1991). In Europe, a Committee of the Regions has since 1994 provided nearly 100 traditional ethnic bioregions with a recognized policy-proposing forum (European Communities 1994). In the Great Lakes, Gulf of Maine and Cascadia, scientific and planning panels have adopted bioregions as the territorial unit within which a variety of diverse planning activities will be focused.

Ideas central to the biorcgional vision have been adopted by mainstream institutions. This appropriation of biorcgional values can be considered a compliment to the relative strength of the movement. At the same time, however, these initiatives are generally devoid of a crucial bioregional value – the redistribution of decision-making power to semi-autonomous territories who can adopt ecological sustainable ***and*** socially-just policies. Bioregionalists fear that the general public will identify bioregionalism with these rhetorical and pragmatic govcrnmcnt-sponsored initiatives rather than associate bioregionalism with its grass-roots and organic origin.

Broadening into a body of teaching

The latest phase in the development of contemporary bioregionalism materialized in the 1990s. After theoretical expression of techniques of applied bioregionalism were issued by the Planet Drum Foundation in the early 1980s, a long period of isolated experimentation with these methods and others took place. As this experimentation matured, and as the number of individuals and organizations interested in bioregionalism increased, the need arose to provide the means by which experience with tested techniques of applied bioregionalism could bc more widely explained and taught.

In 1990 New Society Publishers, centered on Gabriola Island in British Columbia, reacted to this need by initiating two important publishing projects. The first involved assembling a definitive anthology of the best representative sample of available writing on bioregional theory and practice. As conceptualized by an immensely literate team of editors including bioregional movement veterans Van Andruss, Eleanor Wright, and New Society principals Judith and Christopher Plant, ***Home! A*** *Bioregional* ***Reader*** (1990) deftly layers bioregionalism's many themes into a seamless whole. Home! remains the single most convenient and comprehensive way to read oneself into fatniliarity with the biorcgional vision.

New Society Publishers second pioneering effort involved founding of the ***New Catalyst Bioregional*** Series. In a format that allows a knowledgeable editor to weave together sumtnaries of bioregional thought and practice emanating from a variety of geographical and gender perspectives, the *Bioregional Series* has become an indispensable source of cutting-edge bioregional lore. In eight editions the *Bioregional* Series has explored individual themes including interviews with key bioregional thinkers (Plant and Plant 1990), green economics (Plant and Plant 1991), community empowerment (Plant and Plant 1992),

human community–ecosystem interaction (Meyer and Moosang 1992), community-based alternatives to alienation (Forsey 1993), bioregional mapping (Aberley 1993), ecological planning (Aberley 1994), and exploration of the ecological footprint method of measuring a community's appropriation of ecological capital (Wakernagel and Rees 1996). Recent books by other publishers, including *Giving the Land a Voice: Mapping Our* ***Home Places*** (Harrington 1995) and *Discovering Your Life-Place:* ***A*** *First Bioregional Workbook* (Berg 1995), have added to the growing range of "how to" material available to practicing bioregionalists.

Attempting a synthesis

The challenges of twenty years of continuous extension of purpose has stretched the ability of a highly decentralized movement not only to guide its own growth process, but also to communicate its principles in a timely, purposeful, and clear manner. Consequently, the tenets of bioregionalism, and the rich history of the biorcgional movement, are not as widely known by the general public as are those of other contemporary social change movements. It is possible that this relative obscurity is about to change. The publication of this volume, as well as a growing number of similar books being written by experienced biorcgional activists, indicates that a formative, inwardly-focused organizational period of development may be at an end.

Ironically, bioregionalism's greatest strength stems from the fact that it has remained relatively obscure. The goal of the biorcgional theorist has been to reflect on the needs and values of living-in-place, not to craft a seamless theoretical construction or utopian diatribe. As a loosely bundled collection of ideals which emanate from the reflective cxpcricncc of place, bioregionalism "speaks" to social change activists tired of convoluted ideological dogma. Bioregionalism is a daringly inclusive doctrine of fundamental social change that evolves best at the level of decentralized practice. Although none of the tenets of bioregionalism are etched in stone, these tenets stake claim to a dynamic, grass-roots approach to conceptualizing and achieving transformative social change:

Bioregional world-view

- Widespread social and ecological crises exist; without fundamental change preservation of biodiversity, including survival of the human species, is in doubt.
- The root **cause** of these threats is the inability of the nation-state and industrial capitalism – patriarchal, machine-based civilization rising from the scientific revolution – to measure progress in terms other than those related to monetary wealth, economic efficiency or centralized power.
- Sustainability defined as equitably distributed achievement of social, ecological and economic quality of life – is better gained within a more decentralized structure of governance and development.

- The bioregion – a territory revealed by similarities of biophysical and cultural phenomenon – offers a scale of decentralization best able to support the achievement of cultural and ecological sustainability.

Culture

- Both humans and other species have an intrinsic right ***to*** coevolve in local, bioregional and global ecosystem association.
- Bioregion-based cultures are knowledgeable of past and present indigenous cultural foundations, and seek to incorporate the best elements of these traditions in "newly indigenous" or "future primitive" configurations.
- Biorcgion-based culture is celebrated both through ceremony and vital support of spiritual reflection and related cultural arts.

Governance

- Biorcgion governance is autonomous, democratic and employs culturally-sensitive participatory decision-making processes.
- Political and cultural legitimacy are measured by the degree to which a steward achieves social and ecological justice, and ecosystem-based sustainability,
- Intricate networks of federation will be woven on continental, hemispheric and global bases to ensure close association with governments, economic interests and cultural institutions in other bioregions.

Economy

- Human agency is reintegrated with ecological processes, especially through careful understanding of carrying capacity, preservation and restoration of native diversity and ecosystem health.
- The goal of economic activity is to achieve the highest possible level of cooperative self-reliance.
- Reliance on locally manufactured and maintained appropriate technology, devised through an on-going program of ecological design research, is favored.

A future of promise

Bioregionalism continues to evolve, both as an intellectual and political endeavor. Bioregionalism has taken root in Australia, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and Japan, and many other nations. Bioregional periodicals with titles such as ***Inhabit,*** *ArcoRedes*, **and** *Lato* ***Selvatico*** are successfully extending the cultural range and overall vitality of the bioregional movement.

Bioregionalism is a story best learned from listening to many voices. It is a tale with plot-lines and characters that weave and quickly extend in often

Byzantine interconnection. In attempting to introduce the barest outline of this story I have attempted to be fair to historical fact, and have also tried to introduce sources that allow further exploration of facets of bioregionalism that are all worthy of deeper study. My hope is that key aspects of the breadth and depth of bioregionalism and the bioregional movement, as I see them, have been introduced in a clear, accessible and even inspiring manner. This survey, and others that will follow, will ensure that bioregionalism will no longer be so obscure a notion, and that its concepts can no longer be so easily misappropriated by mainstream government institutions intent on only partial measures of reform.

Bioregionalism is a synthesis of thought, applied technique and persistent practice that is spreading like the patterns of a growing fractal. As people reinhabit their home place, a remarkable integration of philosophy and political activity evolves. Place is perceived as irrevocably connected to culture. Culture is seen as connected to past histories of human and ecosystem exploitation. Constraints to achieving the alternative of a socially-just and ecologically sustainable future are identified, analyzed and confronted. Processes of resistance and renewal are animated within, and parallel to, existing power structures.

To those who hear only a part of the bioregional story, or who attempt to analyze bioregionalism only through the filters of academic or institutional specialties, it may seem to suffer a host of apparent weakncsscs, contradictions, or unresolved conflicts. For those who take the time to listen to more of the voices that are speaking about bioregionalism, or better yet participate in the bioregional movement itself, chaos transforms itself into something that is properly perceived as an elegant, persistent and organic growth of purpose. As the human race collectively stumbles into a new millennium, bioregionalism offers the best hope we have for creating an interdependent web of self-reliant, sustainable cultures.

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