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This paper explores the language theories of Gary Snyder, an important modern

environmental author whose early work was associated with the Beat movement of the

early 1950's. I am particularly interested in Snyder's thoughts on how language relates

to nature. I focus primarily on Snyder's prose in attempts to understand his thoughts

on language, but I also look at his book of poetry *Mountains and Rivers Without End*

as an illustration of his theories on language and its relation to the self. I also compare

Snyder's thoughts to those of the twentieth century phenomenologist Maurice

Merleau-Ponty, showing how both writer and philosopher help cross the divide that

has developed between language and nature in contemporary literary theory. In the

first chapter, I describe how Snyder bridges a divide between two environmental

movements which are often thought to be in tension: ecofeminism and deep ecology.

Adding to this, I also explore Snyder's appropriation of Buddhist thought into his own

environmental vision, referring principally to the 11th Century Buddhist philosopher

Dogen, a key figure in the development of Zen. It is from Dogen that Snyder draws his views of self as empty. In chapter two, I further develop Snyder's vision of an empty self, specifically in relation to language, and compare his views with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, who also explains self as the emptiness of "nothing." Both Snyder's idea of the empty self, appropriated from Buddhism, and Merleau-Ponty's conception of the self as "nothing" position self as determined through the context within which the self is situated. This alternative idea of the subject allows self-expression language to become a manifestation of the larger biotic community, rather than an assertion of the ego of individual humans. In the third chapter, I describe the structured relationship between language and nature as that of reciprocal wildness. In this structure, language organizes itself in a manner similar to the ecology of any particular bioregion. Language then both reflects and creates nature. It is the result of the outpouring of the self as a matrix of connections. Yet language is also self-organizing, so it generates its own structures and organizations that then influence the self's perceptions of the world beyond language.

The Wild Flesh of Gary Snyder's "Natural Language"

by

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Michael Hanson, Author

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List of Abbreviations

MRWE   *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996.

PS   *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics and Watersheds: New and Selected Prose*. Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995.

PW   *The Practice of the Wild*. New York: North Point Press, 1990

The Wild Flesh of Gary Snyder's "Natural Language"

I. Introduction

"Honor the Dust"

Inscription by Gary Snyder from *Danger on Peaks*

The relationship between language and the world beyond language has become the central question in Western philosophy, and consequently to literary studies as well. It is described as the central question for the 20th century in the West, beginning with Wittgenstein leading up through the post-structuralist challenges of the end of the century. More and more, the study of language has focused on the inability of language to refer to a world outside of itself. Not only does a symbol (a word) no longer refer to a referent, but the signifier no longer refers to a signified, as Derrida carefully lays out in his descriptions of post-structuralist language in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." This current trend in academic theory has presented a problem for those, such as environmentalists, who wish to acknowledge the immediate consequences our theories and resulting actions have on the physical world beyond our language. Theorists in the study of literature and the environment hold such concerns as the ground upon which they work. They infuse their writings with immediate concern for the implications that our language, and indeed our imagination, may have on the surrounding environment. A major question facing any serious literary scholar who also holds a deep commitment to a diverse biotic world outside of the post-structural entrapments of language is how to bridge the gap or chasm between these two worlds—one world caught in the currency of

language, and the other grounded in the physical implications of our thoughts and actions. It is with this concern that I turn my focus to Gary Snyder, particularly his writings on language, in hopes that they can offer a bridge between academic rigor and sustainable physical practice by building a bridge between multiple divergent theories pertinent to this issue, all of which seem to find a locus of relationship within Snyder's writings.

Snyder's work is uniquely positioned within American literature in that it offers an opportunity for heading in new directions, specifically because he works as a crossing ground for various traditions. Because Snyder expresses many of the same theories in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, he bridges the division within Western thought between analytic thought and constructivist thought. He also bridges the West and East as a locus that represents both Merleau-Ponty's Western phenomenology and Zen Buddhism's Eastern philosophy. Finally, he can be understood to represent both sides of the debate between ecofeminism and deep-ecology with his bioregionalist theories. All of these areas appear in Snyder's work, and because of this complexity, his writing and life provide plethora of opportunities for redeveloping the American mythology within new frames.

Snyder injects Eastern and Native American mythology into his poetry and prose and develops a body of work that lies on the border between multiple mythologies. He recreates and renews the mythology that has informed and guided the West with influences from the East as well as Native American cultures. Even though Snyder's Turtle Island (North America) is geographically positioned in the West, Native American mythology reveals characteristics particular to Eastern thought.

Snyder himself draws the connection between Zen and Native American mythology in the figure of the hump-backed flute player.

This figure stands at the bridge between East and West, and understanding what this character may mean to Snyder could provide a key for understanding how he positions himself within the language debate. In notes for his poem "The Hump-backed Flute Player," Snyder explains the significance of the figure he calls Kokop'ele (elsewhere referred to as Kokopele or Kokopilau): "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 onto the Southwest with trade items" (160). He then relates the wanderings of Aztec traders to Buddhist scholars, "Hsuan Tsang, the Buddhist scholar-pilgrim, brought back the famed 'Heart Sutra'—the one-page condensation of the whole philosophy of transcendent wisdom—in his pack" (160-161). Anthony Hunt draws this connection even closer in his essay on this particular poem, claiming that the hump-backed flute player continues Hsuan Tsang's transmission of Buddhism. "Therefore, this particular part of the transmission may begin in Bihar with Hsuan Tsang, but it is spread by Kokopilau into the Great Basin of the United States where it is carried by many beings, among them Wovoka and Snyder" (11). Although this image may connect ancient Asian mythology with Native American mythology, it also indicates the potential that Snyder continues the transmission begun by Kokopilau. Where Kokopilau brought the Buddhist doctrine to Native Americans, Snyder attempts to rekindle that connection which was lost in the West's conquering of Turtle Island. Thus, Snyder, speaking through the figure of Kokopilau/Kokop'ele, attempts to construct a new bridge to America from the East.

Since Hunt identifies the poem "The Hump-backed Flute Player," as central to Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, I also place this image as central to Snyder's work and his thought in general, including his theories on language. This image transcends the singular poem or chapbook of poems and provides the potent image of crossing a chasm:

> It does seem, for example, that 'The Hump-backed Flute Player' both describes and offers some 'understanding of emptiness' by depicting its transmission in mythical and actual time across geographical space from Asia to North America, across the space which stretches from the earth to the stars, and across the void that exists between our inner and outer being. (Hunt 5)

Thus the image deals with a geographical divide as well as a perceptual, or lingual divide. In bridging these chasms, Snyder takes up Kokopelli's sack, traveling from Japan to America, and his writings could thus be read as East meets West, or East comes West.

This East-West duality appears as Snyder explores the connection between language and the world, or more carefully stated, language's position and significance in the world. But East and West cannot be viewed as easily capitulating one to the other. They often hold tension with each other, both within Snyder's work and in a more general sense. While Eastern mythology, particularly the Zen Buddhism that has most influenced Snyder's thought, is often portrayed as promoting an existence in harmony with nature by straining to move beyond language, the West's Post-structuralism threatens any ethical responsibility to the physical world by explaining that language remains completely disconnected from any physical reality, and that it is a self-referential, closed system of relations. Yet Charles Molesworth identifies both influences in Snyder, "Snyder's work draws heavily on two sources of cultural

wisdom: Buddhism and Amerindian lore" (2), and he later adds that, "In a sense Snyder's work is part of the legacy of modernism" (2). While both the East and West influences do appear in his writings, Snyder should not necessarily be read as synthesizing the two theories. Molesworth suggests the word "synergize" instead of synthesize to explain the relationship between the divergent influences. This word choice indicates that the two influences interact with each other to create a "coherent, stable vision" (Molesworth 2) that is larger than the components. Neither influence is absorbed by the other, but both stand in relation to each other, and potentially in tension with each other. Consequently, the interaction of these two influences results in a whole that is larger than the sum of the combined parts. Although Molesworth only suggests this word to describe Snyder's vision, it seems an appropriate choice because it describes the East and West as interpenetrating each other in a manner that Snyder would seem to advocate.

In describing the drama found in some of Snyder's early poetry, such as *Myths & Texts,* Charles Altieri reinterprets the tensions mentioned above instead as lending "mutual support" (48) to each other. Instead of standing against each other, Snyder's divergent influences hold relation to each other in an ecology of inter-penetration. Altieri writes that the tensions in Snyder's poetry "draw out one another's full significance for the process of living" (48). Adding to this understanding, Molesworth, also focusing on some of Snyder's earlier and more concrete work, explains that Snyder "[synergizes] an amalgam of parts of various cultures into a coherent, stable vision" (2). Even though Snyder offers a collage of theories represented in the concrete images and characters he describes in his writing, he ultimately provides a

stable vision. One might even suggest, along with Altieri, that it is this duplicity of theories and mythologies that makes Snyder's work so fertile. In his essay "Language Goes Two Ways" from *A Place in Space,* Snyder applies this multiplicity to his description of how language works. "It enables us to have a small window onto an independently existing world, but it also shapes—via its very structures and vocabularies—how we see that world" (PS 174). Rather than appealing to a specific set of assumptions, East or West, Snyder plays off of both assumptions in support with each other, and portrays language as both affirming a connection to the world that may reflect a Buddhist's ethic of inter-relationship, and recognizing the manner through which language, as a structure, also shapes the world as theorized in Western philosophy.

Although most Western critical theory has largely accepted the post-structuralist view of language, or its kin, not all Western philosophy has embraced the divide between humans and the world, or between language and an external world. Much promise has recently been identified in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology, which also often finds itself positioned between two opposing theories. Some contemporary ecocritics see within Merleau-Ponty's theories the promise of reconnecting humans to the world, and repositioning language as an expression of the broader world rather than an institution particular to humans. For this reason, reading Snyder through a Merleau-Pontian lens provides valuable mediation between what several critics have described as a "chasm" between humans and the external world or Anglo-American and continental philosophers. With a reading grounded in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology, Snyder's own complex

network of voices crosses that chasm and reconnects humans, language and the world within the confines of Western philosophy.

Division runs rampant even among those within the West that emphasize the ethical connection between human and the physical world, such as environmentalists. Both Deep ecologists and Ecofeminists have debated about the correct lens through which to understand the environmental disaster, and the relation between humans and the non-human world. Snyder's writing also bridges this chasm because his thought cannot be easily fit into either school of thought. Although he often finds himself positioned with deep ecologists, and he may even choose to position himself in this camp, many characteristics of his writing, including his reliance on Dogen's perception of the self, may connect him more strongly with ecofeminism, and thus he provides a bridge between the two, and potentially a path beyond their chasm.

Snyder brings together several divergent movements, that of East and West, mind and body, language and world, and these polarities need not map directly on each other, but these axioms structure my intrusion into Snyder's body of work. The web of this exploration will engage discourse on the philosophy of language (specifically Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology) as it relates to Snyder's ideas on language he expresses in his prose, and as he performs these thoughts in both his poetry and prose. To understand the complexity of his claims, it becomes necessary not to just use one filter to read his work, but to use multiple filters to bring out the varieties of colors. He acts as a bridge between these oppositions simply because each side finds representation within his work. We can invest notions from Buddhist and Western thought, constructivist or analytical language philosophies, ecofeminist or

deep ecologist ideals into the surface of Snyder's writings, because, as he reminds us,

"Language goes two ways." For Snyder, language ultimately is something not owned

or controlled by humans, but it is rather something wild into which each user of it taps

as expressions of the various surrounding environments that compose each self.

II. Gary Snyder's discursive location

"Doing things right means living as though your grandchildren would also be alive, in this land, carrying on the work we're doing right now, with deepening delight."

Gary Snyder – "Reinhabitation" *A Place In Space*

To understand Snyder's thoughts on language it first becomes important to explore the background that produces such thought; it becomes necessary to situate Snyder to understand his body of work. To do so, I will turn to look at Snyder's ecological positioning as well as his philosophical location. Although Snyder originally began writing poetry as part of the Beat movement, his more recent fame comes from his connections to Buddhism and environmentalism. These latter provide the most significant influences in his recent work, and they also reflect the themes in his writing and the discursive communities within which Snyder's work tends to circulate.

Although he also identifies Snyder's Buddhist influences, Michael Zimmerman, in his book *Contesting Earth's Future*, primarily discusses Gary Snyder as a representative of deep ecology, which is a form of radical ecology that questions anthropocentric assumptions. More precisely, Snyder is often categorized as a bioregionalist and grouped with deep ecologists because of the similarities between the two theories. Rightfully so, much of Snyder's work, and a large chunk of his theory, verifies his connections to deep ecology and deep ecologists. Bill Devall and George Sessions even dedicated their book *Deep Ecology* to Snyder, and he appears

several times in Session's later anthology *Deep Ecology for the 21ˢᵗ Century*. But upon close examination, Snyder's writings transcend any particular categorization. His lifetime of work has involved stepping beyond the limitations imposed on him.

This resistance could possibly be traced to his association with the countercultural Beats. His propensity for resistance may characterize his attempts to tap into sources of knowledge and wisdom deeper than can be confined to any single category or tradition. Leonard Scigaj describes the various foundations in Snyder's thought, "Snyder's work evinces a rich and coherent combination of influences from his working class roots to his Forest Service work, his apprenticeship in Zen Buddhism, his study of the cultural anthropology of indigenous peoples, and his readings in the science of ecology" (232). In this sense then, Gary Snyder's body of work provides a bridge between various traditions, theories and communities that come into interrelationship within his writings. In particular, Snyder's articulations of bioregionalism can mediate the continuing debate between deep ecologists and ecofeminism because he takes seriously the need to identify with the larger biotic community without simply expanding Western ideals to encompass what Karen Warren refers to as the "women-other human Others-nature interconnections."

Ecofeminists, such as Warren, and deep ecologists have engaged in a continuing debate that has developed a dialectic of opposing environmental values. This exchange has consequently helped both theories develop and address some of the significant issues that theorists already entrenched in the tradition had previously missed. George Sessions writes that, "The controversy between deep ecology and ecofeminism has been going on for nearly a decade. On the positive side, many

thinkers from these two camps have helped each other understand better their own views and those they oppose, and they have deepened their own and our understanding of the difficult issues we face" (Sessions 90-1). Sessions also recognizes the negative consequences of the continuing debate that has become "rather rancorous" at times.

Because the debate has been continuing for such an extended time it is difficult to express all of the criticisms each side has made of the other. In an attempt to situate Snyder within the debate I will discuss only the most pertinent arguments ecofeminists have made against deep ecology. One of the main points ecofeminists raise is the concern that deep ecology relies on a Western patriarchal concept of identity that foregrounds the individual's ego in relation to the larger biotic community. Devall and Sessions explain that deep ecologists desire to connect the individual with the larger biotic community by identifying all beings as a part of the "Self" in growing circles,

> Spiritual growth, or unfolding, begins when we cease to understand or
> see ourselves as isolated and narrow competing egos and begin to
> identify with other humans from our family and friends to, eventually,
> our species. But the deep ecology sense of self requires a further
> maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to
> include the nonhuman world. (Devall 67)

In his discussion of the ecofeminism-deep ecology debate Michael Zimmerman describes Jim Cheney's critique of this theory of self,

> Cheney believes, however, that most deep ecologists, despite their talk
> of ecological sensibility and interconnectedness with all life, retain an
> alienated, atomistic masculinity that prevents them from attaining a
> profound connectedness with other human individuals and with the
> larger community of life. (288)

Although Cheney's criticism seems to contradict Devall and Sessions' aims at expanding the self's identification with the environment, Cheney's criticism suggests that no true transcendence occurs between the self and the nonhuman other. This

seems especially true if taken along with Val Plumwood's response that "this amounts

to an ecological version of rational egoism" that generates a "disembodied and

depersonalized state" (Zimmerman 288). Taking Plumwood's and Cheney's criticism

together, the deep ecologist's individual centered vision of self denies the difference

between one's own situated existence and the existence of the surrounding biotic

community, because all becomes the same in the expanding sense of self. Difference

becomes blurred in favor of homogeneity, and under this theory "men see women and

nature alike as things either to be dominated or merged with" (Zimmerman 296). An

individual's relationship with the surrounding environment based on sameness

becomes problematic, because it assumes knowledge of the other and fails to

recognize the very different needs the other may hold in its own particular existence.

Consequently, the self becomes all encompassing *and* isolated from interaction with

an other that signifies real difference in the deep ecologist's theory of self.

Instead of identifying with the larger biotic community through its similarities

with us, ecofeminist Karen Warren suggests an ethic of caring that identifies the

difference of the other. She writes,

> In contrast, loving (or caring) perception presupposes and maintains
> difference—a distinction between the self and other, between human
> and at least some nonhumans and nature—in such a way that it is an
> expression of care about the other who/that is recognized at the outset
> as independent, dissimilar, different. (105)

Recognizing the difference between self and other, or human and nonhuman avoids

falling into the logic of domination that Warren identifies as one of the central

concerns of an ecofeminist ethic. This ethic still encourages a connection, or

interconnectedness, with the larger biotic community as Devall and Sessions

encourage, but it allows the space for the other's difference and consideration for the other's different needs.

Cheney and Warren raise important criticisms against deep ecology, but Zimmerman later explains that not all deep ecologists fall into the problems that Cheney identifies as ego-centrism,

> In addition to [Arne] Naess, Gary Snyder and I have also interpreted wider identification as a process of self-emptying, rather than of self-expansion. Because ontological phenomenalism's deconstruction of the self seems to offer a nonmasculinist approach to the issue of identity and difference, I am puzzled by the fact that Cheney ignores this aspect of the deep ecology literature. (Zimmerman 314)

Zimmerman then challenges Cheney's claims that deep ecologists' "Self" is an expansion of the atomistic self of the enlightenment. Instead, Zimmerman identifies himself, Naess and Snyder as examples of deep ecologists who identify with the broader world through an emptying of self. Rather than expanding the self outward in further circles, the self could be characterized in a postmodern, or Buddhist, manner that denies presence at the center of the circles. With an absence at the center, the self then becomes the network of inter-relationality of all that composes the expanding circles. Self is understood as more of an absence than presence, more of a system of relations rather than a singular point that relates to the external environment. Although Zimmerman appears to find influence more specifically from Heideggerean and postmodern conceptions (a theory he develops in his essay "Toward a Heideggerean Ethos for Radical Environmentalism"), several deep ecologists look elsewhere for this new paradigm of self.

Zimmerman recognizes the influence of Buddhism in both Snyder's and Naess' perceptions of self as self-emptying. He describes Snyder's Buddhist

influences in his theories: "A long-time Zen student, Snyder takes seriously the

critique of the 'inflated-self' idea of enlightenment. For Zen, insight into the Buddha-

nature (absolute emptiness) of all creatures eliminates identification with the self,

because such insight reveals the self to be empty" (314). Within this quote,

Zimmerman easily ascribes an empty self to Buddhist thought, and he later connects

this view with ecofeminism, claiming that ecofeminism's critique does not apply to

this theory of self as empty. But Deane Curtin directs criticism against Naess' self. He

claims that Naess' self relies on a hierarcical theory of self: "There is a hierarchy in

Naess' construction of the process of identification that moves parts to 'unity with the

supreme whole' (The very distinction between self and Self by means of capitalization

indicates this point.)" (204). Curtin then quotes Naess as comparing this larger Self to

the Indian Atman. Because Naess encourages the self to identify with the larger and

all-encompassing "Self" he has created a hierarchy where the individual selves need to

extend towards the larger figure that stands beyond any individual. Although in parts

of his writings Naess identifies self as interdependent with other beings, Curtin claims

that Naess ultimately ascribes to the idea of a higher, transcendent "Self" that is

"stable" and beyond any individual self.

Having identified the difficulties with Naess' apparently inaccurate

appropriation of Dogen's theories, it is now important to explore Curtin's

understanding of Dogen's idea of self. This is important because Dogen provides the

theory for both deep ecologists (even if they misinterpret his theory as Curtin

identifies), and ecofeminist theories of the self. Beyond these two strains of ecological

thought, Dogen has also been influential in Snyder's Zen, partly because of Dogen's

key place in the general history of Zen. In illuminating Dogen's theory of self, Curtin explains that,

> Self is always experienced *in relation* to other beings, however, and those relations define what it means to be a self. Indeed, each person's set of defining relations at a given moment are unique...A true self is one that practices undivided activity in the present moment, a practice that reveals the interpenetration (Buddha-nature) of all beings. (201)

According to Curtin, Dogen avoids positioning the self in relation to a larger (cosmological?) self. Instead, he uses the term "interpenetration" to describe self. For Dogen, the term self signifies an interaction between "all beings." This concept recognizes the interdependent relationship all beings have with each other while inscribing difference at the same moment. This provides the space for an ecological self that denies both the isolated self in Western tradition as well as the tendency towards a homogenous cosmological, and stable, "Self" that appears in both Hindu thought and various deep ecologists' writings.

While Curtin criticizes most deep ecologists for setting up a hierarchical self, he leaves the door open for Snyder's particular theories, which again positions Snyder as a bridge figure who straddles multiple traditions. Although Curtin claims that both Naess and Snyder base their self-emptying views on Dogen's Buddhism, he also states that "Gary Snyder's writings on Dogen often display an acute sense of the impermanence that is everyday life" (206). "Impermanence" stands in distinct contrast to the stable higher "Self" that Curtin criticizes Naess for. Thus, Curtin indicates that Snyder holds truer to Dogen's writings, because both Snyder and Dogen perceive the self not as part of a whole, or needing to join with a whole, but as inter-relational, and interpenetrating with other selves.

While Zimmerman still positions Snyder's, Naess' and his own theories within the limits of deep ecology, Curtin explains that "Dogen's characterization of the self is even more sympathetic to a possible version of ecofeminism than to deep ecology" (Curtin 197). Considering that Curtin has characterized Naess' theories as falling short of Dogen's ideals and Snyder's theory of self as comparatively closer to Dogen's, Snyder could then be characterized as transcending ecofeminist criticisms of deep ecologists' view of self. Snyder's sense of self could even more rightly be connected to ecofeminism rather than deep ecology.

Snyder moves beyond Plumwood's, Warren's and Cheney's criticisms of homogenous atomism. By connecting to the larger world, not merely as an expansion of the self or by connecting to a larger "Self" (potentially a "Self" made in the image of man?) Snyder embodies the interconnectedness with the other that ecofeminists encourage in their own theories. Such positions become obvious through some of Snyder's writings: "To see a wren in a bush, call it 'wren,' and go on walking is to have (self-importantly) seen nothing. To see a bird and stop, watch, feel, forget yourself for a moment, be in the bushy shadows, maybe then feel 'wren'—that is to have joined in a larger moment with the world" (PS 179). To understand the wren demands that the perceiver deny his or her self and attempt to experience the otherness of "wren." Rather than extending the self to include the wren, Snyder here encourages the abandonment of the self to embody the wren's different experience.

Emptying the self to gain a larger connection with the biotic community avoids ecofeminism's critique, but it also raises the question as to whether or not a human can ever truly transcend the self to identify with a wren or any nonhuman other. Is the

attempt to do so simply disguising an anthropomorphic movement? All perception still comes through one's own human faculties, which one can never transcend. This is not an easily resolvable dilemma. It has plagued environmentalists who wish to encourage general empathy with the nonhuman other, yet recognize the problem presented in acknowledging difference between self and other that limits empathy. Although I cannot by any means resolve this tension, I suggest this polarity can be mediated through Snyder's bioregional ethic. This problem above depends on a universal ability to transcend from self to nonhuman other, but bioregionalism instead focuses on interpersonal relationships to the local, or regional, systems within which one participates. It is through engaging the particularly local in this manner that the problem of self and other can be repositioned to ease the opposition between the two terms.

Although he many not himself be an ecofeminist, Ramachandra Guha articulates a criticism ecofeminists have also made against deep ecologists. He critiques the application of a universal deep ecological ethic towards the third world environment: "Deep ecology provides, perhaps unwittingly, a justification for the continuation of such narrow and inequitable conservation practices under a newly acquired radical guise" (75). He also claims that "in many parts of Africa, the designated wildlands are managed primarily for the benefit of rich tourists" (Guha 75). Environmentalists' desires to preserve wilderness areas in third world nations conflict with the rights of indigenous peoples, a practice that seems to reinforce a division between humans and the broader community which deep ecologists aim to avoid. Applying radical Western environmental ethics to the broader world necessarily

creates disharmony between the ideals deep ecology represents and its practical application to contexts outside of where the theories were developed. Yet, deep ecology is not the only ethic that has been faced with this critique.

Ecofeminism, as a part of the broader feminist movement, has also historically privileged the Western, middle-class, white woman as the basis for its own theories. Not until more recently, with theorists such as Karen Warren, have its theories expanded to include the subaltern positions of women in the West and the third world. Both Warren and Snyder's stress on the particular in developing an ethic resolves the conflict inherent in a broad application of Western ideals. Taking a particularized situation into account, such as that offered by Snyder in bioregionalism, allows the local communities to restructure ethical principles to fit their particular situation. Instead of simply setting aside large swaths of land for preservation, bioregionalism encourages living within the limits of the surrounding biotic community, and it offers no universal answer for how to carry out such a tactic other than to become familiar with the land's voice.

Snyder's bioregionalism provides a path beyond Guha's previous critique, but Guha also criticizes radical Western environmentalism more pertinent to Snyder's work. Although Snyder avoids the difficulties created by focusing his work on only Western texts and thought through his wide use of Buddhist and Native American mythology in his writing, Guha might question the authenticity of these tactics. He explains how deep ecologists have usurped Eastern religions in order to "present deep ecology as a universalistic philosophy" (76), and that through such a tactic "the East merely serves as a vehicle for Western projection" (77) because it has stereotyped

Eastern thought and denied it its own agency (77). Guha indicates that many Western environmentalists have romanticized Eastern thought in order to create a philosophy that lives in tune with nature to form the basis of a new environmental movement. Whereas deep ecologists were earlier criticized for not identifying the real difference of the nonhuman other, here Guha provides a similar critique that can apply to Snyder's appropriation of Eastern thought. This returns us to the question of whether or not we can truly know the other.

Although this critique draws into consideration the authenticity of Snyder's Eastern thought, and it is an important point to consider, there is a difference between misrepresenting a religion for the purpose of converting others to it and interpreting a kernel of thought found within an other's philosophy that appears useful and applicable to one's own cultural crisis. Although it is potentially true that Snyder may not represent Buddhism in its "pure" form, and possibly no Westerner (or even Asian for that matter) ever could do so, Snyder uses Buddhism to express valuable insights to direct Western thought towards more sustainable practice, and he answers Guha's criticisms in his focus instead on particulars. By its very nature bioregionalism expresses the voice of a particular region, as Snyder illustrates in his travels up and down highway 99 in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Although he utilizes wisdom gained from studying Eastern thought, his work is largely particularized to a specific context and not a universal expression of Buddhist principles. This focus on the particular provides a path forward for both ecofeminism and bioregionalism that allows room for the other outside of their own particularized contexts.

Snyder cannot be simplistically categorized as a deep ecologist, and for that purpose he may escape some of the harsher criticisms ecofeminists have developed against deep ecology. In contrast to these criticisms, some ecofeminists have even identified opportunities within Snyder's bioregionalism for extending ecofeminist theories. Judith Plant offers a line of connection between ecofeminism and bioregionalism, "Bioregionalism, with its emphasis on distinct regional cultures and identities strongly attached to their natural environments, may well be the kind of framework within which the philosophy of ecofeminism could realize its full potential as part of a practical social movement" (158). She identifies within bioregionalism's tenets the possibility for a practical application of the larger, more abstract philosophies offered in ecofeminism. The main point of junction that Plant identifies between the two is the "decentralization of power" (160). Women desire to destabilize the patriarchal power structures in favor of something like Donna Haraway's "situated knowledges." Haraway explains that the main intent behind her cyborg writing is to decentralize power structures: "Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 176). Both Haraway's postmodern theory and Plant's description of ecofeminist ethic focus on decentralizing patriarchal power structures to allow space for a non-hierarchal structure to emerge that can more compassionately care for the subaltern other, both human and non-human.

Snyder also identifies the problems resulting from hierarchical domination. He outlines bioregionalism's ambitions, by explaining that "We are asking how the whole

human race can regain self-determination in place after centuries of having been disenfranchised by hierarchy and/or centralized power" (PW 42-3). By decentralizing power and relocating it within particular bioregions, Plant explains that bioregionalism provides "a way of living what we're thinking" (159). Although Plant's intention is to point out bioregionalism's fertile ground that can help ecofeminist theories grow, her argument consequently criticizes ecofeminist thought, portraying it as too abstract and complex to apply to lived situations. Snyder offers the practicality that ecofeminism has lacked, the lived experiences of a situated knowledge.

In addition to Plant's embrace of bioregionalism, ecofeminists Jim Cheney and Karen Warren find a fertile common ground within which to work. They develop the concept of narrative as a particular expression of ecofeminist thought. Cheney explains the importance of narrative, "narrative is the key then, but it is narrative grounded in geography rather than in a linear, essentialized narrative self" (Cheney 126). He expands on the link between bioregionalism and the term he uses "storied residence,"

> My suggestion is that a postmodernist emphasis on contextualism and narrative as a means of locating oneself offers us an alternative mode of understanding bioregionalism and, conversely, that bioregionalism is a natural extension of the line of thought being developed by those advocating a view of ethics as contextualist and narrative. (Cheney 128)

Cheney interprets both bioregionalism and ecofeminism through a postmodern lens, and all three share common interest in narrative as an expression of context and location. Donna Haraway, another theorist who, like Cheney, bridges postmodernism and ecofeminism, also emphasizes the "story" aspect of one's situatedness. Although several environmental theorists have approached Haraway's term "cyborg" with

caution, this term can be understood as describing (not prescribing) the instrumental position technology has taken in humans' existence. However controversial her term may be, "cyborg writing" presents a useful metaphor for humans' relationship to place. In describing "cyborg writing," Haraway explains "it is a way to get at the multiple modes of embedding that are about both place and space in the manner in which geographers draw that distinction" (*How Like a Leaf* 71). Haraway claims that "place and space" become physically encoded in the writer's body. The "cyborg writer" then translates that encoding into her or his writing: "Understanding the world is about living inside stories…Our own bodies are a metaphor in the most literal sense. This is the oxymoronic quality of physicality that is the result of the permanent co-existence of stories embedded in physical semiotic fleshy bloody existence" (*How Like a Leaf* 107). Similar to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which I will explain in more detail later, Haraway positions the body as a physical metaphor that expresses a place's unique story. The human body works as metaphor for one's position within the complex relationships of self, place, space and other.

While Cheney may focus more directly on the human agency in creating these stories, Haraway positions herself more closely to phenomenologists, and potentially Snyder as well, by describing the human body as a product of place. This gives place agency in its own expression within human bodies and the stories those bodies produce. Considering Haraway's theories, "storied residence" should necessarily express itself through bioregional sense of place that takes seriously both a relationship with the nonhuman world and the particularity of an individual's experience in a particular place.

Karen Warren also encourages using narrative, but she develops it into different ends than does Cheney. She writes, "Unlike more traditional approaches to ethics, a narrative approach contextualizes ethical discourse in ways that make relationships and beings-in-relationships central to ethics" (Warren 102). She continues from here to develop what she describes as a "situated universal" theory. Although she attempts to claim that humans can ultimately discern some universal ethics, she insists that they should always come out of particular contexts and then adapt in addressing other particular contexts. Affirming Plant's earlier statement that ecofeminism aims at the decentralization of power, Warren claims that universals should never be imposed from above, because this would express what she describes as a logic of domination. Warren writes,

> Ethics is not about what is rationally and morally permitted or required for any and all human beings in all contexts in accordance with some abstract principles. Ethics is not about what detached, impersonal, objective, rational agents engaged in grand theorizing deduce. Rather, ethics is and should be about what imperfect human beings living in particular historical, socioeconomic contexts can and should do, given those contexts. (114)

She aims to move beyond "abstract principles" to the particularized situations of each individual within a specific context. This again returns to Haraway's "situated knowledges" as an acknowledgement that universals should always be located. Haraway explains that "objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 190). Like Warren, Haraway claims that any attempt at universality or objectivity necessarily grows out of particulars of individual instances. Snyder's bioregionalism also develops on the same

principles that privilege the particularity of place as the basis of ethics. He writes, "Bioregional awareness teaches us in *specific* ways...our relation to the natural world takes place in a *place,* and it must be grounded in information and experience" (PW 39). Bioregionalism supports the same claims put forth by Warren and other ecofeminists that aim at leveling hierarchies of domination. Only from a connection to a specific place can an environmental ethic develop.

Finally, we return to the problem raised earlier between the self and other by way of language. Language plays a necessary role in the ability to express Cheney's storied residence, Haraway's situated knowledges, Warren's narrative expression of a particularized ethic, and Snyder's bioregional ethic. Language allows story, or narrative, to express the larger biotic community or bioregion. Language then provides a key connection between self and other, or self and place. And environmentalists have searched through various theories of language that would adequately provide the link necessary to re-establish a substantial connection between human and place, thereby reaffirming the importance of environmental ethics.

In varying ways Snyder and ecofeminists Griffin and Cheney express the similar beliefs about language's connection to the biotic community. For Cheney language expresses the biotic community through openness to it. He relies on Heidegger's philosophy of language to explain this, "Heidegger, for example, opts for a new relation to language altogether, one which results from a 'meditative openness' to the world. The world speaks through us when we let go of the metaphysical voice. Language of this sort is a 'listening,' a 'gift in which things come to presence'" (Cheney 119). Michael Zimmerman also describes the potential in Heidegger's theory

for an environmental ethic. He explains the connection between language and nature, "Things do not appear, then, because we disclose them; instead, things call forth a world in which they can reveal themselves. The things that are make it possible for us to live up to our obligation of giving voice to those things" ("Toward a Heideggerean *Ethos* for Radical Environmentalism" 109). Zimmerman places further importance on the role "things" play in their own self expression through human language. In this sense, language belongs not to humans, but to the larger world, and humans happen to be the speakers through which language is broadcast. Zimmerman warns that "Language decays, in part, because human beings begin using it as a mere tool for their own ends, instead of living up to their obligation of letting it use them to reveal the Being of beings" (111). Possessing language places on humans a unique obligation to the rest of the world. This obligation can be that of developing a storied residence by allowing the earth to speak through the human's faculties.

In contrast to Cheney's description of language as listening, or Zimmerman's unique obligation, Griffin relies on the historical connection between a woman and her body, or the woman as being closer to or part of the physical world, as for her description of language. She closes her book writing, "as part of the body of the bird will enter my daughter's body, because I know I am made from this earth...all that I know speaks to me through this earth and I long to tell you, you who are earth too" (Griffin 227). For her, language naturally expresses the physical—both the woman's body and the larger biotic community—because of the link between woman and nature. Humans are composed of the earth, and are an expression of the earth, and thus language is an expression of this larger biotic community.

Snyder expresses connections between the human and the nonhuman world, similar to both Griffin's and Cheney's theories. He explains in his essay "Language Goes Two Ways" that "The grammar not only of language, but of culture and civilization itself, comes from this vast mother of ours, nature" (177). Nature provides language's basis because of our inherent connection with the nonhuman world. Whereas Griffin attempts to flip woman's subjugated position to one of power via woman's more immediate connection with nature, Snyder expands this connection with nature to provide a basis for *all* humans' existence. Snyder's writings show all of human culture "interpenetrating" nature. Scigaj explains: "Words that immediately point toward referential realities convey Snyder's joyous interpenetration with nature" (247).

Like Cheney, phenomenological theory seeps its way into Snyder's perceptions of language as expressing the visible world. Scigaj articulates the connection between Snyder's thought and that of Merleau-Ponty: "Snyder's characterization of perception as an openness that moves through the 'immediate biomass' conveys that sense of the intertwining of the flesh of the visible that forms the backbone of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology" (Scigaj 246). Snyder in turn validates Scigaj's claims: "We move mentally as in a great landscape, and return from it with a few bones, nuts, or drupes, which we keep as language" (PS 179). The "great landscape" is Scigaj's "immediate biomass" through which we move. As we engage the flesh, the "bones, nuts, or drupes," we are open to it and keep parts of it as language. This act intertwines humans' flesh and the nonhuman world through the

openness of language. The language humans use is remnant of or treasures taken from the nonhuman world.

This theory of language provides not only a connection between the bioregion and what Cheney describes as situated residences, it also offers hope for mediating the disconnect between self and nonhuman other. While the nonhuman other is not the same as humans, both humans and nonhuman others share within the production of language. Language becomes not only a human faculty, but it is also of the body, as Griffin explains, and an expression of the phenomenal world as Scigaj portrays Snyder's view of language, as well as Cheney's theories of language based on Heidegger.

III. Phenomenology of Flesh in Snyder's "Natural Language"

> *"The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void"*

> Gary Snyder – "Buddhism and the Possibilities of a Planetary Culture"
> From *Deep Ecology* by Bill Devall and George Sessions

One's theory of self forms the ground from which language develops. Whether the self stands in isolation to the external world, or interpenetrates with other objects in the world, one's theory of self influences the course one takes in developing a theory of language and interpreting the agency of language usage. One's theory of self even determines the potential for language connecting to the external world. Only by exploring Snyder's vision of self in relation to the world can we also understand the role language plays in those relationships. It thus becomes necessary to situate Snyder's theory in relation to other theories of self (Buddhist and phenomenological), always maintaining an eye directed at the resulting influence his theory will have on his understanding of language.

As I discussed earlier, Snyder, like other writers, is the product of various traditions. Because of his multiple influences, the connection between the body and language, or nature and language, finds a double character in his work. Thus, his writing cannot be confined by, or in, a single tradition. Although Snyder works within a Western tradition of poetry inflected with Western ideals, (Romantic ideals according to Molesworth (7)) his poetry also expresses a ten year study of Buddhism in Japan (Scigaj 233), as well as an extended period of time at Berkeley studying Oriental languages. It is while studying at Berkeley that Snyder and fellow Beat poet

Allen Ginsburg befriended Alan Watts, the Zen teacher charged with introducing Buddhism to the Beats (Watts x). Snyder and Ginsburg then passed on their own interest in Zen to the other Beats, and this influence appears throughout their writings. For instance, one of Snyder's first books of poetry, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems,* is an inspired translation of Buddhist Han Shan's poetry. Likewise, Jack Kerouac's book *The Dharma Bums*, which consequently has Snyder as one of its main characters, is also dedicated to Han Shan. In this way the Beat community provided a supportive environment to develop and live out Buddhist beliefs.

In addition to the Buddhism in which Snyder has deeply immersed himself, he has also studied Native American mythology and other Eastern thought. Charles Molesworth identifies these influences in developing Snyder's reinterpretation of Western thought: "his use of Buddhist and Amerindian material can be read as either a critique or a radical reimagining of that [modern European literary] tradition" (11). Snyder brings his pack across the Bering Straits to "reimagine" Western tradition, infusing Buddhist and Native American perspectives into Western thought, but this occurs at deep levels, as deep as the structures of self and language. Snyder brings new thoughts of self by way of the Buddhist Dogen, who positions self as interpenetrating with other selves, human and nonhuman. "Dogen's is a relational self which is distinct, but defines itself through mindfulness about its network of essential relationships" (Curtin 210). Because Snyder's reimagining of the self, influenced largely by Dogen, reconnects humans to nature, his theories on language differ from many of contemporary Western views of language in crucial ways that permit him to connect language to the "natural" world while still retaining skepticism towards the

assurances of certainty. But hints also prevail within his writings that open his theories to other interpretations, such as those of phenomenology.

Snyder begins to develop his counter-cultural perceptions of language by exploring language's relation to the body, a move contrary to most Western views that position language as abstract. In his 1995 essay "Language Goes Two Ways," he rewrites the "more familiar view of language" into a declaration that "Language is basically biological" (PS 178). He then continues to say "it becomes semicultural as it is learned and practiced" (PS 178). Snyder does not attempt to erase language's cultural influence that has been stressed in literary studies. Instead, he wishes to reaffirm a biological basis in an attempt to return language to the larger world. Consequently, he affirms both a biological and cultural component to language, arguing that the two are interdependent. In this way, language reflects the network of relationships that Dogen attributes to the self. But the key move Snyder makes is recognizing the physical element in language. Molesworth also points out the importance Snyder places on the biological aspect, not of language specifically, but in his larger "vision." He writes that "the physical dimension of the vision remains a crucial one" (7). In contrast to Thoreau, who Molesworth describes as moving from the transcendental to the particular, Snyder moves "from dense factuality to a prizing of mental operations" (Molesworth 7). Although Molesworth has not mentioned language yet at this point, he does provide a link to the larger significances biology takes in Snyder's work, which connects to Snyder's views on language as biological.

Snyder continues connecting language to the body at the end of his essay "Language Goes Two Ways" when he states that "language is a part of our body and

woven into seeing, feeling, touching, and dreaming of the whole mind as much as it comes from some localized 'language center.'" (PS 179). Here he not only identifies a crucial relationship between the body and language, but he also places language in relationship to sensory experiences of the world, or the "whole mind." His poems seem to habitually call upon the senses in describing the speaker's environment, as seen in "Endless Streams and Mountains." Here Snyder writes of "seeing this land from a boat on a lake" (MRWE 5), and proceeds to describe this place according to its physical appearance. Snyder also engages the sensuous perception of hearing as well in this poem. Although "The Canyon Wren" focuses on the wren's song, "ti ti ti ti tee tee tee...songs that are here and gone" (MRWE 90-1), Hunt explains that the repeated consonant sounds within the poem's structure even presents a hum that is repeated throughout the poem. ("The Humpbacked Flute Player" 19) Instead of perceiving language as an abstraction mostly connected to the individual mind, as in a Cartesian split self, Snyder connects language to sensuous experience of the world through the body. Thus, language is not only abstraction; it has a real physical basis.

Having destabilized language's position within a Cartesian self by pairing it with the body rather than the mind, Snyder ecologically grounds language to a further extent by transcending the self-other dualism. Instead of relating language only to the self's body, with no connection to the outside world, Snyder steps beyond the individual and places language within the physical world's web of relations. He asserts that language does not uniquely distinguish humans from the rest of the world. Instead, language comes out of the world. Snyder draws upon Thoreau's "Tawny Grammar" and explains that "the grammar not only of language, but of culture and

civilization itself, comes from this vast mother of ours, nature" (PS 177). Language, as arising out of nature, does not keep humans caught within a self-referential system, as many theorists have recently claimed. Rather, language positions humans as inter-related with the external world through the biological basis that both self and nonhuman other share.

We could look at several different sources for this theory, ecology, Buddhism or even phenomenology. All place importance on what Dogen describes as a "network of relationship," but Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides a valuable metaphor that could shed light on the human relation to the nonhuman other. He claims that this inter-relationship primarily takes place through the body's double position as both part of the world and perceiver of the world, what he describes as "two halves of an orange." Using the metaphor of one's right hand touching and being touched by the left hand, Merleau-Ponty illustrates the perceiving body's relationship to and opening up to the rest of the world. He writes:

> This can happen [kinship with the world] only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as two halves of an orange. (Merleau-Ponty 133)

As the (touching) perceiver is always already mapped into the world through her or his position as a (tangible) perceived, she or he is necessarily inter-related with the tangible and not set apart as distinct. Or, stated in another way, the person that perceives a horizon of experience is also a part of that horizon. The human is not

distinct from the nonhuman others, but instead shares a kinship with the nonhuman other, and language comes forth from this inter-relationship. This will become clearer as we proceed, but this passage provides an initial metaphor to help visualize the human's inter-relatedness to the nonhuman other and an example of Snyder's vision of the connection between language and the body.

The connection Snyder makes between the human and the nonhuman other could, in addition to Merleau-Ponty's writings, also be interpreted through the lens of both indigenous cultures' ecological relationships to nature, and Zen Buddhism's denial of the "I" subject (what Snyder writes as the "self/void") among several other traces of various traditions that seep into Snyder's work. My particular interest, however, is to consider Snyder's perceptions of self and language in relation to the nonhuman world primarily through Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Although I will primarily focus on the relationship between Merleau-Ponty and Snyder, all three bodies of thought mentioned above (Buddhism, Native American thought, and Phenomenology), although distinct, should not be viewed as entirely separate from each other. All three find moments of inter-relationality within and beyond Snyder's work, but the overlap of terminology and theory most promising in illuminating Snyder's work is that between Buddhism and Western phenomenology. Buddhism seems so integral to Snyder's work that it is challenging to discuss his writing without relating it to Buddhism in some way, and Buddhism also provides a helpful foil to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology because both share many common features.

As an example of the inter-relationality between Buddhism and Western phenomenology—particularly focusing on Dogen's language in the quotes Snyder chooses to incorporate into his text—is Dogen's frequent use of the term "phenomenon." This indicates that Dogen finds the world of phenomena important to his Buddhist perceptions of the world, and such interest extends to Snyder as well. While many theorists may not expand Snyder's interest in phenomenon beyond this Buddhist influence via Dogen, I think it productive to also explore the ways he may also represent Western phenomenology in relation to the idea of self. While Snyder relies heavily upon Buddhism to develop his understanding of self as empty, Zimmerman has explained Heidegger's theory of an empty self. While Heidegger was originally a phenomenologist that studied under Husserl, he is also given credit as being one of the fathers of postmodernism, as we can see in Zimmerman's use of his theories of an empty self. Both traditions, Buddhist and phenomenological-postmodern, emphasize a process of self emptying, and consequently overlap in various ways. Several philosophers, religious scholars and critics have likewise connected phenomenology with Buddhism and Eastern philosophy in general, but my purpose here is not to explore such general connections. I wish to instead look more specifically at how both of these theories can be read into Snyder's work to help illuminate and flesh-out some of the complex theories that he conveys in his writings. One of the most significant theorists to do similar work, to describe both Buddhist and phenomenological tendencies in Snyder's writings, is Leonard Scigaj, whose analysis provides useful background for my own project.

In his section on Gary Snyder in *Sustainable Poetry*, Leonard Scigaj identifies the Buddhist influence on Snyder's work but supplements his reading of Snyder with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Scigaj explores the similarities between Snyder's work and phenomenology, writing: "The most haunting lines in Snyder's early poetry, from 'Piute Creek,' seem to suggest Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of reciprocity, that the activity of perception is an active engagement of both the perceiver and nature" (235). He proceeds to connect Buddhism and phenomenology within the course of this analysis stating that "Nonhuman sentient / sensible nature has eyes that probe...At the very least, this indicates that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is consonant with the nondualism of Zen Buddhism and the animated world of the Native American myths that Snyder prefers to the Protestant ethic capitalism of white interlopers" (236). Although Scigaj has not described a definitive connection between Snyder and phenomenology, he sets up a parallel the he follows throughout his work that I wish to pick up here as well. Using Scigaj, among other critics, we begin the process of unpacking the emptiness within Snyder's pack, comparing the structures he returns with from the East to our own similar structures in the West.

One such crucial duplicity appears just prior to the passage quoted above from "Language Goes Two Ways" in reference to stopping to see the wren. Snyder quotes Dogen, revealing his Buddhist influences, yet the quote sounds as though it could have come directly from Heidegger (as seen earlier) or Merleau-Ponty (as we will see later). Snyder quotes: "To advance your own experience onto the world of phenomena is delusion. When the world of phenomena comes forth and experiences itself, it is enlightenment" (PS 179). Dogen here expresses the self-emptying goal of Buddhism

by denying "self" a central role in experiencing the world. It is not the self that speaks, but the "world of phenomena" that speaks through the self. This description of experiencing the world contrasts with that of the earlier mentioned deep ecology. Instead of extending self outward towards encompassing the world, Dogen perceives the self as intimately relating to the world. By calling forth Dogen, Snyder positions self in close relationship to the world, what might be referred to as an ecological self, or what others often describe varyingly as interpenetration, inter-relatedness, or intertwining—all of which I will use throughout the course of this work.

To see how Dogen's explanation of sensual experience compares to that as described in Western phenomenology, we must begin exploring phenomenology by gaining a general idea of what it means in its simplest form. By first gaining a simple definition, we can then move on to a deeper engagement to understand how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology differs from the generic use of the term "phenomenology." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* explains that "Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view." Although this definition leaves much to be desired, (which the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* identifies) it sets the basic framework for showing the lines of connection between Dogen's discussion of phenomena and Western phenomenology's study of a subject's experience of the phenomenal world. Both focus on the subject's experience and refer to the world as phenomena. The question that lingers is as to the nature of the subject, or self.

Both Western phenomenology, as represented by Merleau-Ponty, and Buddhist phenomenology, as represented by Dogen, are clearly concerned with experience, and

particularly with sensual experience in the construction of self. Both discuss the subjective experience of the world, but whereas the definition for phenomenology in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* places the subject at the center of experience, at the center of self, Dogen denies the subject's centrality and instead throws importance back onto the surrounding world. The quote above shows this very tendency in Dogen's work. Although Dogen appears to turn Western phenomenology on its head, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology holds much more in common with Dogen's philosophy than this basic idea of phenomenology provided by *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Merleau-Ponty takes up the concept of "nothingness" and also denies the self's presence, similar to Dogen. He exlpains that "The intuition of being is solidary with a sort of negintuition of nothingness (in the sense that we speak of negentropy), with the impossibility of our reducing ourselves to anything whatever—a state of consciousness, thought, an *ego*, or even a 'subject'" (Merleau-Ponty 53). Because Merlau-Ponty's and Dogen's phenomenology both deny the self centrality in experience, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides a valuable scope for shedding light on the relationship between Dogen, Snyder and Western phenomenology; he provides an avenue of approach towards devloping an interpenetration with Eastern Buddhism.

One reason Merleau-Ponty's work provides such an avenue is because it has found revival in recent critical theory. This has particularly been the case among ecocritics and critics interested in environmental readings of texts. One of the major works that explicity focuses on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in relation to ecology is David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*. His full length book deals at

length with Merleau-Ponty's theories and predates most of the other work recently published on similar topics, and his article "Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth" first appeared in *Environmental Ethics* in 1988. Several of the other recent works that rely on Merleau-Ponty's work also seem to read the philosopher through Abram's lens. Works such as Scigaj's *Sustainable Poetry* (which dedicates one section exclusively to Snyder), Louise Westlings' "Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World" and Paula Willoquet-Maricondi's "Fleshing the Text: Greenaway's *Pillow Book* and the Erasure of the Body" were all published in 1999, and all cite Abram's book as a source for their understanding of Merleau-Ponty. This proliferation of texts that use Abram (and Merleau-Ponty) for an ecological reading of various texts also exemplifies the currency of these theories, and likewise, I will look towards Abram to develop a fuller understanding of Merleau-Ponty's work in applying his phenomenology to a reading of Snyder's theories as I develop the ideas mentioned above.

* * *

Abram repositions Phenomenology as a valuable theory by using Merleau-Ponty's work as essential to reconnect language to what he refers to as the "more-than-human" world. He begins his project by discussing his interaction with philosophies of indigenous peoples that challenge Western concepts of self as an isolated, individual entity bound by the skin. In the first chapter of his book he describes indigenous Balians' philosophies: "The 'body'—whether human or

otherwise—is not yet a mechanical object in such [indigenous] cultures…and at death the body's decomposition into soil, worms, and dust can only signify the gradual reintegration of one's ancestors and elders into the living landscape, from which all, too, are born" (*Spell of the Sensuous* 15). This expression of indigenous beliefs about the body illustrates Abram's view that the body is not closed, but is rather part of a flowing cycle of connection with the "more-than-human" world. Through this example of indigenous beliefs Abram sets up his discussion of phenomenology and language.

Already connections seem apparent between Snyder, Dogen and Abram. Like Dogen, Abram denies the individuality of the self in favor of the larger network, or ecology, of relations outside of the individual. Although we may not be able to verify any historical influence between phenomenology and Snyder's writing, we can see indications that Snyder has an affinity for Abram's ideas. Drawing such a connection strengthens the argument for exploring Abram's project on the way to analyzing Snyder's lifetime work.

Countless critics identify the clear influence of Native American philosophy on Snyder's writings, and both Snyder and Abram find interest in the shaman character, but connections between the two run deeper as well. Both writers draw upon dust imagery that can be understood as a symbol that connects the entire physical world. As an example, Snyder wrote in my personal copy of *Danger on Peaks*, his most recent book: "Honor the dust." This relates back to Abram's claim in the beginning of his book (and quoted above) that humans decompose into the "soil, worms, and dust" that forms the basis of humans' (and all beings') later composition. Snyder's focus on dust

parallels Abram's. Although Snyder's inscription in *Danger on Peaks* may indicate that dust is a particular focus in that work, remnants of dust images filter throughout his other works, and it appears several times in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. One such instance occurs when the narrator in the poem "the hump-backed flute player" answers the question, "Ah, what am I carrying? What's this load?" (81) with another question that draws on dust imagery, "Who's that out there in the dust / sleeping on the ground?" (81) We may speculate then, that the narrator, who is conceivably Snyder himself, carries dust, the remnants of ancestors. Following the story of the hump-backed flute player, these ancestors are potentially Buddhist ancestors found, and honored, in the dust.

Snyder follows this question with an answer, "It's old Jack Wilson, / Wovoka, the prophet" (MRWE 81). Hunt explains that "Wovoka, a Paiute who belongs geographically to the Great Basin area, is another emanation of Kokopilau, but he carries both the whole world and emptiness in his hat (rather than in a pack)" ("The Hump-backed Flute Player" 8). Hunt continues later to explain that Wovoka "had shamanistic visions about regenerating the world as it was before the white man came along. His visions became the basis for the formal circling movements and songs of the Ghost Dance" ("The Hump-backed Flute Player" 16). Wovoka signifies a connection to Native American tradition prior to interference by Europeans. Wovoka's vision and dance provided a path of resistance and a return to the older Native ways, thus, the character in the dust refers to both Buddhist and Native American mythologies passed on long ago.

Dust imagery also plays a large role in Snyder's poem "Old Bones." Anthony Hunt suggests that the bones in this poem are "artifacts that we might hold in our hands, but there is nothing to prevent us from seeing, as Snyder does, the 'tracks' of our past in the myths that remains from the past" (GSM 70). Patrick Murphy confirms Hunt's suggestion stating that the poem "pays homage to the spirits of the animals and people who have preceded contemporary humankind" (*A Place for Wayfaring* 187). The bones too represent remnants of our ancestors, not just physically, but their myths as well. Similar to Merleau-Ponty, who describes the interpenetrating relationship between what he terms the visible and invisible, the bones here also stand for the interpenetration between the people and their traditions and myths that are passed along. Like Haraway's bodies as metaphor, these bones serve as metaphor for tradition.

Bones eventually turn to dust. Snyder describes "the dust of old bones" (MRWE 10). While still in the structure of a bone, the various myths cannot easily interpenetrate each other, but when they have turned to dust they can then swirl in the wind. The ancestors' bodies and myths can then circulate and travel. But Snyder also steps beyond the narrowly human history of bones and dust. He writes, "Deer bones, Dall sheep, / bones hunger home" (MRWE 10). The interpenetration is not exclusive to humans, but it also involves the mixing of animals' bodies and voices that turn to dust and join the mix. Dust combines all ancestors, human ancestors, animal ancestors, and even leafy ancestors, all interpenetrating each other in the dust. In this framework, the image of dust connects Snyder and Abram through the interpenetration and continual renewal of life that their visions share.

The two writers also share commonalities with each other and affinities for each others' work beyond the connection within indigenous philosophies. While Abram explores Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Snyder uses similar language of sensual experience that Abram uses within his work. This connection appears more than contingent. Snyder is quoted as praising Abram's book, "This book…lights up the landscape of language, flesh, mind, history, mapping us back into the world." Snyder's language in this quote ("language, flesh, mind...mapping us back into the world") bridges the span between Abram's treatment of phenomenology and his own path of Buddhism that lead them both to repositioning humans within the flow of the world's ecology through language, mind and the body.

While most of Abram's book finds its basis in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, he begins by explaining Husserl's thoughts on phenomenology. Even Husserl, the father of phenomenology, does not describe the phenomenal world as existing only within the human subject's mind, as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* offers as a basic definition for phenomenology. Abram explains Husserl's position: "the phenomenal field was no longer the isolate haunt of a solitary ego, but a collective landscape, constituted by other experiencing subjects as well as by oneself" (*Spell of the Sensuous* 37). Husserl begins phenomenology's move away from individualist anthropocentrism towards a web of relations. The self becomes less important as the larger web of "experiencing subjects" becomes more important in phenomenological reality. With this concept, the individual cannot "map," or impose her or his own ego's phenomenological perceptions onto the world. Rather, as Dogen states above, the individual must allow the other "experiencing subjects" to "come forth and experience

[themselves]." The world humans experience is not only their own experience of the physical world, but an interaction between humans and others, humans' perceptions and others' perceptions forming what Abram refers to as a "matrix" ("Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth" 118).

The "matrix," composed of the phenomenology of experience, provides the inter-relatedness throughout which an "experiencing subject" becomes disseminated. In this sense, an experiencing self *is* the "matrix." Snyder uses a similar structure within his own writing. In response to Dogen's quote above Snyder writes, "To see a wren in a bush, call it 'wren,' and go on walking is to have (self-importantly) seen nothing. To see a bird and stop, watch, feel, forget yourself for a moment, be in the bushy shadows, maybe then feel 'wren'—that is to have joined in a larger moment with the world" (PS 179). In this passage Snyder reciprocates Dogen's quote and finds parallel direction with Abram's description of Phenomenology thus far. "To join in the larger moment with the world," places the experiencing subject in relation with the physical world, within Abram's "matrix." To "forget yourself" denies the subjective experience and opens one's experience to the larger world beyond the self.

Merleau-Ponty also describes an inter-relation with the world similar to Snyder's and Dogen's expression of it, "There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other" (Merleau-Ponty 138). He later explains this intertwining when a subject "turns back upon the whole of the visible...of which it is a part" (Merleau-Ponty 139). The perceiver's ability to join in the "larger moment" is based on her or his ability to forget the confines of self, and experience an intertwining or reciprocal connection with the other, in this case the wren, "as upon two mirrors facing one

another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces" (Merleau-Ponty 139). Neither the self nor the other within the "matrix" provide a stable subject, but both find expression through the other. Thus the self becomes not an individual and isolated entity, but a larger network of connections, similar to that of a matrix.

Merleu-Ponty continues developing this broader network of connections. He describes the "whole of the visible...of which [one's vision] is part" (Merleau-Ponty 139), but he explains also that one's body exists as part of the "whole of the visible," the "visible" being all that is experienced by the senses. The matrix that composes the self stands not only on a psychical or mental ground, but it also stands on physical ground. The body is perceived along with the rest of all that is visible. Merleau-Ponty writes,

> My access to a universal mind via reflection, far from finally discovering what I always was, is motivated by the intertwining of my life with the other lives, of my body with the visible things, by the intersection of my perceptual field with that of the others, by the blending in of my duration with the other durations. (Merleau-Ponty 49)

The body is perceived as it perceives. The hand touches as it is being touched. This forms the basis of a human's connection with the larger matrix. Extending the body through its relationship to the visible as all that is perceived, we arrive at Merleau-Ponty's term "flesh," which Abram describes as "the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity" (*Spell of the Sensuous 66*). The matrix of connection that forms the basis of the world we experience turns its center from the perceiver's body to the physical presence of the broader world, the "flesh" of the

world. One's own body, caught within the larger matrix, is also defined as "flesh."

Thus body becomes flesh. We might compare this idea to Haraway's earlier concept

of the body as metaphor, a hybrid of biological and cultural intertwining, also similar

to Snyder's description of language as "basically biological," but "semicultural as it is

learned and practiced" (PS 178).

Abram sheds further light on Merleau-Ponty's idea of flesh as both the

physical and mental, or the visible and invisible, when he writes,

> The 'flesh' is the name Merleau-Ponty gives to this sensible-in-
> transcendence, this inherence of the sentient in the sensible and the
> sensible in the sentient, to this ubiquitous element which is not the
> objective matter we assign to the physicists nor the immaterial mind we
> still entrust to the psychologists because it is older than they, the source
> of those abstractions. ("Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth 110)

"Flesh" indicates more than the physical world that we perceive, of which our body is

part. Instead, it seems a broader matrix of both our perceptions of the physical horizon,

and our mental "horizon." Abram describes "horizon" in comparison to cyclical time.

"The visible space in which we commonly find ourselves when we step outdoors is

itself encompassed by the circular enigma that we have come to call 'the horizon'"

(189). What we perceive then is signified by a horizon, but Merleau-Ponty uses the

term horizon a bit differently. He at one point describes "the horizon of my universe"

(80). This indicates that the "horizon" to which Merleau-Ponty refers includes the

visible and invisible. It includes the invisible that influences the manner by which a

person perceives the visible. Thus, the horizon that composes "flesh" includes both the

physical realities of perception, and the mental actions that direct perception, but this

matrix or "flesh" should not be understood as produced by the self, but rather it composes the self.

Snyder describes the self's position as part of the broader "flesh" of the world through his use of the antithetical Zen practice of no-mind, as seen in his quote from the appendix in Devall's and Sessions' *Deep Ecology*, "The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void." (Devall 252). While explicitly holding up the value of both traditions, both myths, Snyder identifies importance of perceiving the self as a void, an absence not a presence. He holds the two opposites in relation to each other, as Merleau-Ponty does between "Being" and "Nothingness." D.T. Suzuki, the well known translator of Buddhism for the West, further explains the Buddhist antithetical notion of "no-mind," "The state of no-mind-ness refers to the time prior to the separation of mind and world, when there is yet no mind standing against an external world and receiving its impressions through the various sense-channels" (219). "No-mind" suggests a mind, while at the same time denying its presence, instead filling the void that the mind leaves with the "external world." In commenting on "the Hump-backed Flute Player," Hunt writes, "The poem commemorates various encounters with the void...If the poem works, our minds, like those of the travelers in the poem and that of the poet himself, will be full of . . . emptiness"("The Hump-backed Flute Player 4). He identifies the same structures of "no-mind-ness" in Snyder's poem, pushing a mind structured by thought towards emptiness. Rather than identifying such a move as deconstructing, or moving beyond, binaries it should instead be construed as pre-binarism. It aims at gaining what Snyder might refer to as a "shamanistic vision."

In similar manner to Suzuki's descriptions of "no-mind-ness," Merleau-Ponty

describes absence at the center of self in the term of "nothingness." He writes,

> The only way to ensure my access to the things themselves would be to
> purify my notion of the subjectivity completely: there is not even any
> "subjectivity" or "Ego"; the consciousness is without "inhabitant," I
> must extricate it completely from the secondary apperceptions that
> make of it the reverse of a body, the property of a "psychism," and I
> must discover it as the "nothing," the "void," which has the capacity for
> receiving the plenitude of the world, or rather which needs it to bear its
> own emptiness. (Merleau-Ponty 52)

"Nothing" and "void" describe the self. The consequence of this nothingness brings

the self closer to full experience. Merleau-Ponty sounds particularly Buddhist when he

writes, "a subjectivity that is nothing is in the immediate presence of being or in

contact with the world, and at the same time as close to itself as one could like, since

no opaqueness in it could separate it from itself" (74). By denying one's own being,

and acknowledging the nothingness of the self, the "self" (as nothing) becomes her or

his situation (or situatedness) within being. Merleau-Ponty explains, "between

knowledge of self and knowledge of the world there is no longer any debate over even

ideal priority" (57). In being "nothing," the self becomes the context within which one

is positioned. Here we see both a description of the self as void, or absence, and also a

commentary on the chasm between self and non-human-other. By denying

subjectivity, the self becomes the matrix of relations of the "more-than-human" world.

The self becomes other.

* * *

Snyder's poem sequence *Mountains and Rivers Without End* offers a particularly fruitful example of his poetry for exploring language as an expression of the "self/void." Tim Dean claims he wants to "argue that since it harmonizes a vast range of disparate utterances into a collective voice, the poem's voice should be understood as impersonal" (462). For Dean, an impersonal voice offers the opportunity to "develop relationships with nature that aren't strictly human" (463). The impersonal voice, as he identifies it in Snyder's long poem, denies the imperialist impulse towards dominating nature. Instead of Snyder speaking for nature in his own voice from the position of a self, an impersonal voice allows nature to speak itself through Snyder as situated "self." Thus, this long poem offers a unique example of the "self/void's" expression of the broader "matrix" or "flesh of the world."

Dean, among other critics, identifies Snyder's work *Mountains and Rivers Without End* as an extended poem in the manner of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*. To avoid the confusion between the individually titled poems within the book and the longer poem that the work is intended to be, I, along with other critics, find it more useful to discuss his book as a sequence of poems. One of the main poems that brings Snyder's whole work together is the first in the book, "Endless Streams and Mountains." Robert Kern explains that, instead of looking at Snyder's long poem as modernist in structure, this poem "provides[s] Snyder with his most immediate structural format" (125). This structure is that of the "Asian landscape paintings, and especially hand scrolls" (125). He argues, as does Hunt, that Snyder's poem attempts to recreate, or mirror, the hand scroll's rhythm and structures. Although Kern's claims certainly have validity, I also believe that the connection could be made

between this very structure and that of Merleau-Ponty's concept of one's horizon of perception (both the visible and invisible that compose "flesh") that provides the basis of one's self. While the horizon can be specifically the visible phenomenon, it also includes all that is within one's experience that may not be visible either, and thus Snyder's poems that work as landscape paintings include as well the invisible within the horizon of experience. Snyder appears to hold a similar perspective, connecting the mental and physical in a "horizon" that forms the "self/void." In an interview from *The Real Work*, Snyder states, "More and more I am aware of very close correspondences between the external and internal landscape. In my long poem, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, I'm dealing with these correspondences, moving back and forth" (5). Snyder's poetry brings forth the larger matrix, allowing the earth to speak itself.

From a decentered matrix of selves, or the "flesh of the world," language pours forth. If all the visible and invisible compose the "self," then it is out of this matrix that language speaks. Anthony Hunt writes "Snyder himself would say his poem has been brought into being by the energy-mind-dance of the planet itself" (GSM 62). Snyder writes of the voice non-human others have, and he attempts to grasp those voices and express them. Kern's and Hunt's claims that Snyder replicates the rhythm of the mountains takes on new significance in this guise. Snyder speaks the mountains' voices. His poem "The Mountain Spirit," expresses this very sort of articulation. Snyder attempts to bring forth the voice of the mountain, first questioning himself "Who am I talking to? I think, / walk back to camp" (MRWE 142). Later he writes, "The Mountain Spirit whispers back: / 'All art and song / is sacred to the real. /

As such.'" (MRWE 146). The mountain's voice is composed of "Ghosts of lost

landscapes herds and flocks, / towns and clans, / great teachers from all lands"

(MRWE 146). This poem can be read as the mountain coming forth and experiencing

itself, and expressing itself, through Snyder's poetry.

Other voices appear throughout Snyder's writings. In his poem "The Hump-

backed Flute Player," Snyder writes,

> Up in the mountains that edge the Great Basin
> It was whispered to me
> By the oldest of trees.
> By the Oldest of Beings
> The Oldest of Trees
> Bristlecone Pine.
> And all night long sung on
> By a young throng
> Of Pinyon Pine. (MRWE 82).

Although Snyder does not explicitly make it clear how it occurs, the bristlecone pines

and pinyon pines "speak" to the narrator in the poem. In this instance, the speaking is

reciprocal. The pines sing by the wind blowing through the branches in response to the

hump-backed flute player's songs. And the narrator listens to the pines' songs that tell

of the oldest of things—they being "the Oldest of Beings"—indicating that the pines'

songs are an intermingling of response to Kokope'le's flute and the ancient myths and

legends that the pines have themselves experienced.

Merleau-Ponty likewise describes the "flesh" coming forth in language, that

humans do not control:

> One has to believe, then that language is not simply the contrary of the
> truth, of coincidence, that there is or could be a language of
> coincidence, a manner of making the things themselves speak—and
> this is what he seeks. It would be a language of which he would not be
> the organizer, words he would not assemble, that would combine
> through him by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning,

through the occult trading of the metaphor—where what counts is no longer the manifest meaning of each word and of each image, but the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges. (Merleau-Ponty 125)

In laying out the philosopher's task, Merleau-Ponty explains that philosophers must bring forth the inter-relationships, or the "lateral relations," that words and images have to each other. He calls for "a language of which he [the philosopher] would not be the organizer." This strikes closely to Snyder's call for 'Natural Language' in his essay "Language Goes Two Ways." It calls forth a wildness in language and experience, and places "the things" themselves as the basis of language, which then "combine through him by virtue of a natural intertwining." This also strikes closely to Dogen's quote above, "When the world of phenomena comes forth and experiences itself, it is enlightenment" (PS 179). Rather than focusing on language as a human tool, or a tool that an individual uses to impose on the surrounding world, Dogen suggests that we empty the self and allow experience to be filled with the phenomena of the surrounding world, which transforms language into an act of participation with the larger phenomenal world rather than an organizing of it.

Articulating the voices of the earth, articulating the matrix's interpenetrations that then come forth in language, Snyder would describe as "natural language." This type of language stands beyond what he describes as "Good Usage and Good Writing" (PS 176) in his essay "Language Goes Two Ways." Abram joins Snyder claiming, "Ultimately, it is not human language that is primary, but rather the sensuous, perceptual life-world, whose wild, participatory logic ramifies and elaborates itself in language" (*Spell of the Sensuous* 84). If the self acts as void, then the language that comes through the self/void/nothingness necessarily expresses the larger

matrix/flesh/horizon that composes the "self." This suggests that language belongs to the "more-than-human" world. Abram elsewhere states, "If language is born of our carnal *participation* in a world that already *speaks* to *us* at the most immediate level of sensory experience, then language does not belong to humankind but to the sensible world of which we are but a part" ("Merleau-Ponty and the voice of the Earth" 117). If the "self" stands as mirror reflection of one's horizon, both visible and invisible, then language calls forth that reflection in a self-referential manner. Language provides the mirror through which the horizon sees itself. If language is self-referential, it is so only through the larger "self" defined by interpenetration/intertwining/inter-relationality, not in exclusion of the horizon that is the "self/void."

While this asserts a connection between humans and the "more-than-human" world, it also allows the duplicity of language that Snyder points toward. It allows language to occur as a social engagement that socially shapes humans' perceptions of the horizon/matrix/flesh. It returns to the play of language. Snyder explains "Natural language" is characterized by "enjoyment and unemcumbered playfulness" (PS 176). He suggests that through "Natural Language" that bears a connection to the "more-than-human" world, that brings forth this world in playfulness, language "can lead back to unmediated direct experience" (PS 175).

IV. The Reciprocal Wildness of "Natural Language"

> *"We need a civilization that can live fully and creatively together with wildness"*
>
> Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*

Instead of language mediating the human connection to the rest of the world, language results from – comes out of – the interpenetration between humans and the rest of the world. Humans mediate the connection between language and the rest of the world. It is not humans that control language, but rather humans that work as the piece that can express in language the interpenetration of the larger world, its self-organizing wildness. Whereas language expresses the matrix of the world, it also develops its own matrix and reciprocally reflects back to the world a return vision. Language both expresses and creates. While most philosophies of language that guide critical theory in contemporary academia perceive language as a primarily mental and abstract activity, Snyder positions language as possessing reciprocal relation to the physical world, so that the wildness in "nature" reciprocally relates to the wildness in language.

If we consider that the matrix, or "flesh," of which the self is part, is not controlled by humans, that it is potentially a "decentered" interconnection of experiencing subjects, then we come close to Snyder's description of wildness. In "Language Goes Two Ways," Snyder writes: "So language does not impose order on a chaotic universe, but reflects its own wildness back" (*A Place in Space* 174). In claiming that language's wildness reflects nature's wildness back, he indicates that language and nature do not have a direct cause-effect connection. Their relationship is

that of reciprocal influence. Instead of dismissing what lies beyond language, as post-structuralists suggest, and seeing nature as a linguistic construction, Snyder suggests that we re-engage in the playful wildness of language as a "vehicle of self-transcending insight" (PS 175). The wildness we find in language can then "lead back to unmediated direct experience" (PS 175), because language is not between us and the world, we are between it and the world, and the two, language and the world, share reciprocating structures of wildness.

Merleau-Ponty identifies the value of wildness within language, making divisions similar to those Snyder makes between "Good Usage" and "Natural Language." He also suggests, like Snyder, that wildness in language can lead back to "direct signification," of "Wild being," presumably because they share the same structures. He writes:

> Hence it is a question whether philosophy as reconquest of brute or wild being can be accomplished by the resources of the eloquent language, or whether it would not be necessary for philosophy to use language in a way that takes from it its power of immediate or direct signification in order to equal it with what it wishes all the same to say. (Merleau-Ponty 102-3)

Although he seems to describe the task of philosophy as conquering the "bruteness" of being, Merleau-Ponty sets up a distinction between eloquent language that philosophers have used, and a language that more directly reflects the "bruteness" and "wildness" that more accurately represents immediate experience. He seems to advocate using the power of "direct signification" for returning to the questions on truth that philosophy studies.

In a similar manner, Snyder distinguishes between language that directly connects the user to experience and language that has been controlled. In *The Practice*

of the Wild, Snyder describes what he later might refer to in his essay "Language goes two ways" as "productive" language by using the metaphor of "corralling off a little of the language-behavior territory and cultivating a few favorite features" (PW 17). The writing taught at schools, Snyder indicates, is the taming of wild, the removal of wild from the world, similar to Roderick Nash's descriptions of the original intents of the pilgrims in North America: "For the first Americans, as for medieval Europeans, the forest's darkness hid savage men, wild beasts, and still stranger creatures of the imagination. In addition civilized man faced the danger of succumbing to the wildness of his surroundings and reverting to savagery himself" (Nash 24). "Productive language" continues civilizing the wild, the imperialist agenda that Nash describes. It attempts to domesticate the wild, but Snyder explains that "there are many excellent reasons to master these things, but the power, the *virtu*, remains on the side of the wild" (PW 17). Like Merleau-Ponty, Snyder locates the power of language in experience beyond human control. Tapping into this source of power, the wildness of language becomes the primary concern for Snyder.

This term, "wildness" offers a valuable guiding metaphor in Snyder's exploration of language, both in the essay "Language Goes Two Ways," as well as other places throughout his writing where he makes reference to language. One such explicit place appears in his essay on "Unnatural Writing." He writes, "So I will argue that consciousness, mind, imagination *and* language are fundamentally wild. 'Wild' as in wild ecosystems—richly interconnected, interdependent, and incredibly complex. Diverse, ancient, and full of information" (PS 168). The main characteristic of wildness, as Snyder describes, is its self-organization. He writes, "'Wild' alludes to a

process of self-organization that generates systems and organisms, all of which are within the constraints of—and constitute components of—larger systems that again are wild, such as major ecosystems or the water cycle in the biosphere" (PS 174). Language then is a self-organized system that also relates to other self-organized systems that are part of larger systems, such as the broader movement of water within a watershed. Reading Snyder's tendency towards bioregionalism into this passage, we may suggest that language is a system in relation to other systems within a particular region. It comes out of the particularity and inter-relationships of a specific region, or as Merleau-Ponty states, "the problem of language is, if one likes, only a regional problem" (126).

In comparing Snyder's vision of "wild" with Taoism, Scigaj writes, "Both are similar to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of 'wild' as the referential surround that preexists human contemplation, the complex living context from which we derive human language" (Scigaj 258). Although he indicates here that "we derive," suggesting a definite subject creating language from the world, he indicates also that wildness takes a central position within Merleau-Ponty's theories of self and language. In explaining the philosopher's attempts to understand fact through reason, Merleau-Ponty affirms Scigaj's claims on wildness. He writes, "the questions of fact go further than the truths of reason" (121) in an attempt to retain connection between humans and the world without subjugating this connection to reason, which can be shown to go drastically wrong in various philosophies (rationalism for instance?). He manages to deny certainty in the essences of reason while still retaining

facticity by identifying wildness as the location for the "answers" to the questions of fact,

> The necessities by essence will not be the 'answer' philosophy calls for, any more than are the facts. The 'answer' is higher than the 'facts,' lower than the 'essences,' in the wild Being where they were, and—behind or beneath the cleavages of our acquired culture—continue to be, undivided. (Merleau-Ponty 121)

Questions rise out of the "Wild Being" of experience, and the "answers" will be found in the similar manner, not through the essences of rationalism or facts of empiricism. Merleau-Ponty divides, and moves beyond the contemporary debate within philosophy by appealing to the same type of wildness that structures Snyder's vision of nature, language and the self.

It becomes clear the true significance that wildness takes in Merleau-Ponty's work because he introduces the term early in his book *The Visible and the Invisible*, using the term "wild thought" (13). The translator notes that the term wild refers to "uncultivated, uncultured." In this sense, wild, as Merleau-Ponty uses it, might be closely connected to Snyder's concept of wildness as self-organizing. The translator notes that wildness indicates a moment before entering into civilization for Merleau-Ponty. Wild is the time before organization has been imposed by culture. This draws closer connections between the role Merleau-Ponty grants wildness in the structure of self and being, and Snyder's aims at developing the wildness that contrasts with civility, or the language of "Good Usage." In an above quote, Merleau-Ponty connects wildness to language describing language "that would combine through him by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning" (125). The term "natural" here seems to indicate not specifically a connection with nature, but something guided by its own

innate tendencies. It might be understood that language finds structure through its

innate intertwining, suggesting that language structures itself outside of human

attempts at controlling or organizing it, quite similar to Snyder's description of

wildness.

This term that seems to guide much of Snyder's writings provides a structure

for the large part of his theories. Nash continues to develop his exploration into

wildness in "the American mind," later stating that "The proper condition for people,

Snyder thought, resulted from blending nature and technology, spirit and science, the

Indian's way and the white man's, wilderness and civilization" (Nash 246).

"Wildness" steps beyond the nature culture distinction; it denies simplification and

veracity, and instead moves towards complexity. Snyder's tendency to blend a

binary's ends becomes apparent when he describes language as "some kind of

infinitely interfertile family of species spreading or mysteriously declining over time,

shamelessly and endlessly hybridizing, changing its own rules as it goes" (PW 7).

Language works as hybrid, crossing between binaries and erasing the clear divisions.

He elsewhere writes that "Language and culture emerge from our biological-social

natural existence, animals that we were/are" (PW 17). Language results from an

intermingling of the social and biological, the cultural and natural. Ultimately,

"Natural Language's" wild structure as self-organizing is reflected in that it is

"shamelessly and endlessly hybridizing, changing its own rules as it goes," unyielding

to humans' controlling endeavors.

Thomas Lyon adds further significance to Snyder's movement beyond

binaries. He writes, "Since we are both an unconscious, animal process and a

conscious intellect, Snyder's poetics can be seen as an attempt at continuous self-transcendence, a leading through ego-borders into the wild" (Lyon 39). Through introducing the two opposing positions in a binary, he claims that Snyder attempts to move beyond appealing to one particular side of the binary. Once we have moved beyond the divisions, we move towards the more subtle and intricate wildness of theories such as ecology, or systems theory. We move beyond nature-culture dualisms towards an interpenetration between and interdependency of all entities within the larger system. Snyder identifies the possibility of achieving this through language when he writes: "The way to see *with* language, to be free with it and to find it a vehicle of self-transcending insight, is to know both mind and language extremely well and to play with their many possibilities without any special attachment" (PS 175). Playfulness structures the poet's interaction with the wild. In fact, wildness calls for playfulness to stand against the certainties of a stable structure.

The wildness that populates Snyder's writings also illustrates and depends on interpenetration of the human-"nonhuman-other." As different "self/voids" interact with each other, the systems of which they are part tend to self-organize in response to each other, in reciprocity. Hunt describes the opening scene in "Endless Streams and Mountains," as "a matrix of places" (GSM 63). The trouble with perceiving wildness as unstructured interpenetration, such as a matrix, or self-organizing systems that respond to each other, is the potential that such systems also yield impermanence and instability.

In *The Practice of the Wild*, Snyder writes, "The world is nature, and in the long run inevitably wild, because the wild, as the process and essence of nature, is also

an ordering of impermanence" (PW 5). Language takes on the characteristic of self-organizing impermanence. It is a fluid flowing of experience captured temporarily in language. In his poem "The Canyon Wren" Snyder describes a tumultuous river that the perceiver in the poem travels down "spinning through eddies and waves / stairsteps of churning whitewater"(MRWE 90). Disturbing the tumultuousness, a wren calls out: "Above the roar / hear the song of a Canyon Wren" (MRWE 90). He again juxtaposes a moment of turmoil with that of tranquility, "Shooting the Hundred-Pace Rapids / Su Tung P'o saw, for a moment, / it all stand still" (MRWE 90). These moments stand against the turmoil of the raging river that I earlier connected with experience. Language and experience become a flow that passes through each self's "nothingness." Snyder writes in *The Practice of the Wild*, "Words are used as signs, as stand-ins, arbitrary and temporary, even as language reflects (and informs) the shifting values of the peoples whose minds it inhabits and glides through" (PW 7). Within this quote, Snyder describes language as fluid and located outside of any individual, or potentially even outside of any species.

In *Mountains and Rivers Without End,* rivers illustrate the impermanence that may result from wildness. They are continually developing, never standing still. Snyder begins his book with the lines,

> Clearing the mind and sliding in
> to that created space,
> a web of waters streaming over rocks,
> air misty but not raining,
> seeing this land from a boat on a lake
> or a broad slow river,
> coasting by (MRWE 5)

The perceiver's position among the impermanence plays an important role in developing this poem. Snyder draws attention to the perceiver's location with the lines, "seeing this land from a boat on a lake / or a broad slow river," which locates the perceiver amidst the impermanence. The words "sliding" and "coasting by" both give the feeling of impermanence, positioning the perceiver among the currents, watching as the land flows by. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty explains that the being is always part of Being. He writes,

> In short, there is no essence, no idea, that does not adhere to a domain of history and of geography. Not that it is *confined* there and inaccessible for the others, but because, like that of nature, the space or time of culture is not surveyable from above and because the communication from one constituted culture to another occurs through the wild region wherein they all have originated. (Merleau-Ponty 115)

As the perceiver in Snyder's poem is within the current of perceiving the land, Merleau-Ponty suggests that all beings are within a wild current of Being that they cannot step away from. We, as perceivers, must perceive from within the river, not stable on the shore, and language both reflects this engagement and contributes to the impermanence found in wildness.

External language flows through an individual's mind, continually changing and passing by. Wildness necessarily yields impermanence, but this should not be seen as problematic or threatening. Rather, the wild impermanence of language and culture should be strived for, because these structures that humans have attempted to harness would then be released back into a reciprocal relationship with the wild nature from which we have attempted to extract all our experience. We may suggest that our use of language should replicate the "catch and release" practice in fishing. "Catch and Release Wild Language" seems like a good slogan.

* * *

As has already been indicated, language as wild structure functions in a reciprocal relationship to nature. The ability to maintain a reciprocal relationship with the world returns the discourse to the difficulty of the I-Other divide, or the human-"nonhuman-other" divide. Tim Dean discusses this division. He identifies Leslie Marmon Silko's and Geary Hobson's criticisms of what he describes as "White Shaman Poets" who have colonized the shaman's voice. The critiques he identifies question whether a poet can ever give voice to an Other if this Other's culture is not part of the poet's experience. Dean responds: "This kind of ethnic essentialism...views literature as a vehicle for self-expression and thereby denies the possibility of any encounter with otherness in poetry" (490). Dean astutely claims that from this perspective "all literature would be reduced to an autobiographical function" (490). He further argues that the "impersonal" structure of Snyder's poetry in *Mountains and Rivers Without End* "encourages a kind of self-dispossession that comes with opening the self to otherness, particularly the radical otherness of the nonhuman" (491). In this manner, Snyder's poetry allows a reciprocal relationship between his poetry and the voices of the non-human other he wishes to allow to pour forth through his poetry. As Snyder allows the world to speak through his "self/void" in the composition of a poem, so too does the poem continue to write the flesh of the world.

Merleau-Ponty aids Snyder's move beyond the chasm that would prevent him from expressing the nonhuman other's voice. He writes,

> Because my eyes which see, my hands which touch, can also be seen
> and touched, because therefore, in this sense they see and touch the

visible, the tangible, from within, because our flesh lines and even
envelops all the visible and tangible things with which nevertheless it is
surrounded, the world and I are within one another, and there is no
anteriority of the *percipere* to the *percipi*, there is simultaneity or even
retardation. (123)

Although his description discusses impermanence and the inability to gain a

disinterested position from above, the relationship here is that of reciprocity as well.

He writes, "so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the

things" (123), suggesting a continuous give and take, even an inability to finally

distinguish between what belongs to whom. This same intermingling of flesh appears

in Snyder's poem "The Mountain Spirit." Snyder writes,

--The Mountain Spirit and me
like ripples of the Cambrian Sea
dance the pine tree
old arms, old limbs, twisting, twining
scatter cones across the ground
stamp the root-foot DOWN
and then she's gone. (MRWE 147).

Here two bodies, or fleshes, twist and become intertwined, interpenetrating each other.

The narrator makes a clear connection between "The Mountain Spirit and me,"

suggesting a symbiotic relationship. As "old arms" move, so do the "old limbs," each

responding to the other in reciprocal relationship.

Pattiann Rogers offers a structure that may also move the poet, the human,

beyond the I-Other, or human-nonhuman-other, dualism, by describing the idea of

reciprocal creation:

Perhaps reciprocal creation, as I observe it operating in my own
writing—creating the poem which simultaneously creates me which
simultaneously creates the poem coming into being—just as the marsh
wren created by the marsh simultaneously creates and dreams the
marsh of its creation and therefore creates itself---is the same
phenomenon occurring in regard to divinity. Maybe the existence of

> divinity in the universe depends in part on us. We may be the
> consciousness of the universe, the way by which it can come to see and
> love and honor itself. If this is so, then our obligations are mighty and
> humbling. We are cocreators. We are servants. (91)

Although this quote particularly deals with divinity within the world, and it seems to

position the human self as a presence, it provides a structure for understanding a

reciprocal relationship between language and the world that involves human

participation. Humans act as the world's consciousness, through which what Abram

describes as the "voice of the earth" can be articulated. Humans take the position of

"cocreators" in an act of "reciprocal creation." As we (as a part of the "flesh of the

world") create language, language also creates us through its own wild structures.

Language continues to function as a mirror, reflecting ourselves back to us, but we

must choose whether to fill the whole frame with our own presence, or to identify the

larger flesh of the world that composes our true self/void/nothingness.

Language ultimately symbolizes a connection between humans and the

external world, but not through language as a medium, rather within language. The

interpenetration between humans and the "more-than-human world" finds expression

and self reflection, or a folding back upon itself. As we look through language we see

the larger world. Through language we can perceive our relationship as part of the

"flesh of the world" that gives rise to "Natural Language." At the same moment that

Snyder confirms a connection to the "more-than-human" world through our communal

sharing in the structures of language, he also avoids detailing and outlining these

structures. Although he claims that productive language, which relies on set structures

can be valuable (PS 176), he describes *"Truly Excellent Writing"* (PS 176) as writing

that has passed beyond the structures and "loop[ed] back to the enjoyment and

unencumbered playfulness of Natural Language" (PS 176). The ultimate goal of

language, then is its structured wildness, which defies human control in the form of

analysis, simply because it is "patterned *according to its own devices*" (PS 174). And

this is a necessary part to allowing language to function in such a way that it maintains

its own power of co-creation with the world, because "moments of philosophical

advance often come when the terminology through which we understand our

experience becomes exhausted or inadequate" (Robinson 23). Language must be

repositioned from a human centered possession, which is how we have perceived it in

literary studies, and disseminated throughout the broader world in the guise of

"Natural Language." Merleau-Ponty provides a fitting end to this exploration, "it is

indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are dealing with here" (136).

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