

Florian Andrei Vlad<sup>1</sup>

## Terror, Monkey-Wrenching and (Counter)Netwar: Reading Edward Abbey in the Age of Pure War

*Abstract: Edward Abbey has been a major inspiration for radical environmentalist, neo-Luddite/green anarchist and eco-terrorist movements, and his most influential work in that respect has been, without a doubt, The Monkey Wrench Gang (the title of which has inspired the phrase “monkey wrenching” – anti-technological acts of sabotage). Acknowledging Abbey’s historical significance, this article engages critically with his most controversial novel, through a lens informed by more recent theoretical developments on asymmetrical warfare and radical resistance (drawing from theorists such as Ronfeldt and Arquilla, Hardt and Negri, and Virilio), to assess the novel’s continued relevance.*

*Key words: netwar; eco-terrorism; morality of violence; neo-Luddism; pure war*

### **Introduction: Spectral Afterglows?**

This is to some extent a deliberately presentist reading of Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang* - anachronistically applying contemporary terminology to a novel written more than three decades ago, hence engaging with one of the definite no-nos of literary analysis. Yet, while historicized understandings of the novel may be the predictable norm, reading it through a contemporary lens informed by changes in the nature of warfare, and by theoretical developments in conceptualizing both warfare and wilderness may offer some additional “edge” in addressing the continued relevance of Abbey’s classic.

Economist Michael D. Yates goes as far as to note that “The ghosts of Karl Marx and Edward Abbey haunt the contemporary United States,” putting Abbey in not exactly the most lightweight of companies. While one might feel tempted to raise an eyebrow at such a statement and view it as excessively inflating Abbey’s historical and cultural significance, Yates does make a convincing case for the interconnectedness of economic inequality and environmental degradation, and for the urgency of radical environmentalism in the context of a US economy obsessed by “growth” at the expense of ecological, social and urban

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<sup>1</sup> Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania; Justus Liebig University Gissen, Germany

sustainability:

“Development” and “growth” are the watchwords of capitalism in the United States. Environmental protection is pretty much an afterthought; when this conflicts with growth, growth wins. Two things you can’t miss if you drive around the country are urban-suburban-exurban sprawl, heavily subsidized by the government, and private use of public lands. (Yates 20+)

If he were writing in 2008, or 2011, instead of 2005, Yates could also mention the current global economic crisis (preceded by convergent infrastructure, housing and energy crises), which makes the necessity for ecological responses even more urgent. Of course, Abbey’s novel is not the Bible (or Little Red Book) of environmental activism, and the current ecological problems do not automatically translate into a need to feverishly reach for our copies of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* for ideological enlightenment. But, in simple terms, a book about a bunch of people running around causing mayhem out of concern about unsustainable practices and capitalist enclosure of open space is certainly still relevant.

Yates mentions a phenomenon that is described in the book and continues to be a serious issue: “The usurpation of public lands by private interests is very likely greater at state and local levels where business can exert enormous influence on public officials and where the latter are more willing subjects of influence peddling” (20+). But more significantly, he places Abbey’s significance (in relation to Marx) in terms of the need for an anti-capitalist critique where economic and ecological concerns converge: “The radical politics of the future must make inequality and environmental destruction its centerpiece. Both of these phenomena are so much a part of the nature of capitalism that it is hard to talk about them without making at least a partial indictment of the system” (ibid.).

A key concept I will be using in the paper is that of netwar. The term was coined after the first Gulf War by David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, two RAND corporation analysts, as a theoretical tool for defining the changing nature of warfare, and it has since then been picked up by a multitude of commentators (no pun intended) from varying parts of the theoretical and political spectrum. In a subsequent article written after 9/11, Ronfeldt and Arquilla revisit the concept, and define it as

an emerging mode of conflict in which the protagonists - ranging from terrorist and criminal organizations on the dark side, to militant social activists on the bright side - use network forms of organization, doctrine, strategy, and technology *attuned to the information age*.  
(1) (emphasis added)

Admittedly, one often associates the “information age” with the age of internet communication (even though the term “information society” can be traced to as early as 1933), and the mischievous monkey-wrenchers were definitely not brandishing iPods or spreading their revolutionary messages over facebook and twitter. And certainly there could be an element of irony about using terms related to the information society when talking about a book dedicated to Neil Ludd. Yet the concept of netwar as envisioned by Ronfeldt and Arquilla is essentially still relevant for the book; after all, network types of struggle didn’t just suddenly appear out of nowhere in the 90s; furthermore, the concept itself can be traced to previous theories of decentralized struggle, such as the “rhizomes” and “nomadic

war machines” of which Deleuze and Guattari are so fond, or to a somewhat lesser extent to the “radical democracy” articulated by Laclau and Mouffe.

Of course, Ronfeldt and Arquilla’s distinction between the “bright side” and “dark side” of netwar seems strikingly naïve (how would we define in these terms, for instance, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, which is at least declaratively guided by ideals of egalitarianism and social justice, yet engages in drug trafficking and, allegedly, in terrorism? Or anarchist black blocs who often derail peaceful protests and cause unnecessary violence?). And *The Monkey Wrench Gang* does raise ethical issues about how “bright” network-type struggle really is.

The term “pure war” in the paper title may also seem slightly confusing. Paul Virilio initially used the term to describe the blurring of the boundaries between home and battlefield after World War II (hence the transition from “total war” to “pure war”). This year he published an updated version of *Pure War* where he argues that this transition has become even more dramatic after 9/11. It is to this contemporary state of “pure war” that the title of the paper alludes to. Virilio argues that “Asymmetrical war, the terrorist disequilibrium has erased the theatre of operations (battlefields used to be called “theatres of external operations”) - in favor of metropolitan concentrations“ (Virilio 10). This is not at all dissimilar to Hardt and Negri’s oft-quoted observation that “War seems to have seeped back and flooded the entire social field” such that “all wars tend to be netwars” (Hardt and Negri 55-7).

### **Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: Revolution, Art and the Morality of Violence**

Artists in general and writers in particular have always been considered to be up to no good, since at least as early as Plato. It could be argued that this has been particularly true in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kafka’s explanation was that “Intellectual labour tears man out of human society. A craft, on the other hand, leads him towards men” (Janouch 15). In *Ground Zero*, Virilio makes some somewhat disturbing parallels between writing and armed struggle:

The artists of the twentieth century, like the anarchist with his home-made bombs, the revolutionary suicide bomber or the mass killers celebrated by the mass-circulation press, would themselves become wielders of plastic explosives, visual mischief-makers, anarchists of colour, form and sound, before coming to occupy the gutter press’s gallery of horrors. (*Ground Zero* 28)

Abbey was of course never shy or ambiguous about his view on the relationship between writing and radicalism. While stating in an interview with James R. Hepworth “I don’t think written propaganda makes much difference in a war” (Hepworth 53), he nevertheless fully took on the role of the militant writer. After all, as he put it in a malicious aside on the less edgy writing of Updike, “How can you get excited about someone named Rabbit, for Chrissake?” (Loeffler 31). (He might have had kinder words for Updike’s somewhat more

recent *Terrorist*, but that is beside the point)

Abbey certainly doesn't mince his words in the essay "A Writer's Credo": "To oppose, resist and sabotage the contemporary drift toward a global technocratic police state, whatever its ideological coloration" (Lindholdt 110), thus equating technocracy with totalitarianism, and writing with resistance. Jack Loeffler, a historian, writer and activist who was a friend of Abbey, described him in the following way: "He was an activist, a warrior armed with the tools of a warrior. With firearms, flammables, wit and courage, he physically destroyed those metal marauders that raze wilderness" (Loeffler 38) - not exactly lightweight metaphors.

And while Kafka may have abstractly reflected on the role of the writer as a radical critic of society, Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* had very tangible effects. One the one hand, as Paul Lindholdt notes, "the title has been communized - as a verb, 'to monkey wrench,' and as a noun, 'monkey wrenching' - in books by Foreman (1991), Manes (1990), and Scarce (1990)" (Lindholdt 111). On the other hand, and more significantly, the book was one of the major influences on Earth First!, which started up in 1980 and proposed a radical anti-technological agenda for preserving the public lands of the American West. Earth Firsters used Abbey's book as a how-to manual, and the Earth First! Journal borrowed names and slogans from it. This was not merely a philosophical influence. Abbey himself endorsed Earth First! and spoke at its rallies. Jamie Malanowski offers a vivid description of one of the more spectacular actions undertaken by Earth First!, directly inspired by *The Monkey Wrench Gang*:

Their first and perhaps most colorful action took place in the spring of 1981, when about seventy-five people gathered atop the Glen Canyon Dam in Arizona. They stood on the concrete wall that bottles up the Colorado River, sang songs, made speeches and, at the rally's culmination, several of them took a hefty roll of black plastic, twenty-one feet in width, and let it unwind down the face of the dam. From a distance, the effect was terrifying: a 300-foot black gash in the wall. (Malanowski 568+)

Earth First! was not the only real-life successor of Abbey's fictional gang of eco-saboteurs. Another notable example is the Earth Liberation Front, active in both the US and Europe (and classified as a terrorist organization by the FBI), which, as Colin Tudge puts it, "even as you read this, might well be filling the fuel tanks of huge bulldozers with syrup and sand, defacing the odd McDonald's, or (as it did a few years ago) firebombing an 'outlet' for Hummers in California. Sometimes the ELF leaves a slogan: 'Hayduke lives'" (Tudge 40).

Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front are precisely the sort of decentralized, molecular networks that Ronfeldt and Arquilla were referring to. In fact, they specifically discuss the ELF at one point. Describing it as a network which "may in fact have only a small core of true believers who commit its most violent acts," they explain the way it functions:

... according to ELF publicist, Craig Rosebraugh, the ELF consists of a "series of cells across the country with no chain of command and no membership roll." It is held together mainly by a shared ideology and philosophy. "There's no central leadership where they can go and knock off the top guy and it will be defunct." In other words, the ELF is allegedly built

around “autonomous cells” that are entirely underground. (12)

One of the comments they make is arguably unfair: they claim the ELF has “unclear origins.” Presumably they had never read *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Abbey may not have personally started the ELF, but that is not the point. As Loeffler explains, “Abbey has inspired a coterie of discerning, stout hearted, wilderness-loving *thinkers* to fully understand that, ‘A patriot must always be ready to defend his country against his government’” (39). And this in fact fits in with Ronfeldt and Arquilla’s own assertion on the importance of the narrative level of netwar: “The right story can thus help keep people connected in a network whose looseness makes it difficult to prevent defection. The right story line can also help create bridges across different networks” (13).

A particularly problematic issue in addressing Abbey’s work is that of violence. The title of his master’s thesis as a graduate student at the University of New Mexico was “Anarchism and the Morality of Violence.” Among the many controversial things he said in interviews was that “violence is an integral part of the modern world, modern civilization” (Solheim and Levin 147). And Hayduke, the most sanguine of the novel’s protagonists, claims “Violence, it’s as American as pizza pie” (176).

Of course, this does not mean an endorsement of violence *per se*, but a critique of the place violence has in modern society, coupled with a justification of violence for higher purposes and which is not directed at people. No people get hurt in the book, not even the unsavory likes of Bishop Love. The “gang” makes it a point not to hurt any humans, and only directs violence and sabotage at technology. They call their endeavors “creative destruction” and their struggle is formulated in such a way that technology appears completely dehumanized: “One way or another they were going to slow if not halt the advance of Technocracy, the growth of Growth, the spread of the ideology of the cancer cell” (225). The only moment when they are faced with a situation where they can kill a human being is when they blow up a train; however, it miraculously turns out to be “Computerized. No human hand at the controls! World’s first automated coal train!” (178). It is as if technology is run by itself, or by some invisible force that has nothing to do with humanity.

An interesting biographical detail is relevant here. Loeffler recounts that

If ever there was a symbol of absolute evil in Ed’s mind it was the Glen Canyon Dam that plugs the once mighty Colorado River. We would build an adobe houseboat, fill it with high explosives, sink it just upstream from the damn dam after having pre-set a triggering device, and watch it blow the dam to smithereens, our rubber rafts ready to catch the crest of the first wave and take what was sure to be the swiftest, most exciting trip down Grand Canyon any boatman has ever had! (37)

In that context, we can read *The Monkey Wrench Gang* then as the vicarious playing out of Abbey’s own fantasies about taking on the great beast of technocracy: the fictionalization of revolutionary schemes that would be later de-fictionalized and put into practice (to some extent) by the likes of the ELF.

Nevertheless, the issue of violence remains troubling. The acts of sabotage committed by the fictional gang seem, in a way, harmless: nobody has to suffer except the (impersonal) evil corporations. And the heroes, even after capture, somehow manage to get away with

their deeds. Even Hayduke, whom we see being shot to death, makes a highly improbable comeback that gives him an equally improbable Christlike aura. One could think eco-terrorism is good clean fun, and the violence involved is similar to classic Walt Disney cartoons, where characters get bludgeoned, burnt or beheaded yet eventually escape unharmed.

Yet outside fiction things are less pretty. Even paramilitary or terrorist organizations who try to make a point out of not hurting civilians or people in general have had a hard time avoiding that. And especially after 9/11, it might prove more difficult for would-be monkey-wrenchers to get away as easy as Hayduke and his crew. In his 1985 book, *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkey Wrenching*, Dave Foreman, founder of Earth First! explained one of the reasons eco-saboteurs could get away: "Obviously, it's not always in the interest of victimized companies to report instances of sabotage to the police, or for the police to release the information to the press, because that could encourage emulation" (Malanowski 568+). In the age of Guantanamo and the Patriot Act, those set on blowing up things might be well advised to think twice before taking Foreman's words for granted.

### **Fun and (War) Games: (Counter)Warfare and the Militarization of Public Space**

Conventional understanding says that war and public space have traditionally been supposed to be (more or less) separate. After all, the very emergence of fortified cities was meant to keep warfare away from public life. Obviously, this is a flawed narrative, but there is a prevailing view among scholars (particularly those with leftist or pacifist affinities) that from the Cold War onwards war has increasingly permeated the entire social and cultural sphere. In the US, even public policy discourse has often been coined in inappropriately martial terminology: the "War on Poverty," the "War on Drugs," and the "War on Terror" (probably the wackiest concept of them all, since it presumes "terror" to be some autonomous and homogenous force that suddenly appeared out of nowhere, completely disconnected from cultural and geopolitical dynamics).

While militarization is a common theme, one of the most unsettling insights into the avenues around which this is actually happening comes courtesy of Roger Stahl, in his study of the "...collusion between military and commercial uses of video games." Setting his article in the historical perspective that "War's technological and rhetorical trajectory in the twentieth century can be thought of a long process of integration of the home front and battlefield," he explains that war-themed video games contribute to a "...blurred distinction between the soldier and the citizen [...] war games are part and parcel of information-age warfare, merging the home front and the battlefield through multiple channels;" in other words, they represent "a nexus for the militarization of cultural space" (Stahl 113), replacing reason and reflection with an a knee-jerk "gametime" which is *interactive*, but not *participatory*. This is not mere speculation; Stahl backs his "military-entertainment complex" argument up with solid evidence; for instance, we are told that "In 2000 the Defense Department devised an institution to facilitate collaboration between the military and the entertainment industries. The result was the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies" (117).

There were probably no video games in 1975 (this is however an uneducated guess) but Abbey's characters certainly expressed similar beliefs about the convergent military, technocratic and capitalistic encroachment of public space. One passage is particularly vivid in formulating a dystopian, cancerous metaphor of intertwined militarism, technology and totalitarianism:

...oligarchs and oligopolies beyond: Peabody Coal only one arm of Anaconda Copper; Anaconda only a limb of United States Steel; US Steel intertwined in incestuous embrace with the Pentagon, TVA, Standard Oil, General Dynamics, Dutch Shell, IG Farben-industrie; the whole conglomerated cartel spread out upon half the planet Earth like a global kraken, pantentacled, wall-eyed and parrot-beaked, its brain a bank of computer data centers, its blood the flow of money, its heart a radioactive dynamo, its language the technocratic monologue of number imprinted on magnetic tape (172)

The mischievous Mormon Seldom Seen Smith has a similarly unsettling nightmare: "Beneath the superstructure the dynamo purred on, murmuring the basic message: Power... profit... prestige... pleasure... profit... prestige... pleasure... power..." (256) In a scene that nowadays might remind one of *The Matrix*, "He gaped in terror at the cables now joining his head and body to the computer bank before him" (257). And Hayduke is enraged by what the transformation of the American West, which he compares to the mass-scale atrocities in Vietnam:

The Army sure didn't want to let me go. Said I had to be 'processed and rehabilitated.' Said I couldn't wear the VC flag pin on my Green Beret [...] Medical discharge [...] Anyway, when I got free of those jail-hospitals and found out they were trying to do the same thing to the West that they did to that little country over there, I got mad all over again. (360)

Nick Dyer-Witherford could give a more contemporary (and more eloquent) explanation of the problem troubling Hayduke. He suggests that "At its cutting edge, capitalist globalisation means war," war meaning "not only the immediate violence of military attack, whether in the form of imperial invasion or low-intensity conflicts, but also the sustained social and environmental violence of starvation, social disintegration, and deprivation" (Dyer-Witherford 335). Dyer-Witthford also replaces the term "netwar" with "anti-wars," which he defines as "the mobilisation of worldwide communications to hold open spaces within which experiments in autonomy can escape extermination" (339).

Netwar or anti-war, Abbey's gang of eco-saboteurs is structured along the sort of decentralized, non-hierarchical and molecular lines that leftist academics love. Their tiny group is suitably diverse (though missing a token African American to fully conform to the class, race and gender paradigm): a beer-guzzling Vietnam Vet (in many ways an inflated caricature of the American hyper-masculinity of popular culture), a libertarian, urban medical doctor with a penchant for burning billboards, a neo-Luddite "Jack" Mormon and a liberated Jewish feminist. Their horizontal democratic practices would make the likes of Laclau and Mouffe proud: "No voting,' Doc said. 'We're not going to have any tyranny of the majority in this organization. We proceed on the principle of unanimity. What we do we do all together or not at all. This is brotherhood we have here, not a legislative assembly'" (169). The same Doc articulates his libertarian/anarchist view of radical, participatory democracy: "'Friends,' said Doc, 'I don't believe in majority rule. You know that. I don't

believe in minority rule either. I am against all forms of government, including good government” (170).

If Doc had been speaking after 1987, he could have mentioned Deleuze and Guattari’s “machines of struggle” and “rhizomes,” which refer to decentered, divergent, transverse, nonhierarchical, lateral or transverse modes of organization - as opposed to “arborescent” or rigid, linear, vertical and hierarchical patterns” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6-7).

Ronfeldt and Arquilla assess that hierarchies have increasing difficulty fighting networks. Seldom has one possible answer for this when explaining the inefficiency of Bishop Love’s team (after all, teams are essentially hierarchical: whether in sports, military or corporate circumstances, they have “leaders,” “captains“ etc): “One man can be pretty dumb sometimes, but for real bona fide stupidity there ain’t nothing that can beat teamwork” (368). Hayduke on the other hand is more elaborate; in response to Bonnie’s fear that economic, political and military power is invincibly concentrated, he retorts: “Bonnie, you think you’re alone? I’ll bet - listen, I’ll bet right this very minute there’s guys out in the dark doing the same kind of work we’re doing. All over the country, little bunches of guys in twos and threes, fighting back” (182). He adds another significant issue that makes it difficult for established hierarchies to destroy the aforementioned machines of struggle: “No organization at all. None of us knowing anything about any other little bunch. That’s why they can’t stop us” (183).

The two doctrinal practices of netwar articulated by Ronfeldt and Arquilla almost sound as if they were formulated after consulting with Doc or Hayduke. One strategy is to “organize and present a network in a way that is as ‘leaderless’. as possible, by having no single leader who stands out, by having (or appearing to have) multiple leaders, and by using consultative and consensus-building mechanisms for decision-making.” The other is to use swarming strategies and tactics by having myriad small units that are normally kept dispersed turn to converge on a target from all directions, conduct an attack, and then redisperse to prepare for the next operation” (16).

The media’s response to the gang’s activities and literal interpretation of “Rudolf the Red” (the fictitious name through which the acts of sabotage were claimed) is illustrative of how molecular forms of struggle make them difficult to expose by those who assume that there has to be a hierarchy and a chain of responsibility

Rudolf the Red is not an Indian, asserts Navajo Tribal Chairman. Rudolf the Red *is* an Indian, insists Jack Broken-Nose Watahomagie, self-styled “war chief” of the Shoeshine Crazy Dogs. Speculations rife. Indian or non-Indian, these depredations are the work not of one man but of a well-organized and large-scale conspiracy, informed sources disclosed privately. Coal company has long history of labor troubles (277)

One could only wish that media pundits and policy consultants had read *The Monkey Wrench Gang* before 2001.

Yet, across three decades, both Abbey and the RAND analysts have arguably miscalculated the broader significance of netwar-type struggle. A sobering insight comes from Felix Guattari, who rightfully points out that “it is not just a matter of struggling against material enslavement and the visible forms of repression, but also, and above all, of creating a whole lot of alternative ways of doing things, of functioning.” (Guattari,



*Molecular Revolution* 263). The key question is whether these micro-revolutions “remain contained within restricted areas of the socius” or establish “a new interconnectedness that links one with another” which would lead to “a real revolution [...] capable of taking on board not only specific local problems but the management of the great economic units” (ibid.). After all, molecular structures have also been successfully used for neo-fascist, fundamentalist or other unsavory purposes. Deleuze and Guattari note that “What makes fascism dangerous is its molecular or micropolitical power, for it is a mass movement: a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism” (215) - a statement that has been thoroughly vindicated by political developments over the last decades.

### **Wilderness and its Discontents**

Abbey repeatedly expressed his neo-Luddite and anarchist beliefs in no uncertain terms. For instance: “In the realm of ideal politics, I’m some sort of agrarian, barefoot wilderness eco-freak anarchist. One of my favorite thinkers is Prince Kropotkin. Another is Henry Thoreau” (Loeffler 31). His opposition was not to a particular system of production, but to technocracy in general: as he noted in his journals, “Not socialism, not capitalism is the enemy but - industry and technology carried to excess, to and beyond the point of madness” (Lindholdt 110). And in the novel, it appears “the evil is in the food, in the noise, in the crowding, in the stress, in the water, in the air” (180). In other words, in all facets of civilization.

The earlier mention of madness is intriguing. Madness has traditionally played an ambivalent role in cultural understandings of the relationship between humans and nature. In Western culture, humanity is perceived as somehow disjointed from the natural world, and Abbey’s equation of madness and hyper-technology follows that line of thought. Yet at the same time, madness has also been associated with the rejection of civilization. Abbey’s novel treads that path as well. Hayduke is described as “Young George, all fire and passion, a good healthy psychopath” (181). But in all fairness, by regular social standards, Doc and Seldom aren’t particularly sane either. The romantic theme of madness as associated with wilderness and a flight from civilization was also present in Abbey’s journals:

My favorite melodramatic theme is of the harried anarchist, a wounded wolf, struggling toward the green hills, or the black-white alpine mountains, or the purple-golden desert range, and liberty. Will he make it? Or will the FBI shoot him down on the very threshold of wilderness and freedom? Obviously. (Loeffler 36)

However, likeable as Abbey’s characters are, wilderness has always been a loaded concept. William Cronon argues that “there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness [...] In virtually all of its manifestations, wilderness represents a flight from history” (Cronon 79), or, more precisely, “the false hope of an escape from responsibility, the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave marks on our world” (80). He links the concept of wilderness with the imperialist frontier myth that “wilderness was the last

bastion of rugged individualism (77) and notes that, for cultural imperialists like Owen Wister and Theodore Roosevelt, “civilization contaminated its inhabitants and absorbed them into the faceless, collective, contemptible life of the crowd” (78).

Lawrence Buell articulates a similar critique when stating that “What the first European settlers of North America saw as primordial or ‘empty’ space, and what their descendants persist in thinking of as ‘wilderness,’ had been somebody else’s place since the first humans arrived millennia before” (Buell 67). And Giovanna Di Chiro, an advocate of the environmental justice movement, criticizes the mainstream environmental movement for upholding “the same underlying colonial philosophy of nature as ‘other’ to human culture” (310) and holds that “some humans, especially the poor, are also the victims of environmental destruction and pollution and that, furthermore, some human cultures live in ways that are relatively sound ecologically” (301). Di Chiro’s perspective is on the whole representative of emerging trends in environmental criticism that, in Buell’s terms, has evolved “from imaging life-in-place as deference to the claims of (natural) environment toward an understanding of place-making as a culturally inflected process in which nature and culture must be seen as a mutuality rather than as separable domains” (67).

While Cronon does not mention Abbey in his article, he does take direct aim at Dave Foreman for writing of Earth Firsters that “we believe we must return to being animal, to glorifying in our sweat, hormones, tears and blood” and that “we struggle against the modern compulsion to become dull, passionless androids.” According to Cronon, Foreman “is following in the footsteps of Owen Wister” (84). Indeed, evoking exalted notions of soil, blood and assorted body fluids do inevitably bring to mind uncomfortable parallels. Cronon also examines the physical attributes of open spaces that anti-anthropocentric environmentalists (like Edward Abbey) set out to protect from human interference:

By teaching us to fetishize sublime places and wide open country, these peculiarly American ways of thinking about wilderness encourage us to adopt too high a standard for what counts as “natural.” If it isn’t hundreds of square miles big, if it doesn’t give us God’s eye views or grand vistas, if it doesn’t permit us the illusion that we are alone on the planet, then it really isn’t natural. (86-87)

Would *The Monkey Wrench Gang* have been as popular and as readable if its protagonists had fought over some unspectacular, non-sublime piece of land rather than the desert of the American West? That is a question that may prove how deep seated notions of wilderness and civilization are.

Finally, there is a further reason why Abbey’s writing should be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt. As noted earlier, concepts of space, place and wilderness are often not only imperialistic, but also exclusionary. That may translate into the sort of dubious politics that Deleuze and Guattari certainly *wouldn’t* like (or at least one would hope so). One of Abbey’s many controversial statements on immigration was: “How many of us, truthfully, would *prefer* to be submerged in the Latin-Caribbean version of civilization? ... Harsh words, but somebody has to say them” (Williamson 92). This plays exactly into Buell’s critique of exaggerated place-attachment: “taking a good thing too far (place-attachment and stewardship at the local level) manifestly can produce bad results too: maladaptive sedentariness, inordinate hankering to recover the world we have lost, xenophobic stigmatization of outsiders and wanderers.” (68)

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