

# 1

## Mountains, Rivers, and the Great Earth

*Here, everywhere, right now* is mountains, river, and earth.

—Dōgen, *Baika* [Plum Blossoms] (S, 585)<sup>1</sup>

### I

Although his profile as a major American poet has been dramatically ascendant, Snyder's critical contribution to speaking in a compelling language, beyond the duality of art and science/philosophy, of our elemental relationship to the "great earth" (what he calls "the Wild" and, following Dōgen, the Chinese landscape tradition, and other Zen practitioners, "mountains, rivers, the great earth") is not generally appreciated. Snyder's work is sometimes pigeonholed as mere nature poetry with a twist of Zen mindfulness. David Perkins, for example, in his *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After* (1987), includes Snyder in a group of poets like Robert Bly, James Wright, W. S. Merwin, and Galway Kinnell, who are discontent with the disappointments of "civilization" and who consequently seek its rapidly disappearing alternative.

Oppressed by crowds and noise in cities, by roads, wires, and houses everywhere in the landscape, by the glut and litter of material goods, by daily reports of ecological pollution through oil spills, strip mines, smokestacks, and pesticides, by guilt at the extinction or near extinction of animal species, by terror of war, and by contemplation of the possible end of life on earth, the mind is tempted to turn against the civilization Western man has created.<sup>2</sup>

It is a familiar story: The Romantics sensed the looming disaster, but it has now arrived in its full fury. Allegedly trapped in "civilization," we long for its lost antithesis, "nature." Snyder becomes a neo-Romantic or a modern day

Rousseau nostalgic for a state of nature. Speaking of the Zen resonances in relationship to the poem “Trail Crew Camp at Bear Valley,” Perkins observes that the poem’s voice has been separated from the ego’s voice and in this “abnegation of the ego” Snyder can exercise his “Zen ideal” by “concentrating on the immediately given.” “Unity with nature or reality is to be achieved by being wholly where you are” (HMP, 587). While there is some truth in this kind of discourse (and its implication that in Snyder’s poetry, it is the Great Earth itself that is somehow *speaking* is critically important), Perkins’ analysis of all of these poets nonetheless reinforces the duality between nature and civilization that Snyder seeks to undo. Moreover, a return to nature, while perhaps nourishing and inspiring, could never be as serious as hard ecological science or rigorous ecological philosophy. This chapter is dedicated to dispelling this erroneous—and erroneously dualistic—view and to making a case for Snyder and Dōgen as Elders who belong to a long and complex set of lineages, ancient and contemporary, that span Western (Europe as well as Turtle Island’s indigenous peoples) as well as Asian philosophical and poetic horizons. These are critical interlocutors in the emergence of an earth philosophy-poetics-ethics-science and the elemental language and language of the elements that allows us to be once again, in Nietzsche’s celebrated phrase from *Zarathustra*, *faithful [treu] to the earth*.

I use this word *elemental* cautiously and in a very specific manner. When Doug Flaherty asked Snyder in 1969 if his poetry was elemental, Snyder resisted, claiming that the term is “not really precise enough for me. Everything is elemental” (RW, 20). He claimed, rather, that his work endeavored to be “myth making” or a “ritual and magic order against a pure song order” (RW, 20). As we see in the next chapter, the mythopoeic belongs to the art of *upāya* or Buddhist skillful means and the poetic word is not something that happens in a more elemental way than anything else. All beings are elemental. I use the term here in a provisional fashion to speak to the power of the poetic word to awaken in us an awareness that “everything is elemental” and to do so in a soteriological manner. The elemental speaks simultaneously of the Mountains and Rivers, form and emptiness, that is, the dependently co-originating elements of the Great Earth, as well of specific places, specific bioregions, indeed, of the singularity of particular ecological communities. The shamanistic magic of the poetic word seeks to call forth both the interdependence of being and the singularity of place nondualistically and transformatively. These are songs and myths that mindfully and ever anew expose the sacrality of the Great Earth, place by unique place.

In this sense Snyder's elemental earth language, rooted in Turtle Island,<sup>3</sup> and resonating with the Dao and *Mahāyāna* Buddha Dharma, is also non-dualistic. Snyder and Dōgen help us to move beyond the following kinds of pernicious dualisms.

*Ecology is a contemporary concern, not an ancient one.* Dōgen's sūtra of the mountains, rivers, and the Great Earth, so thorough that not one inch of soil is left out, as well as Chinese landscape painting (*shan-shui*), are, as we see, a direct refutation of this claim. This is not to say that ecology meant the same thing and responded to the same challenges and context that it does today, or that Dōgen would have fully recognized such a word. Nonetheless reading Dōgen in this present moment exposes us to a sensibility that is already ancient in Dōgen's relationship to the Buddha ancestors. Such ancestors are much older than the official organization of practice into the myriad Buddha Dharma schools and lineages. Even Śākyamuni, the sage of the Śākya clan of Kapilavastu, is in some way a relative newcomer.

*Ecology is a science, and only trivially a question of poetic production.* Snyder, like Dōgen, breaks down the dualism between discourse and art and Snyder's own output, comprised of both essays and poems, exemplifies this nonduality and insists that it is rooted in the nonduality of the earth itself.

*Human beings are in an ecology or bioregion, and while dependent on it, they remain fundamentally distinct from it.* The human mind is an ecology, not in an ecology.

*Western approaches to the problem are irreconcilable with Asian approaches.* Snyder is rooted in both Greek and Asian lineages, as well as many others, including the ancient cultural veins of the Western part of Turtle Island. Who speaks for the West? Moreover, to the extent that one could say that science is a European contribution, it comes to a fuller expression of the Great Earth in its dance with Buddha Dharma. To oppose the "spiritual" and the "scientific" is to condemn the former to irrelevance and the latter to a flat, indifferent, and noncompassionate relationship to the marvels and problems that science contemplates.

*Civilization is opposed to the Wild.* This duality, in which we are all either uncritically absorbed in Heidegger's loathsome *Gestell* or Neo-Romantics pining for the missing woods is especially pernicious and also belongs to the heart of the prevailing ecological crisis. The fantasy of a return to pristine nature, untouched by fumbling and contaminating human hands, is destructive of both civilization, which imagines that it flourishes in opposition to the Great Earth, and the wild, which is being dominated and

consumed to an unprecedented and unrestrained degree by contemporary imperial civilizations.

And finally: *The elements only belong to chemistry and not to the alchemy of the Wild*. An elemental speaking, that is, the earth speaking in the form of something like a sūtra, is the elemental force of the voiceless voice of the Buddha, what Dōgen (quoting SU Dongpo) in his 1240 fascicle “*Keisei Sanshoku* [*Valley Sounds, Mountain Colors*]” called the Great Earth’s and the Buddha’s “long broad tongue.” The shaman heals with poetic alchemy.

## II

Speaking of some of the remarkable ways that the patriarchs and other ancient Buddhas have transmitted the Dharma, Dōgen turned to the words of the great Song poet and lay Buddha Dharma practitioner, SU Dongpo (the pen name of the Song Dynasty poet and statesman SU Shi). Su was enlightened when he heard the sound of a mountain stream flowing in the night. In his poem “We Wash Our Bowls in This Water” from *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Snyder quotes Dōgen’s commentary on Su’s remarkable words in the poem that Su had successfully presented to his teacher, Chan Master Zhaojiao Changzong of the Linji School, as proof of his awakening. Su, who “sat one whole night by a creek on the slopes of Mt. Lu,” began: “The stream with its sounds is a long broad tongue / The looming mountain is a wide-awake body” (MR, 138). The voice of the water with its encompassing tongue alludes to one of the Buddha’s canonical thirty-two characteristics. The river, covered in darkness, was the Buddha speaking. The imposing form—“looming”—of the mountain, that is, the mountain suggesting the looming of all form as such, is the manifesting body of the Buddha, whose ongoing wakefulness calls us to awaken. Mountains and rivers, form and emptiness, are the inseparable, impermanent earth song of the Buddha. The poem continues:

Throughout the night, song after song (MR, 138)

Through the night, beyond visibility but through listening to the voice of the mountain-valley stream—Dōgen will later use language of seeing with one’s ears and hearing with one’s eyes—Su hears each and every thing ever taught in all possible schools of the Buddha Dharma, hearing not the mere words of the verses, but the great Buddha sea about which the verses were

singing.<sup>4</sup> No time, no culture, no language, no gender, indeed, no particular species of life, (including humans) owns the Buddha Dharma. It is to hear the Great Earth in this present moment. And finally the poem concludes,

How can I speak at dawn? (MR, 138)

How does one transmit the Dharma? How does one speak the elemental language? How does one write a poem? Perhaps we could already suggest that this song is a deeply geological song, not in its current usage of the study of the history and laws of earth solids, for that is to confuse the earth with its looming forms, but in the archaic sense of the *logos* (λόγος) and song of *Gē* (Γῆ) fully *awakened* as *Gaia* (Γαῖα). We should clarify that we are not speaking merely of the earth that sustains us, but the *awakening* to the Great Earth, the earth as Tārā, who is not the mother of all beings but rather “the mother of Buddhas” and thereby the “mother of those beings who see through birth and death” (NH, 63). It is the awakening to the Great Earth and simultaneously (nondualistically) the Great Earth whispering (and sometimes screaming) to us a wakeup call. Snyder allows Dōgen to weigh in immediately:

Sounds of streams and shapes of mountains.  
 The sounds never stop and the shapes never cease.  
 Was it Su who woke  
 or was it the mountains and streams?  
 Billions of beings see the morning star  
 and all become Buddhas!  
 If *you*, who are valley streams and looming  
 mountains,  
 can't throw some light on the nature of ridges and rivers,

*who can?* (MR, 138–139)

Awakening to Gaia, to the Great Earth as the Great Assembly of All Beings, is to awaken to each and every being, to the mattering of all beings. In seeking to unleash this elemental word, this word that we say not just from ourselves—it is not in the end just the human subject that is speaking—but from ourselves as “the mountains, rivers, and the great earth,” we hear the long broad tongue of ourselves as bioregional song, as Snyder hears and dreams the Cascadian song in “Raven’s Beak River At the End”:

Mind in the mountains, mind of tumbling water,  
 mind running rivers,  
 Mind of sifting  
 flowers in the gravels  
 At the end of the ice age  
 we are the bears, we are the ravens,  
 We are the salmon  
 in the gravel  
 At the end of the ice age (MR, 123)

In 1964, thirty-two years before finally finishing *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, but after eight years of already tinkering with it, Snyder told Gene Fowler that “More and more I am aware of very close correspondences between the external and the internal landscape. In my long poem, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, I’m dealing with these correspondences, moving back and forth” (RW, 5). When Snyder and the Mahāyāna traditions more generally speak of Mind, they do not just speak of the mind that we habitually imagine to be inside of us (our internal landscape). It is also the Mind that is the Great Earth (the external landscape). “A billion worlds can be sat through within a single sitting” (S, 59), Dōgen tells us. To realize that the earth has the deep structure of your own mind is to realize that the mind has the same deep structure as the Great Earth. This realization is fully transitive and nondual. “Now, we are both in, and outside, the world at once. The only place this can be is the *Mind*. Ah, what a poem” (TI, 114)! In learning to breathe more elementally, that is, in Zazen and other meditative practices, I realize that my breath, my mind, is not just my breath or my mind.

A soft breath, world-wide, of night and day,  
 rising, falling,  
 The Great Mind passes by its own  
 fine-honed thoughts,  
 going each way. (MR, 70–71)

Dōgen realized this and this is part of what makes his writing so resonant today. For example, in “*Keisei Sanshoku* [Valley Sounds, Mountain Colors]” we hear: “Saying that the self returns to the self is not contradicted by saying that the self is mountains, rivers, and the great earth” (S, 89).

In the fascicle “*Busshō* [*Buddha Nature*],” Dōgen claims to have inherited his discourse on the Great Earth from the Twelfth Ancestor, Aśvaghōṣa

(c. 80–c. 150 CE), who had maintained that “mountains, rivers, and the great earth are the ocean of Buddha nature” (S, 238). The most notable appearance of this articulation is the renowned kōan by the Tang Dynasty Linji School Chan Master, Qingyuan Weixin (Jp. Seigen Ishin). It can also be found in D. T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen*, first series, which Snyder first read in 1951 when he was hitchhiking to Indiana to study anthropology and linguistics. “It catapulted me into an even larger space; and though I didn’t know it at the moment, that was the end of my career as an anthropologist.”<sup>5</sup> The poem was recorded in the thirteenth-century work, *Wudeng Huiyuan* (*Compendium of Five Lamps*):

Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, “Mountains are mountains, waters are waters.” After I got an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, I said, “Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters.” But after having attained the abode of final rest [that is, Awakening], I say, “Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters.”<sup>6</sup>

In the first stage of Zen practice, mountains and waters are just things among things. In the second stage, they are emptied of their self-being (*svabhāva*), that is, they are seen against the horizon of their lack of intrinsic, self-standing, independent, discrete being. In the final realization, mountains really are mountains and waters really are waters because they show themselves elementally in their dynamically evolving interdependence. Mountains and waters are the elements by which the images of mountains and rivers come and go in the temporality of their fragile impermanence. Mountains and rivers do not refer, as they do in Platonism, to a meaning remote to themselves. The Buddha nature or elemental Buddha sea of things is not a remote ontological reality underlying appearances. It is things in their suchness (*tathatā*), the way of things just as they elementally are. As Dōgen articulates it in “*Sokushin Zebutsu* [Mind Right Now is Buddha],” mind or consciousness (*shin*, 心) of mountains, rivers, and earth is not aware of something besides mountains, rivers, and earth:

Thus, we know that the mind is mountains, rivers, and the earth; the mind is the sun, the moon, and the stars. What is said here is not more, not less. Mountains, rivers, and earth mind are just mountains, rivers, and the earth. There are no extra waves or sprays. The sun, the moon, and stars mind is just the sun, the moon, and stars. There is no extra fog or mist. (S, 46)

Elemental earth mind, the mind of the mountains, rivers, and the Great Earth, does not add extra fog or mist to perception. (Platonism is a great and pervasive fog.) There is not some other thing that one perceives besides the things themselves. It is elemental perception, the elementality of perception as such.

How do mountains and rivers elementally comprise the Great Earth? Snyder deploys both the poetic word and prose. How do mountains and rivers speak with the long broad tongue in and between these various forms of writing? Traditionally, this relationship is the stormy and vexing antagonism between the philosophical essay and the work of art, but the theme that holds them together (the Great Earth and its practice of the Wild) invites us to think these two expressions *nondualistically*.

### III

What is the relationship between art and nature? How are we to hear a line like the one that Snyder has the Mountain Spirit whisper: “All art and song / is sacred to the real. As such” (MR, 148)? Is this the word of the sūtra that articulates the holding together of song and thought, poetry and philosophy?

Speaking of his early Rinzai training, Snyder reflects that he

came to see the yogic implications of “mountains” and “rivers” as the play between the tough spirit of willed self-discipline and the generous and loving spirit of concern for all living beings: a dyad presented in Buddhist iconography as the wisdom-sword-wielding Mañjuśrī, embodying transcendent insight, and his partner, Tārā, the embodiment of compassion, holding a lotus or a vase. I could imagine this dyad as paralleled in the dynamics of mountain uplift, subduction, erosion, and the planetary water cycle. (MR, 155)

Snyder characterized the poetic cycle of *Mountains and Rivers Without End* as “a sort of sūtra—an extended poetic, philosophic, and mythic narrative of the female Buddha Tārā” (MR, 158).<sup>7</sup> Wild language as elemental language and elemental language as the wild song of Tārā and Gaia is sūtra language. As we see more fully in the next chapter, sūtra language is not restricted to human language (at least in the European sense of humanism and the humanities). More elementally, it is geological language.



Snyder's decade of Zen training in Japan, including his work with Ruth Fuller Sasaki and his training under ODA Sessō Rōshi, was in Rinzai lineages. It was not, however, until he moved back to California that Snyder discovered the elemental language of the white heat of the beginning of what later came to be called the Sōtō School of Zen. "In the late seventies my thinking was invigorated by the translations from Dōgen's *Treasury of the True Law* [*Shōbōgenzō*] just then beginning to come out. His *Mountains and Waters Sūtra* is a pearl of a text" (MR, 157). These invigorating translations to which Snyder refers include Kazuaki TANAHASHI's watershed collection, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, which was published by North Point Press, at the time helmed by Snyder's publisher and friend, Jack Shoemaker (b. 1946). (He had cofounded the press with William Turnbull in 1979.) Snyder even released an audio recording of his readings of some of the fascicles from this collection (*The Teachings of Zen Master Dōgen*). But even before these translations appeared, Snyder recollects being the recipient of a smuggled translation of the *Sansui-kyō* from Carl Bielefeldt's MA thesis.<sup>8</sup>

Dōgen's *Sansui-kyō* (1240), *Mountains and Waters Sūtra*, brought many things together for Snyder. "Now it becomes possible for contemporary environmentalists, of wide and compassionate view, also to think of Dōgen a kind of ecologist. An *ecologist*, not just a Buddhist priest who had a deep sensibility for nature, but a protoecologist, a thinker who had remarkable insight deep into the way that wild nature works" (MHM, 161). Dōgen's title, *Sansui-kyō*, alludes to Chinese landscape painting, a powerful example of which opens *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Snyder had already studied this tradition with the great Chiura OBATA (1885–1975) at Berkeley, becoming "aware of how the energies of mist, white water, rock formations, air swirls—a chaotic universe where everything is in place—are so much a part of the East Asian painter's world" (MR, 153). When Dōgen allows this paradoxically chaotic but not disorderly universe to speak (an early intuition of the crux of contemporary chaos theory), he resorts to phrases like "mountains, rivers, the great earth."

Dōgen's *Sansui-kyō* (山水經) is not itself a sūtra (*kyō*), nor is it a commentary on a canonical sūtra.<sup>9</sup> The sūtra is Tārā and Gaia themselves, which Dōgen, following a venerable Chinese tradition, calls *sansui* (Chinese *shan-shui*, 山水, mountains and waters). This is the term for something like "landscape," especially with reference to paintings, but it is not landscape in the typical sense of a panoptic view of scenery or a formal representation of what is "out there" to be seen. Rather it is the Great Earth as the interpenetration of yin and

yang, waters and solids, emptiness and form, free, unconditioned ground and interdependent beings, in the spontaneous, organic autogenesis of Dao. *San* (山), mountain, rises into form in the most formidable of ways, as if it were an especially forceful and implacable expression of form's self-insistence, yet, it too flows, for *sui* (水), water, is pure elasticity, having no form of its own, yet capable of taking any form. *Sansui*, the insistence of form and its concomitant emptiness, and, transitively, emptiness in its dynamic shapeliness, is nature as both the stubborn, hard as a diamond, bright as the sun, aspiration of Fudō Myō-ō, the Immovable Wisdom King, and the dark as the moon, beneficently pliable, and softly overpowering compassion of Kannon, the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara who looks down and hear the cries of the world.

In *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, in the first part of a section entitled "The Flowing," perhaps itself a way of thinking the manner in which mountains walk and flow as time, Snyder sings of the Blue-faced growling Fudō, / Lord of the Headwaters, making / Rocks of water, water out of rocks" (MR, 68). In the final poem of Snyder's earth sūtra, as he sings through the voice of Zeami's Nō play *Yamamba* (山姥, *Old Mountain Woman*),<sup>10</sup> we hear the words:

Peaks like Buddhas at the heights  
 send waters streaming down  
 to the deep center of the turning world.

And the Mountain Spirit always wandering  
 hillsides fade like walls of cloud  
 pebbles smoothed off sloshing in the sea

old woman mountain hears  
 shifting sand  
 tell the wind  
 "nothingness is shapeliness"

*Mountains will be Buddhas then* (MR, 145)

Mountains emerge as Buddhas when the shifting sands, pliable like water, shift and reform like *Yamamba* herself. In the *Sansui-kyō*, Dōgen meditates on the elemental words that Priest Daokai (1043–1118) of the Chinese Caodong (Sōtō) School offered to the assembly: "The green mountains are always walking; a stone woman gives birth to a child at night." The Green mountains

walk, they flow not from the form of themselves, but discontinuously, as non-sequiturs, from the formless into form. This is the walking of mountains, a walking that derives not from what a mountain is formally, but from its seriality shifting, its discontinuous manifestation, so to speak.

Walking manifests mountains and mountains, like all beings, express walking. The forms of being are not in time, deriving themselves from themselves. For something to be *in time*, it first has to be itself. But how is it possible for us to think of a mountain as something that began, endured through time, and then one day ended? To regard a mountain in this way, we have to think about it conceptually, to construe it with a concept as something fixed. When the mountain thereby becomes a fixed point of reference, time appears in the background (the *duration* of this abstraction that we construe as a selfsame mountain). If the mountain is not a fixed point of reference for time, however, time marks the emptiness of the form of the mountain (that a mountain is not first itself and then endures through time). Rather than a continuity through time, the mountain is time as discontinuity, as difference. Impermanence is not that a mountain does not endure forever, but rather that it does not endure at all because it is not first and foremost an identity to either endure or perish. Rather than thinking time from the perspective of the mountain, Dōgen thinks the mountain from the great imponderable sea of time.

Mountains express the emptiness of time itself—what Dōgen famously called *uji*, time-being—and hence one could also say that the stone woman, a barren mountain that produces no fruit from itself, gives birth “in the night,” that is, from the watery, monstrous, elemental depths of time itself.<sup>11</sup> This is the Way of the Wild, the Way of the wondrous, even miraculous, Dharma (*myōhō*), each of its Dharma stages (*hōi*) unprethinkable.<sup>12</sup> If the mountain is no longer simply first and foremost a form, then the limits of expecting it to be more or less what it was before are exposed. What a mountain is *now* is not simply derived from what a mountain was *then*. It is a barren woman and it does not therefore give birth to itself, somehow perpetuating itself through time. A mountain in each and every moment expresses the Dharma—it is in each and every moment a dwelling stage of the Dharma—and hence calls for mindfulness, that is, cultivating an ongoing attentiveness to what it is now and here as an expression of the ongoing walking of the emptiness of time (giving birth in the night).

Hence, Dōgen can say that “a mountain always practices in every place” (S, 155) and “when your learning is immature, you are shocked by the words ‘flowing mountains.’ Without fully understanding even the words ‘flowing water,’ you drown in small views and narrow understanding” (S, 155–156).

Objects are not first discrete entities and then secondarily moving through time. Beings are empty and become anew, “like each time was the first” (MR, 130). This is the endless becoming of mountains and waters, being and time, that Dōgen called *kyōryaku*, what ABE Masao expansively translates as “passageless-passage.” All of being is Buddha nature, but Buddha nature is the temporal conditions of time. This is the truth of the impermanence of Buddha nature: not that things are finite, but that they are ceaselessly emptied by time.<sup>13</sup> Because “being and time are identical in terms of the manifestation [*genzen*] of the Buddha nature” (SD, 88), mountains walk and the stone woman gives birth in the night.

Prior to this realization, we think that we are a fixed and permanent point that, as such, is the unswerving master perspective on all things. In “*Genjō Kōan* [Actualizing the Fundamental Point],” Dōgen likens this illusion to being on a boat and, because one cannot see the impermanence of one’s own position, concluding that it is the land that is moving. This is the confused mind-set with which we initially perceive all beings (the ten thousand or myriad beings). In returning to the self in order to forget the self, one clarifies one’s Original mind. “When you practice intimately and return to where you are, it will be clear that nothing at all has unchanging self” (S, 30). When the self falls away and is no longer the reference point for beings, the mountains and rivers without end confirm one. To forget the self is to be continuously actualized by all beings, all beings simultaneously casting away and experiencing the dropping away of the body and mind (Dōgen’s famous *shinjin datsuraku*) (S, 30). This is the splendor of every moment, the depth of each day, each being, each moment, where all beings are inseparable from all beings. My Original Mind was not my personal private quotidian mind, but the “Great Mind” (MR, 73). My awakening and realization confirms the awakening and realization of all beings. The awakening and realization of all beings confirms my awakening and realization.

ABE Masao, too, is attuned to the manner in which Dōgen articulates this realization of the Great Earth’s ongoing realization (in the double sense of ever realizing anew its endless becoming real anew) in terms of mountains and waters:

This is, at the same time, the world of self-fulfilling *samādhi* [concentrated Zen awareness] and the world of the spontaneous manifestation of true suchness (*genjōkōan*). In this world, turning the mountains, rivers, and the Great Earth into the Self as well as turning

the Self into the mountains, rivers, and the Great Earth takes place.<sup>14</sup> It is also expressed as, “We cause the mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, and stars to practice and conversely the mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, and stars cause us to practice.”<sup>15</sup> This is the world of the non-obstruction of things and things that “is turning both self and other.” (SD, 97–98)

This was Dōgen’s own practice of the Wild, what he called *bendōwa*, negotiating Dao and wholeheartedly practicing it.<sup>16</sup> In the fascicle of the same name we find the following astonishing claim: In Zen mind, one realizes that

trees, grasses, and land involved in this all emit a bright and shining light, preaching the profound and incomprehensible Dharma; and it is endless. Trees and grasses, wall and fence expound and exalt the Dharma for the sake of ordinary people, sages, and all living beings. Ordinary people, sages, and all living beings in turn preach and exalt the Dharma for the sake of trees, grasses, wall and fence. (HDS, 13)<sup>17</sup>

Hee-Jin Kim rightly insists that the *sansui* or mountains and waters practice of Dōgen, which included his peregrinations through the mountains of China looking for a teacher as well as the remote mountain location of his temple, Eihei-ji, was not the “romantic exaltation of them which we see, for example, in nature mysticism, any more than it is the scientific and technical manipulation and exploitation of nature.” The “naïve veneration or exaltation of nature,” evident in the more reactionary, infantile, antiscientific giddiness about trees and birds in the worst excesses of Romanticism, was for Dōgen “a defiled view of nature, enslaving humans in a new captivity.”<sup>18</sup> Rather Kim sees in Dōgen’s “love” of nature “not a deification of nature, but the radicalization of nature—nature in its selflessness. Only then is nature undefiled and natural” (DKM, 191).

Dōgen is not advocating, nor would he likely recognize as sensible, any call to return to a pristine, undefiled nature. There is “no ‘original condition’ which once altered will never be redeemed” (PS, 240). Dōgen was not an advocate of wilderness in the sense of places unperturbed by human habitation. There is no unmediated access to nature, no thing in itself in some private reality beyond our ensconement in the veil of *māyā* and its web of representations or delusions. Nowhere in Dōgen or Snyder is there any kind of New Age fantasy of a lost and intrinsically beneficent and harmonious Eden.

Awakening for Dōgen is always to be awake to conditions and causes, to be free for the paradoxical play of karma (the free play of what must be). The infinite ground of the Wild is not a thing, either in itself or as a series of representations originating in human subjectivity. Being mindful of things “just as they are” does not mean that one develops a special kind of seeing that can penetrate the illusions that bind others. It is, rather, a different kind of seeing and a different relationship in consciousness to the causes and conditions of karma. One does not break through to reality beyond a veil of illusion but rather overcomes one’s own ignorance (*avidyā*, literally, not seeing) regarding the interdependent play of causes and conditions.

We should also be careful not to rush to the other extreme: If there no pristine *Ding an sich* called nature, then it must all be a representation seated in human subjectivity and its interests. Yes, the Wild is *always* interpreted, and human beings engage it within the historical milieu that grants them access to it. This is not, however, to advocate the subsumption of the Wild under culture and obscure its inassimilable alterity. The living core of the Wild is not an object that resists the advances of a discerning subject nor is it the product of the subject’s own mind (as it is in Idealism). We are not separate from the Wild, studying it as something beside ourselves. We are always *of* it and hence the question is not whether we have a relationship to the Wild, but rather *what kind of relationship is it*. Whether it is a dominating relationship or a more mindful relationship, we are involved in a set of relations whose depths we cannot plumb. The infinite depth of our immanence is the alterity of the home within which we emerge. And so Snyder rightly laments in “Is Nature Real?”:

It’s a real pity that many in the humanities and social sciences are finding it so difficult to handle the rise of “nature” as an intellectually serious territory. For all of the talk of “the other” in everybody’s theory these days, when confronted with a genuine Other, the non-human realm, the response of the come-lately anti-nature intellectuals is to circle the wagons and declare that nature is really part of culture. (GSR, 388–389)

That nature would be an extension of culture is the global symptom of what Heidegger called the *Gestell* and, as Heidegger warned, when this subsumption is complete, Dasein can never, as it did so dramatically in *Being and Time*, following Augustine, come to experience itself as a question, as a source of distress and turmoil. This danger allows us to hear Dōgen’s celebrated

counsel in a new resonance: The Buddha Way is to study the self, but to study the self is to forget the self and to awaken to all of the Wild (*Genjō Kōan*, S, 30). Wandering, Snyder somewhat erotically sings his earth song:

The root of me  
hardens and lifts to you,  
thick flowing river,

my skin shivers. I quit

making this poem. (MR, 72)

In a sense, the river composes these words as I quit imagining that it is I who can take full responsibility for “my” poems. Even the erotic tinge of this poem speaks less to the sport of sexual conquest and more to the creative play of form and emptiness. It is closer to the “cross-legg’d” play of *yab-yum* (“father-mother,” i.e., the creative union of wisdom and compassion, form and emptiness): “always new, same stuff . . . like each time was the first” (MR, 130). Entering the backcountry of the Wild requires neither discerning the Wild as a pristine object nor dismissing it as a mere subjective representation. To study the Buddha Way is to study the Self but to study the Self is to forget the Self. To forget the Self is to awaken to the backcountry:

We were following a long river into the mountains.  
Finally we rounded a ridge and could see deeper in—  
the farther peaks stony and barren, a few alpine trees.  
Ko-san and I stood on a point by a cliff, over a  
rock-walled canyon. Ko said, “Now we have come to  
where we die.” I asked him—what’s up there,  
then—meaning the further mountains.  
“That’s the world after death.” I thought it looked  
just like the land we’d been traveling, and couldn’t  
see why we should have to die.  
Ko grabbed me and pulled me over the cliff—  
both of us falling. I hit and I was dead. I saw  
my body for a while, then it was gone.  
Ko was there too. We were at the bottom of the gorge.  
We started drifting up the canyon. “This is the  
Way to the back country.” (MR, 55–56)

Kō-san, a Zen teacher, has helped peck at the egg shell that Snyder is trying to crack from within; as he liberates himself from himself, he undergoes what Zen famously calls the Great Death (*daishi*). Kō-san alludes to Sōkō MORINAGA with whom Snyder practiced at Daitoku-ji.<sup>19</sup> As Katsunori YAMAZATO, who translated *Mountains and Rivers Without End* into Japanese, aptly articulates it: “To awaken to a new dimension of consciousness, one has to transcend the mundane world, and only after the destruction of the mundane ego is one capable of finding ‘the way to the back country.’”<sup>20</sup> In the backcountry of awakening language, we find ourselves with the mountains that Dōgen insisted were fond of wise people and sages.

They are what we are, we are what they are. . . . No hierarchy, no equality. No occult and exoteric, no gifted kids and slow achievers. No wild and tame, no bound and free, no natural and artificial. Each totality its own frail self. . . . This, thusness, is the nature of the nature of nature. The wild in wild. So the blue mountains walk back to the shop, to the desk, to the stove. We sit on the park bench and let the wind and rain drench us. The blue mountains walk out and put another coin in the parking meter, and go down to the 7–11. (PW, 110–111)

In the final chapter of *The Practice of the Wild* called “Grace,” Snyder explains that at his house they say a Buddhist grace, which begins, “We venerate the Three Treasures [teachers, the wild, and friends]” (PW, 185). The three treasures are universally acknowledged by all negotiators of the Buddha Dharma to be the Buddha, which Snyder, using his own *upāya* or skillful means, renders as “teachers,” the Saṅgha, the community of practitioners, whom Snyder renders as “friends,” and finally, and most strikingly, the Dharma, which Snyder renders as “the Wild.”

In what manner can the Dharma, the very matter that is transmitted from Buddha Dharma to Buddhist negotiator, be translated as the Wild?

It depends on our capacity to hearken to what is silenced in the word “wild” in common parlance. In the latter “wild” and “feral [*ferus*]” are “largely defined in our dictionaries by what—from a human standpoint—it is not. It cannot be seen by this approach for what it is” (PW, 9). Hence, a wild animal is an animal that has not been trained to live in our house (undomesticated) and has not been successfully subjected to our rule (unruly). When we tire of the mores to which we regulate our behaviors, we imagine



that “we go wild,” as if this were the way of all nonhuman forms of life. To call someone an “animal” is to associate them with the outlaws and the uncivilized. If something is not subject to the rules of our culture, then it is the nomadic wildness that terrified Kant as wanton savagery, as “independence from laws.”<sup>21</sup>

But what happens if we “turn it the other way”? What is the wild *to the Wild*? Animals become “free agents, each with its own endowments, living within natural systems” (PW, 9). As Snyder begins to explore this turn, he indicates the ways in which the Wild “comes very close to being how the Chinese define the term *Dao*, the *way* of Great Nature: eluding analysis, beyond categories, self-organizing, self-informing, playful, surprising, impermanent, insubstantial, independent, complete, orderly, unmediated . . .” (PW, 10). And the *Dao*, as we know from the rich interpenetration of Mahāyāna and Daoist traditions in East Asia, is “not far from the Buddhist term Dharma with its original senses of forming and firming” (PW, 10). The early Daoists spoke of *Dao* as “the great mother.” The Wild is the “back country,” but that country is not only in the mountains or, as we see in chapter 4, “where the bears are” (PW, 30). It is also found in the depths of our own minds, at the heart of language, repressed even within the heart of our metropolises.

We are not in an exclusive disjunction of being either wild *or* civilized. We *are* the Wild. “Mountains and waters’ is a way to refer to the totality of the process of nature. As such it goes beyond the dichotomies of purity and pollution, natural and artificial. The whole with its rivers and valleys, obviously includes farms, fields, villages, cities, and the (once comparatively small) dusty world of human affairs” (PW, 109). We are not civilized animals who every now and again escape the drudgeries of our autonormalized modes of being by going wild and becoming party animals. “Wildness is not just the ‘preservation’ of the world, it *is* the world” (PW, 6). The Wild is the self-organizing autoproduktivity of our being and being as such. “‘Wild’ as process is universal” (BF, 130); it is a “name for the process of the impermanence and constant flow of change of phenomena, as constantly going without human intervention” (NH, 84).

Although I do not think that this has been sufficiently appreciated by those who oppose Snyder’s embrace of the Wild, he is clearly not embracing the legal definition of the Wild as “a place without noticeable human impact or permanent presence” (BF, 129)—almost as if we were desperately trying to spare some places from the pernicious modes of human habitation

that have gone into overdrive since the industrial revolution and the ascent of capitalism. The Wild is not something outside of or beyond or wholly other-wise than us. That we think so is part of the nub of the ecological crisis. The landscape within is the landscape without and vice versa. The Wild is within (language as well as the depth of the mind's pure luminosity) and without (the Great Earth) but in all of its strata it comprises us.

Snyder is not lamenting the existence of cities, although he does lament that we have largely lost the sensibility that urban life has its own practice of the Wild. (He considered San Francisco an exception, at least before its current occupation by the masters of capital; what Snyder laments about American cities is not that they are cities, but rather that they are such inhospitable and alienating cities.)

In *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Snyder takes an owl's eye perspective on Los Angeles ("Night Song of the Los Angeles Basin"), seeing its "calligraphy of cars" (MR, 64). The calligraphic stroke attempts to take the form or mountain (*yang*) element and make it dance and come alive, rife with energy, by playing itself off against the emptiness or *yin* element of the white paper. The character is animated as much by its background emptiness as its foregrounded form. Nothingness comes to animate the character just as the owl can see the repressed life and wildness seeping through the suffocating Los Angeles basin. Yes, the "owl calls," but it is a "late-rising moon" (MR, 66), that is, a slow awakening. But if the moon rises in Los Angeles, it is because, as the owl teaches us, it rises everywhere. To receive this teaching, however, we need in some manner or another to open our true Dharma eye. The owl does not discriminate between the Wild and the civilized (although some no doubt prefer more amenable habitats than our cities). Snyder later applies his Dharma eye to New York City ("Walking the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information"), "wide and waving in the Sea of Economy" (MR, 99).

The nonduality of the true Dharma owl does not maintain an absolute distinction between national parks and contemporary megacities. When asked in 1973 if he would write differently if he lived in a city rather than Kit-Kitdize, Snyder responded, "probably not too differently, especially as I'm learning to see cities as natural objects" (RW, 37). Cities, too, are wild processes. They do have one disadvantage, however: although the owl can see the Wild in Los Angeles, Angelinos have a hard time learning that the etiquette of the Wild asks them to aspire to the eye of the owl.

#### IV

Snyder is not just asking us to come to a new theoretical realization. He is attempting to awaken another mode of consciousness. Understanding the Wild is not the same thing as caring about the Wild, although if you care about the Wild, this will likely motivate you to better understand both its global and local aspects. Conducting debates about public policy are necessary, but they are not sufficient to move beyond our corporate-capitalist-grab-and-run posture. We also have to open our true Dharma eyes.

To transform public policy in regard to the oceans and air, forests, and population questions, and to move toward saving endangered species, both require reaching the very hearts of whole societies.

This is not a work of the scientists. Their research is essential to us, but to change the way contemporary human beings live on earth is a kind dharma work, a work for dedicated followers of the Way who because of their practice and insight can hope to balance wisdom and compassion and help open the eyes of others. I think that Buddhism, and especially old Shamon Dōgen, has something to show us in the matter of how to go about this. (MHM, 163)

Ecological policies would also be a question of practice, not just the rational and bureaucratic execution of tasks. This points to a dimension of action that Dōgen called *shingi*, pure standards or rules, originally referring to the protocols for monastic life at Eihei-ji. Even in the *Shōbōgenzō*, the Dōgen who could write breathlessly about the inseparability of being and time (*uji*) was the same Dōgen who could in the next moment write about the proper manner of cleaning your body (*Senjō*), including how to wipe your ass after defecating in the woods after practicing Zazen outdoors,<sup>22</sup> or washing your face (*Semmen*).<sup>23</sup> “It is not only cleansing the body and mind, but also cleansing the entire land” (S, 49). The loss of the practice of countering bad breath by rinsing the mouth, scraping the tongue, and then chewing on a little *yōji* or willow twig, indicates that the “decline of the great way of buddha ancestors is beyond measure” (S, 67). Moreover, “without washing the face, all the practices would lack authenticity” (S, 70). Sewing and caring for your robe (the *kāṣāya* or *kesa*) is very important because “there is more merit in seeing

the Buddha robe, hearing the teaching of it, and making offerings to it than in presiding over the billion worlds” (S, 113). When sewing it, however, one optimally takes patches from whatever discarded cloth one can find, including “burned cloth, cloth chewed by oxen, cloth chewed by rats, and cloth from corpses,” even “excrement-cleaning cloth” (S, 119).

Monastic practice (or just engaging in some Zen practice as part of one’s daily life) in its deepest and most clarified manifestation is not in the end a retreat from the world, but an effort to more fully realize the Great Earth that one already *is*. In this spirit of *shingi*, Snyder suggests that Dōgen’s “*Instructional Text for Forest Management, Ocean and Wetland Restoration, and Third World Crisis Intervention* would be that guide for dharma activists and administrators—the “Tenzo-kyōkun, ‘Instructions to the Head Cook’” (MHM, 165).

Of all of Dōgen’s *shingi* fascicles, the *Tenzo-kyōkun* continues to have the greatest impact. Given the rigors of food preparation, the head cook (*tenzo*) for the monastery (or even growing vegetables and cooking as part of one’s daily practice) has far less opportunity to practice *Zazen* and do all the other sorts of things that one associates with traditional practice. Our prejudices tempt us to assume that the *tenzo* gets the short end of the deal, preparing food so that others can practice *Zazen*. That assumes that there is something lowly about food preparation and other “real work” like washing your face, wiping your ass, cleaning the dishes, sweeping the floor, scrubbing the toilet, and changing the oil in your car. *Zazen* is not a flight from the mundane, but rather the realization of the everyday profundity of real work.

Growing and eating food is not just fuel in order to have the energy to do more important things. As we see in chapter 5, it is to participate in the *puja* and potlatch that is the great exchange of energies that comprises the passageless passage of the Great Earth. Without wholesome food there is no *Zazen*. Looking at the nightmare of fast food, industrial farming, rampant addiction, the voracious overconsumption of animal products, especially their flesh, and the use of fossil fuels to ensure that we can eat whatever we want whenever we want,<sup>24</sup> regardless of season and location, it is easy to see that we are as mindful of food (and our own bodies) as we are of our place and our Earth. Such mindlessness—the spiritual connection between fast food, ecological pollution, and the Sixth Great Extinction event—is at the heart of the current ecological crisis. If you cannot take the time to clean your own dishes and to learn to relish doing so, the forests, oceans, wetlands, as well as our human sisters and brothers in the Global South as well as those marginalized everywhere by our hatred or indifference, will continue to languish.

Dōgen instructed the *tenzo* not to lose either “the eye of oneness [the true Dharma eye] or the eye that discerns differences [the capacity to be mindful of the specifics of food and the detailed practice of its preparation].”<sup>25</sup> At the end of Dōgen’s fascicle, we find the phrase, “Written in the spring of 1237 to instruct later wise people who study Dao” (DPS, 49). The *tenzo* cultivates mindfulness in response to our mindlessness around food (itself a symptom of a more generalized mindlessness). One practices attuning oneself to the Dao in food preparation.<sup>26</sup> “If you do not have the mind of the Way, then all of this hard work is meaningless and not beneficial” (DPS, 33). We should not underestimate the *tenzo*: She is working to save all sentient beings beginning with our somnolence around food. Dōgen cites an ancient master: “When steaming rice, regard the pot as your own head; when washing rice, know that the water is your own life” (DPS, 33). The *tenzo* prepares food *nyohō*, in accordance with Dharma (DPS, 39) and this is also how we should approach our wetlands, rather than leaving them to the ravages of build-and-run developers.