"Winged Beginning," by Daniel O. Stolpe.

Part One

WHAT IS BIOREGIONALISM?

"Bioregionalism doesn't mean merely one thing; it isn't restricted to a single issue or special activity. It has become connective tissue joining the diverse parts of a growing organism." — Sheila Rose Purcell

For a theory and practice that promises to radically change the world so that we may all survive, "bioregionalism" is an unusually awkward and unappealing term at first sight. It's hardly surprising that many people have not heard of the word—even though they may be experienced practitioners of the art—and equally to be expected that, if they have heard of it, it may have left them cold. A deeper probe, however, reveals the extraordinary power of an idea that genuinely integrates numerous other powerful ideas into a common view of the world.

More than just a set of ideas, however, bioregionalism is a movement, too. And just as other social movements contain within their names a critique of present society and a direction for future change, so it is with the bioregional movement. Bioregionalism calls for human society to be more closely related to nature (hence, bio), and to be more conscious of its locale, or region, or life-place (therefore, region). For humans who exhibit the most extreme alienation from nature imaginable, and who—in North America especially—are uniquely *un*attached to particular places, bioregionalism is essentially a recognition that, today, we flounder without an adequate overall philosophy of life to guide our action toward a sane alternative. It is a proposal to ground human cultures within natural systems, to get to know one's place intimately in order to fit human communities to the Earth, not distort the Earth to our demands.

Jim Dodge's essay on the topic—"Living By Life"—is perhaps the most complete and concise explanation of the full scope of the bioregional view. He reiterates the need to understand natural systems, and to shape

human cultural behaviors to fit with nature—forming community *with* natural systems, not apart from them. He takes on the somewhat contentious task of describing how bioregions are defined, and calls unhesitatingly for political self-government within such bioregions. The task for bioregionalists, he says, is a dual one of resistance to further centralization and monoculture, and of renewal: creating alternative, small-scale communities and cultures, and repairing the damage already done to natural systems.

Peter Berg from Planet Drum Foundation, in San Francisco, continues this thought. In his view, bioregionalism is "more than just saving what's left," more than environmentalism, rather it is the political means for directing society toward restoring and maintaining the natural systems that ultimately support all of life. Importantly, he sees this work going on everywhere—in cities, suburbs, rural areas, and wilderness. His account of the diversity of those who might consider themselves "bioregionalists" is pursued further by Sheila Rose Purcell.

Gary Snyder elaborates upon how the boundaries of bioregions can be discerned—the boundaries of what he calls a regional "commons." Contrary to the current jurisdictional lines drawn by the state, he describes bioregional boundaries as following, for example, the presence of a key species such as Douglas fir. By identifying more closely with such species, even standing up for them at environmental hearings perhaps, we begin to take on the spirit of a place. In turn, this extra sensitivity to natural regions will inevitably begin to reshape the politics of Turtle Island.

The novelty of bioregionalism is perhaps best summed up by the idea of revaluing home: home as watershed, as community, as the sum total of the relations which sustain us—where human culture is formed. Judith Plant makes the important addition that a new view of home must include the insights of feminism as well as a radically different practice, if we are not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

One vital strand in the origin of bioregionalism was the back-to-the-land movement—the focus of Christopher Plant's article. He reaffirms the capacity of bioregionalism to unite diverse and scattered groups, giving new life and inspiration to land-based alternatives by "daring still to call forth planet-healing ideals."

The Value Of A New Word: Bioregionalism

Often people say, "Big fancy words. YUK! Words I've never heard before. YUK! I don't like them. Why can't you use plain everyday words we all know and are comfortable with?"

Looked at another way, a new word can be a gift, a gift of a new idea—a new concept, a new thought tool for understanding our world, a new vehicle for moving us ahead to where we'd like to go.

Gary Snyder has said that we should find our "*place*" and stay there 400 years! That's how long it takes to make enough observations about where we *are* to live there respectfully, in harmony with all the other members of the animal and plant community—the *bio-tic* community (there's that word *bio* again).

Here's another one: *re-inhabitation*. Maybe you've heard the word *habitat*: the life place (usually of an animal); the whole little system of life resources that an animal dwells in, and can't do without. Our ancestors spent thousands of generations learning how to live *in place*. Learning again, or remembering, how to live in place is one of the most important tasks we have before us.

Re-inhabitation, a lot of people believe, will be necessary for our long term survival. Living in mutual, respectful partnership with Planet Earth; taking care of our needs in a mutually benefitting exchange will sustain our own lives *and* the life of the planet.

BIO - REGIONAL - ISM

Bio... means all of life... *regional*... means within a physical or geographic boundary and ...*ism* is the human part; where we study how we relate with and live as part of the *Bioregion*.

— from **Columbiana**, Summer, 1988.