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Revolution as technē: place, space, and ecotage in the American radical novel

David Aitchison

- 1 In spite of the apparent vanishing of the radical novel in the USA following the mid-twentieth-century collapse of the American left, novels of social revolution continued, and still continue, to be written and written about—most recently as fictions marked by an overwhelming sense of environmental crisis. The classic (socialistic and communistic) radical novel, to be sure, always evinced a complex understanding of place, space, and habitat as grounds both *of* and *for* struggle, guided by a sense of what we now call environmental justice : that is, radical novelists from Upton Sinclair and Mike Gold to John Steinbeck, William Attaway, and Myra Page typically shared an understanding that the burdens and benefits of home, work, and natural spaces are unevenly distributed across classes and communities. If doctrinaire fictions have fallen by the wayside, the radical novel as such—as a genre giving sanction to social revolution in the name of greater equality—did not so much cease as diversify : it carried on principally (though not solely) in fictions speaking to the Black Power, Women’s Liberation, American Indian, and environmentalist movements. The Red Power and ‘ecotage’ subgenres, in particular, have proven especially robust in the hands of such critically acclaimed writers as N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, Edward Abbey, T.C. Boyle, Neal Stephenson, Dave Foreman, Richard Melo, and Carl Hiaasen.¹ At the same time, in their visions of struggle over land rights, land use, borders, and sovereignty, certain Red Power and ecotage fictions demand that we broaden what we mean by radical fiction in the USA, to the extent that they put us beyond the rationalist-humanist purview of the Marxism that underwrote the classic radical novel : by either refusing to separate the natural from the supernatural or treating the so-called wilderness as a sacred site of asocial recuperation. I have in mind here such novels as Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) and Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), both of which, as we shall see, share an understanding that place suffers because it is *enframed*, imposed upon by large-scale if not totalizing apparatuses that over-determine the ways we know and use the more local physical

world; and both of which respond with formal frames that teach us to read and re-read sites of degradation as scenes of radical action.

- 2 In terms of framing, I invoke the now-familiar premise that dominant discourses provide conceptual “frames” according to which we understand reality. Bluntly, frames work to over-determine certain points of view. As Jim A. Kuypers puts it, frames, which “are often found within a narrative account of an issue or event, and are generally the central organizing idea, “serve to define problems and diagnose causes, suggest strategies and solutions, and rouse us, one way or another, to action” (7). Frame analysis is most commonly called on to explain the processes by which social movements rise and fall, and to explore the ways in which dominant cultural forms give shape to popular consciousness. Robert J. Brulle, for instance, tells us of the pivotal role played by the “discursive frame” in the modern environmentalist movement, bringing together and binding individuals with shared interpretations and stories of political and ecological reality, and motivating them to take collective action (76-7). Daniel J. Philippon, meanwhile, singles out a denser kind of frame residing at the level of metaphor, which he identifies, historically, as the enabling figure of speech for U.S. environmental movements. If “we posit social transformation as a kind of ‘social disturbance,’” he argues, then “we might see metaphor as the agent of that disturbance” (5). Thus, for Philippon, the function of long-familiar metaphors such as “frontier,” “garden,” “park,” “wilderness,” and “utopia” has been to frame, rhetorically, certain locales so as to seal for them, or save them from, particular fates.
- 3 I call attention to *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Almanac of the Dead* as novels that take the idea of the frame, as a problematic for the environmental imagination, a little more literally. This is to say, they respond to damaging intrusions into their beloved places with narrative frames that prime us to read and re-read the territories laid out in the narratives proper: for Silko, the Americas under European civilization; for Abbey, the Utah-Arizona desert under urban-industrial encroachment. As we shall see, the formal frame, as counter-frame, becomes both a thematic and guiding principle. Silko achieves this by using a prefatory *narrative* map that prophesizes the end of European domination in the Americas; a map more interested in the movements of peoples over time than in the fixities of colonial borders. Abbey, meanwhile, resorts to a genealogy of machine breaking in the Luddite tradition, literalizing what it means to take direct action against the obnoxious frame imposed in the name of modern industrialization.
- 4 Brulle and Philippon shed some light on the stakes here in their reliance on Kenneth Burke’s dramatism to explain how frame analysis makes sense of environmentalist movements.² Dramatism, in Burke’s words, “invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action” (xxii). In a passage quoted at length by Philippon, Brulle applies this theory liberally:

The discursive frame of a social movement takes the form of a moral drama in a quest for salvation in a new social order. The world is seen as a theater in which the drama of human life is played out. This drama unfolds in a sequence in which the old social order falls into corruption. Identification and elimination of the cause of evil follow. A new and redeemed social order emerges, based on a new definition of reality that then enters into competition with the dominant discourse. (77)
- 5 Conspicuously, for critics intent on environmentalist concerns, neither Brulle nor Philippon comment on the subordinate *scenic* role given the world, “in which the drama

of human life is played out.” As such, they miss an opportunity to probe Burke’s insights into space, place, and frames. “It is a principle of drama,” says Burke, “that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene” (3). More specifically, “[f]rom the motivational point of view, there is implicit in the quality of a scene the quality of the action that is to take place within it. This would be another way of saying that the act will be consistent with the scene. Thus, when the curtain rises to disclose a given stage-set, this stage-set contains, simultaneously, implicitly, all that the narrative is to draw out as a sequence, explicitly” (6-7). At first glance, Burke’s human-centric theory of motives, figured in the artificial realm of the theater, hardly seems an obvious choice for the ecocritic. Yet, this is precisely what makes him useful—his literalizing (rather than allegorizing) of conventional conditions under which we habituate ourselves to framed and enframing spaces. He reminds us of the theatricality of the *scenic*, by which the world comes to us in fragmentary representations and stylizations, building up and boxing in perceptions and conceptions of the world. Not just a hackneyed metaphor for a scripted life, the stage-set signals the exemplary space in which we actually discover the world at its most blatantly framed and apportioned—and to which, conventionally, we respond by suspending belief.

- 6 At this point, we arrive at something paradigmatic: the work of the literal scene lends itself to a consideration of those spaces and places in the vaster world that we habitually frame, conceptually and physically—from the urban to the rural scene, from the local to the global—each with its own peculiar discourses and narratives enabling and disabling action and thought alike. Though frame analysis conventionally dates back to Erving Goffman’s 1974 *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, the idea of the world ‘enframed’ received its classic articulation in Martin Heidegger’s “The Question Concerning Technology” (1964), a work he first broached in a 1949 lecture. Admittedly, the pioneer of ecocriticism Lawrence Buell cautions us against working with Heidegger, acknowledging him as a seemingly “key precursive figure for many environmental critics” but also “a somewhat embarrassing one (in light of his Nazism and the ‘green’ face of National Socialism), whose legacy must be carefully sifted if ecocentrism is not to be tarred by this brush” (2005, 165, n11). Yet Heidegger’s argument—that the realm of art offers a viable locus for confronting a technological imperative that compels us to frame the world injuriously—is in many ways a blueprint for Buell’s argument. “The success of all environmentalist efforts,” says Buell after all, “finally hinges not on ‘some highly developed technology, or some arcane new science’ but on ‘a state of mind’: on attitudes, feelings, images, narratives” (2001, 1). While responding explicitly to Fredric Jameson’s theory of the “political unconscious,” Buell prioritizes the environmental over the more socially-oriented political imagination “[i]nsofar as the where of existence precedes the what of social practice” (2005, 44). For Heidegger, however, these what and where are inseparable. That is, he offers something more than simple ideology critique, grounding his deconstruction of modernity in a fundamental sensitivity to the environment. As such, he affords a paradigm that is useful for understanding those radical subgenres that resist the presumptions about nature and society that a more conventional (that is, Marxist) ideology critique might make.

A Technical Imagination

- 7 In his essay, Heidegger labors the point of “what the name ‘technology’ means. The word stems from the Greek. *Technikon* means that which belongs to *technē* . . . the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts” (294). He casts aside the common conception of *technē* as something instrumental to claim it instead as “something poetic,” belonging to *poiēsis*, whose proper work is a “bringing-forth” or “revealing” (292). “The Greeks,” he tells us, “have the word *alētheia* for revealing. The Romans translate this with *veritas*. We say ‘truth’ and usually understand it as correctness of representation” (294). So his appeal to pre-modernity allows him to characterize the technological as a mode of *revealing* and *representing*, terms he insists are definitive for what art, too, originally does: “At the outset of the destining of the West, in Greece, the arts soared to the supreme height of the revealing granted them. They illuminated the presence of the gods and the dialogue of divine and human destinings. And art was simply called *technē*” (315-6). Thus, just as he tempers what is meant by technology, he tempers what is meant essentially by art, and draws each into the same realm of activity.
- 8 But this is what *technē* used to mean, at odds with the way technology now “sets upon” us so that everything in sight is reduced to a “standing reserve” of resources: revealing is still the fundamental operation, only now technology damages (Heidegger’s word is “challenges”) as it reveals: it

puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such . . . a tract of land is challenged in the hauling out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order appears different from how it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and maintain. (296)
- 9 So the historical narrative is one of decline, and the name of the injurious force now reigning is *enframing*. Because “the essence of technology is nothing technological,” however, “essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art” (317). The essay leads to this claim, and asks for what I call a “technical imagination.”
- 10 If enframing speaks of conceptual strangleholds on space, place, and habitat that compel us to conceive the world so that it appears as a storehouse to be plundered, then the technical imagination is that aspect of the environmental imagination that is conscious of the aberrant discursive frame and is intent on deconstructing it. As part of the novel’s function, its task is to recuperate a sense of place beyond the merely instrumental and a sense of action beyond the merely exploitative. It signals an interpretive act, whose fundamental problem can be phrased in terms of Burke’s scene-act ratio—according to which, as noted, “[f]rom the motivational point of view, there is implicit in the quality of a scene the quality of the action that is to take place within it.” In other words, whatever damaging logics prevail are intrinsic to the way we have framed the scene—or the way the scene has been framed for us. But if we seek alternative logics, Heidegger reminds us that just because a quality is implicit in the world of action, this by no means guarantees that it will achieve presence: sometimes we must intervene and draw out what is implicit.

- 11 The task for any novel bent on reform or revolution, then, is to re-make scenes of degradation as sites of radical confrontation, in turn making us conscious of the alternative ways in which we might order our environments. Put another way, novels like *Almanac of the Dead* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* put formal and thematic framings to work so as to establish irreverence for the “unreasonable demands” of globalizing forces and a correlative reverence for comparatively local spaces that have suffered from subjugation: for Silko, the continent and its indigenous peoples; for Abbey, the desert and its romantic devotees. In what follows, I consider radical novels in which the technical imagination probes imperialist-capitalist conceptions of space and place in the service of outlining what we might call ‘liberationist ecologies’: where the struggles of human communities to wrest themselves free of crisis are simultaneously struggles for habitat and environment. I show that, in its conventional capacity to reveal and represent the world in terms of local detail and global structure alike, the radical novel strives to recuperate a sense of place that, taking Burke’s cue, yields a kind of action beyond the merely instrumental and exploitative. As a genre study, this paper constellates more familiar texts like *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Almanac of the Dead* in the less familiar clusters of the ecotage and Red Power subgenres—among such novels as: on one hand, Stephenson’s *Zodiac* (1988), Boyle’s *A Friend of the Earth* (2000), Foreman’s *The Lobo Outback Funeral Home* (2000), Hiassen’s *Hoot!* (2002), *Flush* (2005), and *Scat* (2009), and Melo’s *Jokerman 8* (2004); and on the other hand, Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* (1968), Welch’s *Winter in the Blood* (1974), and Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977).³In particular, I consider how these fictions tackle the problem of enframing—as a problem of form—by establishing their own framing devices that work to teach us how to read and re-read scenes of domination and depravation as sites of radical possibility. Locating these novels as (troubled) heirs to the social and environmental justice fictions of the classic radical novel and the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social novel, I show the literary figuration of radical environmentalism to be an enduring and productive force in the American literary imaginary, testing what it means to act in, and respond to, an endangered world.

Megamachine in the Garden: *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

- 12 *The Monkey Wrench Gang* takes literally the question concerning technology and the imposition of the dangerous frame, its own opening framework asking us to think historically about the consummate radical scene: in which the laborer, his livelihood threatened by encroaching industrial culture, breaks the machine frame. Abbey applauds direct-action with a lively cluster of allusions: an epitaph to “Ned Ludd” (who figures in a quotation from the *Oxford Universal Dictionary*, which defines him as “a lunatic living about 1779, who in a fit of rage smashed up two frames belonging to a Leicestershire ‘stockinger’”) and a definition of “sabotage” (“n. [Fr. < sabot, wooden shoe + -AGE: from damage done to machinery by sabots]”), followed by lines from Richard Shelton (“but oh my desert/ yours is the only death I cannot bear”), Walt Whitman (“Resist much. Obey little”), and Henry David Thoreau (“Now. Or never”). Preceding all this is a note from “E. A.”: “This book, though fictional in form, is based strictly on historical fact. Everything in it is real or actually happened. And it all began just one year from today.” Suggesting that what has happened is yet to happen, Abbey casts doubt on what could be meant by “historical fact,” priming us to be skeptical of the first alleged fact we meet: of Ludd as a raging lunatic. If in moving from Ludd to sabotage, Abbey signals the conspicuous absence of

political motivation in the record of Ludd as merely mad, in proceeding from Ludd's "rage" to Shelton's environmental mourning, Whitman's poetics of resistance and the figure of Thoreau, Abbey sensitizes us to a machine-breaking spirit informed by a romantic attachment to endangered place. In sum, what he broaches is the cultural enframing of this frame wrecker, whose smashed frame we read as both the apparatus of a machine culture imposed upon sites of labor for profits' sake, and as an exploitative boxing-in of the human community. To smash the frame, then, is to rail against a local intrusion that is also a cipher for a much larger encroachment, set in motion by industrial modernity: resistance is not to the machine *per se* but to the machine in the hands of technology's exemplary accomplice, the industrial-capitalist.⁴

- 13 Abbey thus primes us to expect counter-agents in the ensuing story, which indeed has an expert frame-wrecker—Hayduke, a Vietnam veteran “returned to the American Southwest he had been remembering only to find it no longer what he remembered”:

The city of Tucson . . . was ringed now with a circle of Titan ICBM bases. The open desert was being scraped bare of all vegetation, all life, by giant D-9 bulldozers, reminding him of the Rome plows leveling Vietnam. These machine-made wastes grew up in tumbleweed and real-estate development, a squalid plague of future slums constructed of green two-by-fours . . . Even the sky . . . was becoming a dump for the gaseous garbage of the copper smelters, the filth that Kennecott, Anaconda, Phelps-Dodge and American Smelting & Refining Co. were pumping through stacks into the public sky. A smudge of poisoned air overhung his homeland. (16)

- 14 Signaled here is a struggle for competing conceptions of space, place and habitat, where the act of recognizing what is now “restrained,” “polluted,” and “exhausted” as what was once “clear desert,” “semi-virginal wilderness” and “real river” (51-58) constitutes an indictment of a worldview in which all is reduced to mere resources. Refusing to let such scenes of degradation persist, Abbey sets Hayduke, the wilderness guide Sarvis, the doctor Smith, and the doctor's receptionist, Abbzug, on a project of wrecking the soil compactors, excavators, bulldozers, tractors, earthmovers, loaders, geophones, and drilling rigs; not to mention roads, bridges, and barbed wire fences—a concerted assault on the apparatus of the “megamachine”: “[a] planetary industrialism’... ‘growing like a cancer. Growth for the sake of growth’” (64). Giving the American pastoral tradition an anarchist twist, rethinking Leo Marx's “machine in the garden” as the *megamachine* in the garden, Sarvis's diagnosis of the diseased vision unleashed by technological enframing determines the quality of response called for: one does not negotiate with cancer, one cuts it out. Taking every opportunity to vividly describe how to go about this radical surgery, Abbey's novel dramatizes what a grassroots challenge to a world force might look like. What remains a conceptual maneuver for Heidegger is here given literal representation as a systematic dismantling of the apparatus corrupting our care for the world, and a radical deconstruction of what it means to set our world in order.
- 15 If we acknowledge Abbey's protagonists as actors in an anarchistic scene, the Utah-Arizona environment depicted assumes an expressly strategic function. It figures, on one hand, as an alternative to the project of modernity exemplified in urban-industrial encroachment, and, on the other, as an alternative to the idea of the techno-industrial state that sanctions such development. Setting the scene in this way, Abbey admittedly comes close to a conception of American wilderness that has since incurred criticism as a culturally constructed phenomenon—motivated by what William Cronon identifies as a Romantic-era bourgeois “frontier nostalgia” (“The Trouble with Wilderness: or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” 1996). The problem, according to this critique, is that those

individuals valorizing the wild as a tonic for all the debilitating effects of urban-industrial capitalism were historically often the very ones benefiting from urban-industrial production. It needs to be stressed, however, that if Abbey invokes frontier nostalgia, he does so to turn it against such class interests. Not only does he democratize the myth of the wild place by giving it into the hands of working men and women—doctor, receptionist, rancher, and soldier—he gives it over to activists conspiring against those very urban-industrial interests. Reclaiming the mythic American wild, Abbey sequesters it from capitalist and centralized powers alike, rendering it instead a locus for an autonomous and organic community attempting to demarcate the limits of an empire that abhors limits.

- 16 Unfortunately, if Abbey's novel sets out in exuberant libertarianism, bent on wrecking certain ways and means of enframing the Southwest existence, it finally opts for adjusting, rather than breaking, the dominant frame: it dramatically liberates the land only to rhetorically corral the Indians. First introduced, his ethno-nationalism reeks of disappointed expectations: "The real trouble with the goddamned Indians, reflected Hayduke, is that they are no better than the rest of us. The real trouble is that the Indians are just as stupid and greedy and cowardly and dull as us white folks" (26). Certainly, the narrator at one point seems sympathetic to "the sold-out, deceived and betrayed Navajo Nation" (171), but this sympathy is undercut by Hayduke's characterization of the American Indian Movement as led by little more than "bleeding-heart types" (169). Indeed, when next invoked, Indian politics is a joke: to throw the authorities off their trail, Abzug leaves behind slogans like "CUSTER WEARS AN ARROW SHIRT – RED POWER!" (193). With such disdain for all things Indian—in an era otherwise marked by fraught Native struggles to reclaim homelands, traditional culture, and political autonomy—Abbey reveals a radical novel not quite free of the exploitative imperative it seeks to deconstruct. As such, he leaves us with two critical questions: how do we counter a possessive sense of place without falling into the trap of possessing it just as unreasonably; and to what extent can we salvage the enemy's technology and conceptual apparatuses in the course of revolutionary change? These questions speak to core concerns for the radical imagination in both the realm of literature and the realm of action, for the task in hand for the activist and the novelist alike is precisely to help reconceive our scene so that it is less wasteful, less polluted, and more just. They are also core questions taken up by another radical novel similarly attached to the Southwest, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* – a beast of a novel trampling underfoot Abbey's fabrication of the politically and culturally exhausted Indian.

Revolution as Technē: Almanac of the Dead

- 17 Flipping the ethnic script to indict the Anglo-European legacy in the Americas, *Almanac of the Dead* has proven controversial in ways that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* has not.⁵ Tracking the complex land and labor relations of indigenous and European ways of life centered on the Four-Corners/Mexico region, from pre-Colombian times to present, *Almanac* imagines political revolution in the name of tribal reclamation of stolen lands. It announces itself as a novel of geo-politics, opening with a "contents" section showing chapters organized under territorial headings ("the United States of America," "Mexico," "Africa," "the Americas," "The Fifth World," and "One World, Many Tribes") and a "five hundred year map" of the Americas emphasizing the Tucson-Mexico area. Recent scholars using the

lenses of post-colonialism, decolonization, multiculturalism, and the transatlantic have read this map as purposefully transgressive: as a *narrative* map—indexing characters, scenes, and events from the story to follow—resisting standard cartographic conventions premised on topographic fixities, it is read as a challenge to those colonial forces that also presided historically over the institution of map-making.⁶ Silko herself describes it as “a ‘glyphic’ representation of the [novel’s] narrative” (1983, 119). The glyph came to popular attention in nineteenth-century America when Frederick Catherwood and John Lloyd Stephens published their *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1841), documenting their so-called discovery of Mayan glyph-carved ruins. If Catherwood’s glyph—typically a monumental carving in stone, mediated through drawings—served the colonial construction of the Americas, Silko re-inscribes it as an expression of Native primacy (glyph as mark of pre-Colombian culture) and evidence of new indigenous power (glyph as mark of de-colonialization). “This ‘glyph,’” says Silko, “shows how the Americas are ‘one,’ not separated by artificial, imaginary ‘borders’” (1983, 119). The map as glyph thus challenges the conceptual framing of the American continents, trading the constructed limit zones that would compartmentalize colonial America for the natural limits yielded by the edges of the continent(s).

- 18 More to the point, Silko suggests that the standard map, and the legal apparatus it underwrites, is just another form of technology making unreasonable demands. In ways comparable to Heidegger’s valorizing peasant labor as a pre-modern alternative to caring for the world, Silko offers the glyphic map as an appeal to a more natural and reasonable relation to the world. This plays out in the avowal of the Yaqui smuggler Calabazas, that “[w]e don’t believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that”:

“We are here thousands of years before the first whites. We are here before maps or quit claims. We know where we belong here on this earth. We have always moved freely. North-south. East-west. We pay no attention to what isn’t real. Imaginary lines. Imaginary minutes and hours. Written law. We recognize none of that. And we carry a great many things back and forth. We don’t see any border. We have been here and this has continued for thousands of years. We don’t stop. No one stops us.” (216)

- 19 The fact that Calabazas refuses to speak of his people’s presence in the past as past—insisting that “we *are* here before maps”—calls attention to a certain historical difficulty. The radical sentiment implicit in his refusal to recognize the territorial frames imposed on the continent has its counterpart when Zeta, a smuggler amassing arms for the Native insurrection, considers how “[t]here was not, and there never had been, a legal government by Europeans anywhere in the Americas. Not by any definition, not even by the Europeans’ own definitions and laws. Because no legal government could be established on stolen land. Because stolen land never had a clear title.” She concludes that “[a]ll the laws of the illicit governments had to be blasted away” (133). Though Zeta here appears as the more revolutionary of the two characters, she does not flout the law the way Calabazas does: on the contrary, her appeal is precisely to the law: recognizing it as the codified system that nominally legitimates the colonial project, her narrative function is to lay bare its intrinsic illegitimacy. Put another way, she is about the business of ‘bringing-forth’ a particular truth—that a failure of truth is inherent within the white establishment—and this is what sanctions her revolutionism. The problem with the apparatus of the modern map and the legal system it implies, as Zeta sees it, is that it blocks what Heidegger calls the way to *veritas*. Zeta’s determination to blast away the laws of the illicit governments invites us to understand this particular revolutionism as a good

technology : a *technē* and *poiēsis* yielding a vision intended to return us to a more truthful conception of the world ; which is to say that revolution figures here as the practical application of the technical imagination.

- 20 It ought to give us pause when critics such as Walter Benn Michaels (*The Shape of the Signifier* 2004) write off *Almanac of the Dead* as a multiculturalist work that merely teaches us to live with inequality—a novel otherwise regarded as prophetic in its anticipation of Mexican revolutionism and even cited as a source of inspiration for Chiapas’s Zapatista insurgency. Silko certainly foregrounds what Abbey buries : the fact that who you are and where you are from largely determine where you end up in the stratified Americas. But despite the predominance of racialized ways of being and knowing in Silko’s imagination, the root of the novel’s critique does not rest in a pluralism of opposing nations, or ethnicities, but in a schism of indigenous practices, a clash of competing answers to a certain question of political economy. *Almanac* is a story, after all, that looks back to a pre-Colombian emergence of human sacrifice and destruction in Mesoamerica *on top of which* European culture settles as a capstone. It is a story putting pressure on ethno-nationalism to arrive at a broader ethical question of at what cost, in terms of the human community and the natural world, do we secure survival—which in turn yields the thornier question of how much of what we have and of who we are must be exploited, exhausted, and wasted before we craft a new vision, a new way of framing and revealing the world. Identity in the novel, ultimately, is not a theory of value foreclosing on narrative choices but grounds for challenging the technological apparatuses of an unfinished colonialism.

Conclusion

- 21 *Almanac of the Dead* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* are core fictions for thinking through the role of the novel in times of environmental endangerment, even if they evince the ambivalence Ursula K. Heise in *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* (2008) ascribes to the modern environmentalist movement:

Avant-garde and rear-guard at the same time, environmentalism concerned itself with issues of global citizenship and activism long before such questions became fashionable in academia. But—in the United States at least—it also invested much of its utopian capital into a return to the local and a celebration of a “sense of place” that remained impervious for a long time to the kinds of antiessentialist perspectives that had become common currency in most other areas of American culture. (8)

- 22 Like good environmentalists, Silko and Abbey are painfully aware of the ways in which all-embracing systems make their presence felt in particular places : how the large-scale economic forces of European and American expansion set their logics to work in otherwise sequestered locales. They indeed invoke a way of looking at the local framed by the global. At the same time, speaking to Fredric Jameson’s call for cognitively mapping the capitalist totality (*Postmodernism* 1991) and for finding an enclave from which to resist that totality (*Archaeologies of the Future* 2005), they evince an understanding of those large-scale forces as symptomatic of exploitative and never-satisfied imperatives, and so insist that we cannot detach any modern ‘sense of the planet’ from the damaging logic of enframing. In other words, if they frame the local in terms of the global, they do so in the course of imagining ways to oust the global system from intruding dangerously on the local purview.

- 23 As Heise sees it, “ecologically oriented thinking has yet to come to terms with one of the central insights of current theories of globalization: namely, that the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place, in a process that many theorists have referred to as ‘deterritorialization’” (10). I do not doubt that this is true for certain locales, and even for an increasing number of locales, but if we discuss (as Heise does) societies, cultures, and places in the abstract with no obvious interest in actual particular societies, cultures, and places, we risk continuing the logic of enframing: in pre-determining the argument against any real sense of place, we write off as outdated or underdeveloped all motives favoring a return to local epistemologies. But even this does not quite get at the issue, since what is often rejected is not the sense of planet, as such, but a particular sense of planet understood as a vehicle for modernization, industrialization, and expansion—a vehicle typically deemed unwieldy and out of control. Unsurprisingly, the radical scene in the Red Power novel does not support Heise’s presumption that the globalization of all cultures and societies is inevitable; nor does it do so in the ecotage novel. The same holds true if we turn to the real world of, say, Subcomandante Marcos’s Zapatista revolutionaries in Chiapas, Mexico, the late Hugo Chávez’s Bolivarian government in Venezuela, or Evo Morales’s Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia—or, further a field, and on the other side of the political spectrum, the ideology of the European New Right. As Charles Lindholm and José Pedro Zúquete point out in *Struggle for the World: Liberation Movements For the 21st Century* (2010), these and other revolutionary movements put pressure on globalization as a necessarily enduring critical category, primarily because globalization as a keyword is inextricable from a totalizing Western colonialism.
- 24 Such politics speak to the recent theories of Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman, who, while acknowledging the global forces at play in modern life, take ‘globalization’ to be an ideological fiction that prevents us from speaking of the true dominant world system: an imperialist capitalism serving discrete national powers. Consequently, until we can genuinely assert a sense of the global that does not imply an exploitative economic imperative, the radical environmentalist novel rightly insists that there is good reason to resist glibly framing the local as global if it means we lose all sense of our particular places, cultures, and societies. This is especially true if the local typically affords the most fertile grounds for establishing resistance to endangering practices (as it did, for instance, in the Civil Rights struggles). In other words, Heise’s desire to move beyond the local-global binary is, politically, a false move. What is called for, rather—if the revolutionisms of Marcos, Chávez, and Morales have anything to teach—is a deconstruction of the global and a re-territorialization of the local, not ‘to come to terms’ with the global scene but to re-conceive it: not to sanction the logics already anticipated there, but to reveal them in all their difficulty with a view to setting them aside for a different kind of action, for a whole new scene.
- 25 The real achievement of Abbey’s and Silko’s fictions, finally, rests in their understanding that environmental crisis might be posed as a problem for novelistic contemplation—a crisis of frames (dominant worldviews and structures) and forms (patterns of exploitation and social relations) to which the novel speaks on like terms: laying the world before us, less a representation of the world and more a revealing of the world enframed, in scenes revealing the unreasonable quality of our actions and demands. Evincing a technical imagination, they self-consciously speak against enframing by offering alternative

interpretations of American place, space, and habitat, intervening in and disrupting the damaging patterns into which we all box ourselves with our politics, aesthetics, and theories of value. What sets such novels apart is their capacity to re-conceive scenes of domination and exhaustion as sites of radical conflict. So doing, they function properly as revolutionary literature : not necessarily inspiring armies like the Zapatistas and Earth First !, or educating activists in practical sabotage, but *re-inscribing the sense of conflict* so that we recognize it as one of hopeful action rather than habitual exploitation. They do not merely dramatize liberationist struggles but make it possible for us to think the world, and its motives, anew. In this sense these novels yield the idea of revolution itself as *technē*, which is properly an unconcealing: of our situatedness in a world whose forms presently but by no means permanently constitute crisis, and of our responsibilities in and for that world.

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NOTES

1. I take the term 'ecotage' from Sam Love and David Obst, who claim coinage in their 1972 Environmental Action book *Ecotage!*, a neologism combining "ecology" and "sabotage" to denote a "branch of tactical biology."
2. Philippon cites Burke directly; Brulle cites Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton, Jr., whose *Persuasion and Social Movements* (2001) draws explicitly on Burke's dramatism.
3. For this Native genealogy, I draw on Sean Teuton's *Red Land, Red Power* (2008).
4. I paraphrase from Philip Hobsbaum's "The Machine Breakers" in his 1952 *Labouring Men*: "In some cases, indeed, the resistance to the machine was quite consciously resistance to the machine in the hands of the capitalist" (11).
5. See Tillett.
6. See Archuleta, Horvitz, Hunt, Mogen, O'Meara, Reed, and Tillett.

RÉSUMÉS

Dans cet article, les méthodes philosophiques et narratologiques sont entremêlées afin d'examiner comment le roman radical, suite à l'émergence du mouvement écologiste moderne et de "l'American Indian Movement", envisage le lieu, l'espace et l'habitat en tant que sites *de et pour* la lutte politique. L'article compare *Almanac of the Dead* de Leslie Marmon Silko et *The Monkey Wrench Gang* de Edward Abbey afin d'explorer comment "le roman Red Power" et "le roman

ecotage” — dans leurs visions de la lutte pour les terres, les droits, et les frontières — dévoilent les cadres conceptuels par lesquels nous connaissons et trop souvent mettons en danger le monde. L’analyse met en corrélation le *scène-acte ratio* de Kenneth Burke (qui montre comment une scène donne lieu à des motifs et des logiques particuliers) et la théorie de la *technē* de Martin Heidegger (qui souligne que la technologie moderne, bien qu’elle *arraisonne* le monde et nous oblige à le percevoir comme une simple réserve de ressources, est vulnérable à l’intervention de la sphère de l’art) afin d’étudier comment le roman radical nous apprend à résister aux visions dangereuses, en particulier celles imposées sur les territoires par les appareils technologiques de l’expansion vers l’ouest. Est en jeu ce que nous appelons une *imagination technique* : un aspect de ce que Lawrence Buell nomme « l’imagination de l’environnement », qui fait appel aux cadres narratifs afin de re-décrire des scènes de la dégradation en tant que sites de possibilité radicale. La tâche, en définitive, est de retrouver un sens du lieu au-delà de l’instrumentalité et un sens de l’action au-delà de l’exploitation.

In this article, I combine philosophical and narratological methodologies to consider how the radical novel, following the emergence of the modern environmentalist movement and the American Indian Movement, understands place, space, and habitat as grounds both *of* and *for* struggle. I compare Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* with Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang* to explore how the Red Power and ecotage genres, in their visions of struggle over land rights, land use, and borders, disclose the competing conceptual frameworks through which we know and too often endanger the world. I interrelate Kenneth Burke’s dramatist ‘scene-act ratio’ (which accounts for the ways a scene yields particular motives and logics) and Martin Heidegger’s theory of *technē* (that modern technology, though it “enframes” the world and compels us to perceive it as a mere repository of resources, is vulnerable to intervention from the realm of art) to show how the radical novel teaches us to resist endangering worldviews, especially those imposed on territories by the technological apparatuses of westward expansion. At work is what I term a ‘technical imagination’: an aspect of what Lawrence Buell calls the ‘environmental imagination,’ making a specific appeal to narrative frames to re-describe scenes of degradation as sites of radical possibility. The task, ultimately, is to recuperate a sense of place beyond the instrumental and of action beyond the exploitative.

INDEX

Mots-clés : ecotage, écocritique, environnement, Heidegger, Kenneth Burke, Leslie Marmon Silko, Edward Abbey.

Keywords : ecocritic

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