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This is the End: Earth First! and Apocalyptic Utopianism

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“The ice may be coming soon to wipe our nasty little case of acne off the broad smile of Ma Gaia... And good riddance too” (Lee Earth First! 89).

To smash or not to smash? The use of violence against property is a controversial issue that faces most, if not all, environmentalist groups, creating ideological seams and fault lines that frequently tear groups apart. From internal debates over the morality of engaging in the dangerous and costly destruction of property, to the categorization of ELF and Earth First! as the most serious domestic terrorist threat in the United States (Vanderheiden 425), the use of violence within radical environmentalist groups is a complicated issue filled with emotion, teleological rationalization, political posturing, and economic arguments made by all sides involved. Most mainstream environmental groups abhor the practice, yet they no doubt benefit from the subsequent positive press their campaigns receive in comparison to more radical actions.

This essay will look at the role of violence within radical environmentalist groups that engage in or support the use of ecotage or monkeywrenching. The discussion will be centered around Earth First!, but because of the illegality of the actions and the decentralized nature of the groups and individuals using these tactics, it is pertinent to groups like the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Earth Liberation Front (ELF), Rainforest Action Network (RAN), and numerous unnamed groups and individuals that engage in strategic monkeywrenching (or ecotage) in the defense of nature. My analysis will begin by looking at the philosophical underpinnings of monkeywrenching in terms of apocalyptic and utopian discourses within the movement. I hope to show how violence

functions to create a form of subjectivity that can account for the dialectic tension and irreconcilability of utopian and apocalyptic discourses within the group. This tension, with its simultaneous elevation and denigration of the Human, is fundamental to the ecological subjectivity of the members and allows them to act despite a truly apocalyptic belief in the reality of biological meltdown. In other words, it is precisely the impossibility of redemption, and the no-compromise defense of the earth, that allows the movement to create an apocalyptic-utopian subjectivity that, while perhaps impractical for the larger population, is important in articulating the gravity of the ecological crisis and radicalizing environmental discourse and action. In the second section, I will show how the eco-warrior functions within the group as well as within larger environmental circles to provide a counter-narrative to benign images of industrial progress by providing an archetypal figure of resistance that marries the modern-primitive, nature-culture, and apocalyptic-utopian together. The narrative violence of the eco-warrior provides a way to mobilize a very disparate group of people on the margins of both society and more 'legitimate' environmental groups.

Earth First! (EF!) is a very controversial group, even within radical and reformist environmentalist circles. They have been on the receiving end of many attacks, most prominently from the Sierra Club and social ecologists like Murray Bookchin, with accusations of misanthropy, essentialism, racism, sexism, eco-brutalism, and fascism forming common retorts to the controversial publications of the group (see further Bookchin, Levine, Manes, Luke). Much of the controversy stems from the apocalyptic and millenarian undertones of the application of EF!'s central ideological pillar: the principle of biocentric equality, which states that "all living creatures and communities

possess intrinsic value, [and] inherent worth” (Foreman *Eco-warrior* 26-27). Combined with a strong Malthusian belief in the role of technology and overpopulation leading to a vast overextension of the earth’s carrying capacity, EF! takes the tenants of Deep Ecology and extends them into an apocalyptic conception of imminent biological meltdown. According to Christopher Manes, “the understanding of radical environmentalism thus begins at the end, the end of the world as we know it, the meltdown of biologic diversity that our industrial culture has recklessly set in motion” (Manes 22).

In laying out the principles of monkeywrenching, Dave Foreman, one of the founders of Earth First!, reminds the reader that “they are engaged in the most moral of all actions: protecting life, defending Earth” (*Ecodefense* 11). Despite its apparent illegality, Foreman argues that monkeywrenching is a part of American history, beginning with the Boston Tea Party and the Underground Railroad, and enshrined in the words of one of the countries founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson: “To lose our country by a scrupulous adherence to written law would be to lose the law itself” (*Ecodefense* 13). The apocalyptic implications of biological meltdown justify the use of ‘illegal’ tactics such as tree spiking, the destruction of heavy equipment, and arson. According to Foreman, the slow pace of official change and the tendency for the system to co-opt and pacify radicals by giving them a small place near the seat of power adds more impetus for deploying radical tactics in the defence of the earth.

Drawing on countless scientific studies and traditional environmental knowledge (TEK), members of EF! “understand themselves to be elites whose awareness of the biological meltdown imparts them a special role in saving the planet’s biodiversity” (Lee

Apocalypse 62). There is a sense of quasi-religious calling that reverberates in statements like this that helps shore up a sense of group identity in the face of overwhelming opposition, which will be discussed later. Confirming the severity of biological meltdown, the United Nations *Millennium Assessment Report (MAR)*, conducted by 1300 researchers in 95 countries, warns that two thirds of the 24 ecosystems in the world are in major decline and in danger of collapse. Moreover, in the next 100 years, 32 per cent of amphibians, 12 per cent of birds, and 23 per cent of mammals could become extinct (*MAR* 59). This amounts to the staggering fact that “over the past few hundred years, humans have increased the species extinction rate by as much as 1,000 times background rates typical over the planet’s history” (*MAR* 59). Earth First! perceives this meltdown as a war, echoing Raymond Dasman’s argument that “world war III has already begun, and that it is the war of industrial humans against the Earth” (*Eco-warrior* viii). In this war, Earth First! does not side with humanity, and the morality of violence and radical change is at the very heart of the movement. As the name suggests, the mandatory exclamation mark indicates that above all else, the defence of the Earth is the number one priority. Earth First! celebrates the Copernican trauma by emphasizing biocentric equality and thus de-centering humanity from its artificially elevated position as privileged pinnacle of evolution.

Because of the apocalyptic implications of biological meltdown, reform tactics are considered too slow. The founders of the group, Dave Foreman, Mike Roselle, Ron Kezar, Bart Koehler, and Howie Wolke all came from careers in the Big Ten environmental organizations, groups like the Sierra Club and the Auburn society, and truly believed that they could work within the system. The conservation movement

gained a strong foothold in political circles in the 70's, and with the election of Jimmy Carter, who was considered to be a conservationist at heart, many environmentalists were optimistic that much would be done to protect the remaining tracts of wilderness in the U.S. For many, the final straw came in 1977 when the Forest Service published the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II (RARE). In it, the service decided that of the 62 million acres of roadless areas that qualified for Wilderness protection, only 15 million would be designated as such, of which 32 were immediately opened up for development (*Eco-warrior* 13-16).

For Foreman and many like him, this was seen as proof that the government was hopelessly entwined with corporate interests and that legal means were ineffective and vulnerable to co-option. Earth First! was born out of frustration with 'legitimate' means and considered the use of violence to be an important tactic in supporting their cause. In fact, the acceptance of violence on principle, if not in tactics, was a key distinguishing feature of Earth First!. Because "the current situation—morally, ecologically, and politically—is so grave... tactics considered objectionable by most are... necessary and even obligatory" (Taylor 17). If the government was unwilling to side with nature, then the movement would have to hit them where they would notice: the pocketbook. Foreman ideologically defends the actions of monkeywrenching in the tradition of Martin Luther King's defense of civil disobedience: while "it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends... it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends" (qtd in Vanderheiden 435). Therefore, "putting grinding compound into the crankcase of a logging yarder may not be civil, but crucifying three and a half billion years of evolution on a cross of gold is far more uncivil" (*Ecowarrior* 131).

However, at the bottom of the apocalyptic theme of biological meltdown, EF! is utopian in its vision of Big Wilderness. Foreman argues that “we need nothing more than this paradise in which we were born” (Lee *Earth First!* 53). And from this sentiment comes the demand for a system of 716 million acres of interconnected wilderness preserves across the United States (ibid 71). The *MAR* confirms that the most significant cause of biodiversity loss is the destruction of habitat (*Biodiversity* 18). This is precisely why Earth First! focuses on creating wilderness areas where the important work of evolution can continue uninhibited. Because “over half of the 14 biomes that the MA assessed have experienced a 20–50% conversion to human use” (*Biodiversity* 12), the need to halt and reverse anthropogenic manipulation of habitats is vital for the continued survival of non-human nature. Humans now use “40% of global net primary production” (Alberti et al 1). Moreover, according to the *MAR*, a further danger of the reduction of biodiversity is the threshold effect, whereby an ecosystem can collapse suddenly when a series of synergistic feedback loops are set in motion (*Biodiversity* 16). We have seen this in the collapse of fisheries around the world, and this lends significant credence to the apocalyptic tone of Earth First!, because while things seem bad now, once a threshold is crossed, a series of non-linear changes occur that can lead to very rapid and widespread effects. Thus the apocalyptic urgency of Earth First! is spurred on by a belief that we must act immediately if we are to avoid destruction.

Foreman compares ecodefense to an antibody working for Gaia to get rid of the Humanpox (*Ecowarrior* 58). The antibody comes in the form of Gaia defending the cauldron of evolution, wilderness, and thus Earth First! demands “at least 1 million acres in each bioregion connected by wilderness corridors to allow genetic material to flow”

(Levine 73). Human activities would be directed towards restoring these wilderness areas and repopulating them with native flora and fauna. Foreman considers this “a truly revolutionary ecological vision” (ibid 73). Big wilderness is seen as the “important work of organizing the new ecological society that will emerge out of the ashes of the old” (ibid 73). Modern industrial society is seen as dystopian: it is a “a driverless hotrod without breaks going 90 miles an hour down a dead-end alley with a brick wall at the end” (ibid 71). Because industrial society is figured as rotten to the core, the apocalyptic clean-sweep is a positive thing. In a sense, it is better if the hotrod hits the wall sooner rather than later, as the planet stands a chance of recovering if some wilderness remains. The work of saving wilderness is essentially seen as damage control, providing Nature with enough genetic variability to rebound after the crash. Because EF!’s vision is apocalyptic and not millenarian, they are not particularly concerned with the survival of humanity, but of Nature itself. Unlike millenarians, who see redemption for humanity after the apocalypse, EF!ers tend to be less concerned with the fate of humans than they are with the Earth itselfⁱ. The transition towards a new society is essentially the complete destruction of the old. Very little is seen as redeemable, and thus the only solution must involve a clean sweep. This is summarized in Edward Abbey’s vision of the new world:

Scattered human populations modest in number that live by fishing, hunting, food-gathering, small-scale farming and ranching, that assemble once a year in the ruins of abandoned cities for great festivals of moral, spiritual, artistic and intellectual renewal—a people for whom the wilderness is not a playground but their natural and native home. (qtd in Manes 241)

Foreman argues that you cannot work within the system when “the system is fundamentally anti-ecological, elitist, and stacked against you” (Levine 78). The basic

strategy of monkeywrenching is therefore to save what we can before the hotrod hits the wall.

In response to social ecologist's significantly more millenarian belief in the ultimate perfectibility of human society, Foreman responds to Bookchin by stating:

I am significantly more pessimistic about the future than [Bookchin]. I am not sure we really have enough time to turn things around before most of the world is overtaken by famine, genocide, war, totalitarianism, plagues, and economic collapse (Levine 113).

Foreman combines dystopian pessimism with a misanthropic utopian vision of a world significantly depopulated by humans. His dystopianism can be characterized by its ambivalence towards humanity, for his reverence for Nature is indeed utopian. For Foreman, there will be no *dues ex machina* for the moribund play that is industrial civilization—only a monkeywrench, a tomahawk and a clenched fist remain. EF!ers not only believe that the apocalypse is immanent, but Foreman would often state that “the sooner the system collapses, the better” (Lee *Apocalypse* 125). According to Martha Lee,

the movement's first generation of adherents transformed its millenarian ideology into an apocalyptic belief system. They still believed they were to play a critical role in bringing about the appropriate conditions for the apocalypse to occur, but they no longer believed that they, or any humans, would necessarily be a part of the new millennium (129).

Unlike social ecologists, who believe that “after experiencing the environmental apocalypse, human civilization will be altered in such a way as to be more environmentally responsible,” EF! celebrates the apocalypse as a cleansing (Lee *Apocalypse* 120). Wilderness is the transition strategy for the revolution, and Earth First!ers understand their role as preparing for the impending apocalypse by easing the transition into a post-apocalyptic and possibly post-human world. Apocalypse, to a

certain extent, is therefore a necessary stage. In many ways, monkeywrenching works to revive the “Paleolithic mind” of Max Oelschlaeger’s *The Idea of Wilderness* (200). Earth First!, by accepting agriculture as humanity’s fall from the “Edenlike condition of hunting-gathering,” (Oelschlaeger 23) works as a tribe of “Paleolithic counterrevolutionary[ies]” (ibid 8) that reject the progress narrative of modernity in favor of what I call a future primitivism. Monkeywrenching is a key strategy here because not only does it aide in protecting wilderness, but it does so by attacking the dynamo of industrial civilization, seeking to expel the machine from the garden by engaging the enemy on its own terms: the commodification of nature.

In order to understand the apocalyptic utopianism of Earth First! it is crucial to examine the role of time in the ontology and epistemology of the movement. Earth First!ers see themselves “as a resurgence of a primal culture that has been quiescent since the Neolithic” (Manes 237). In a sense, they channel this culture into the present, but ultimately, hope that it will manifest in the post-apocalyptic landscape. They are channeling the spirit of an ‘authentic’ human nature that has been suppressed and alienated by (agricultural) civilization. Foreman’s contention that “we haven’t had any progress on this planet in sixteen thousand years. [And] the only good invention since the atlatl... is the monkeywrench” (qtd in Manes 228), reverberates with the call to eradicate the root of all evil, the agricultural-industrial complex. Moreover, “by acting in defense of wilderness Earth First!ers could restore the Pleistocene and in doing redeem themselves” (Lee *EF!* 84). Yet this can be no return, for we will have the lessons of the last 10,000 years to guide us. The apocalyptic vision of EF! is a synthesis of the not-yet and the once-was united in an atavistic vision of future primitivism. Unrealistic perhaps,

but as Christopher Manes states, it provides “a sense of direction, of context, for an environmental sensibility beyond technocracy” (240). He rejects the notion that radical environmentalism is primitivistic, essentialistic, idealistic and utopian. He argues that it is “our way of life that is utopian, in the sense that it is unrealistic and naïve and cannot realize its fantasy of unlimited affluence and power free from ecological constraints” (238).

Moreover, this future primitivism shifts temporality away from a linear, technocratic rationality, and towards an organic, circular, ecological temporality that (re)situates humanity within the great flow of being we are fracturing. The desire to return is a desire to reinsert ourselves into an evolutionary flow over 3.5 billion years old, and which the apocalyptic visions of biological meltdown suggest is becoming dangerously destabilized by the spread of industrial civilization. In a sense, a linear conception of fall and redemption does not apply, for Earth First!’s temporality is cyclical and thus the desire for a Paleolithic harmony is not atavistic in the strictest sense, but rather, seeks to affirm a deep sense of harmony and contiguity with Nature. While it is easy, and valid, to critique Earth First!’s call for a return to the Pleistocene as hopelessly romantic and naïve, relying on a mythologized and essentialist prelapsarian Eden, the fact remains that many people are still attracted to the all-to-problematic pure wilderness of Earth First!’s “weird, cowboy twist on Zen Buddhism” (Levine 45). Murray Bookchin is particularly harsh in his criticisms of the ecomystical “postmodern parody of the noble savage” (Bookchin 120). He argues that in addition to being bad anthropology, anarcho-primitivist ecomystics rely on “romantic caricatures of social harmony and virtue” (Bookchin 120). Modern-day Natives often become living symbols of “mythic notions of

a pristine and primitive past that probably never existed” (122). While his point has undoubted value, I think that Bookchin is too quick to dismiss this romantic longing. While many ecocritics and theorists, including myself, have jumped to criticize the problems of valorizing a pristine wilderness opposed to a corrupt civilization (see further Cronon, Luke, Merchant), something about the vision inspires people to put their bodies and lives on the line, and as such, it deserves more than being thrown to the academic wolves. Why does the vision of a primitive holism still hold, and is there anything salvageable from what I agree is hugely problematic and essentially dichotomous re-evaluation of the nature-culture relationship? I would like to suggest that it is more productive to look at the ontology and epistemology of future primitivism as “temporary liberated zones where dominant discourses and cultural norms can be symbolically countered, and alternative discursive practices—such as identity—can be socially created” (Ingalsbee 272). As such, these zones are necessarily contradictory, messy, and often violent, but I would like to suggest, that within this space it is possible to confront larger questions of kinship, power, and subjectivity in a way that is potentially very productive.

Moreover, while monkeywrenching is fundamentally an act of material sabotage, it functions on a highly symbolic level, creating what can be seen as a *biocentric creation myth* for the emergence of a future society capable of finding new (old) ways of re-inhabiting nature without dominating it. The impossibility of thinking completely outside the hegemony of industrial oppression predisposes that any attempt will seem hopelessly utopian or atavistic. However, if we understand ecodefense and ecowarrior activities as seeking to shift what Raymond Williams refers to as the “structures of feeling”

surrounding the ecocidal tendencies of industrial civilization, then the (im)possibility of ecological consciousness is simply that which is not-quite-yet, but once-was. The dialectic tension between negation and creation is played out in the creative destruction of monkeywrenching, where ecotage is an opening up of epistemological, ontological, and subject positions that give us a glimpse of “the space of the utopian leap” (Jameson 38), no matter how tentative and potentially contradictory that space may seem. The transgressive ecotopianism of monkeywrenching engages with Castoriadis’ “radical imaginary” by challenging the capitalist utopia of unlimited material abundance and a permanent growth economy. By reaching into the deep time of an (imagined) past where humans lived in harmony with nature, Earth First! negotiates between the past and present in order to create an ecotopian hope for the future. While this hope rests on the destruction of civilization as we know it, because anthropocentrism is understood to be the source of unsustainable human civilization, the solution must begin with its negation, or in other words, misanthropy.

On a symbolic level, the guerilla warfare of monkeywrenching creates alternative socio-economic and ecological forms that threaten to destabilize the naturalized organization of capital with radically different models of the ‘good life.’ Monkeywrenching can thus be read to be as an attempt to escape the dystopic reality of capitalism into a utopic future through an apocalyptic clean-sweep. Because Earth First!’s utopianism is “a retreat from modernity rather than a development upon it” (Pepper 9), they rely on a future primitive that valorizes pre-industrial social organization, self-sufficiency, and local participation. Dave Foreman’s embrace of the apocalypse stems from his misanthropic philosophy of biocentric equality, for while “the future ruins of

industrial modernity is a humanist *dystopia*, to deep-ecological Gaianists this is a *utopia*. For although destructiveness and greed have returned society to a primitive state, nature continues to thrive” (Pepper 10).

The Narrative Violence of the Eco-warrior

While ecotage seeks “to alter economic incentives that are presently unjustly skewed toward ecological destruction” (Vanderheiden 444), it is also highly pedagogical and performative, in the sense that it provides a mythologized warrior figure for a decentralized movement. In outlining the principles of Earth First! Dave Foreman states that “we are warriors. Earth First! is a warrior society” (*Eco-warrior* 33). While many in Earth First! rejected violence, the myth of the eco-warrior nonetheless remained a potent symbol of the movement’s resolve. It becomes a kind of origin story that expresses a core set of beliefs about the relationship between humans and nature that simultaneously elevates the eco-warrior to mythic and moral heights, but also places him/her in their rightful place, as just another member of the web of life. “The mystique and lore of ‘night work’ pervades our tribe, and with it a general acceptance that strategic monkeywrenching is a legitimate tool for the defence of the wild” (*Eco-warrior* 34). Ecotage is the material and metaphoric unmaking of civilization which allows for new, non-hierarchical, biocentric subject positions to be imagined and lived.

The tension between self-aggrandizement and self-effacement is particularly difficult to reconcile in the subjectivity of the eco-warrior, which relies on a religious sense of calling and duty while also denigrating the very idea of the Human as a kind of disease. How does one commit oneself to a calling that is based on the idea that humans

constitute a kind of virus? Conversely, the very action of ecotage seems to contradict the notion that humans are unnatural and agents of the apocalypse. It is precisely this tension, however, between a Fanonian subjectivity forged in violent refusal, and a humble offering of oneself to Brother Bear, which reveals the significance of the eco-warrior subjectivity and signals a complicated dynamic between those who espouse and are willing to act violently, and those who work in supportive, but non-violent ways. In other words, violence operates symbolically in order to provide a series of myths and images that contribute to a deeper solidarity and ideology, even when debate over the tactics threatens to rip the group apart. The notion that ecotage is not for everyone, but that it is a respected tactic, creates a kind of warrior-class that radicalizes the centre by sheer centrifugal force, while also providing those that believe in the humanpox with a means of redemption, a vaccine if you will. Direct action becomes a sort of atonement that allows the members to purify themselves of the sins of collective humanity without necessarily committing to the millenarian belief in the ultimate perfectibility of humanity. While this may seem like a contradiction, and in many ways it is, the image and reality of the eco-warrior plays an important role in forging an ecological subjectivity that can deal with the apocalyptic implications inherent in the belief of immanent biological meltdown. For if one does believe that the apocalypse is coming, why bother acting.

In radical circles not necessarily contained by a name, the eco-warrior is an important figure. Edward Abbey's *The Monkeywrench Gang* is a perfect example of the role of narrative violence in the formation of new subject positions for radical environmentalists. While the eco-warrior operates on the level of myth, she is not mythic, and in the same way that future primitivism brings the past into the present, the mythic

figure of the eco-warrior is a profoundly practical and real individual. This hero is necessary for inspiring action: many real Earth First! actions make it into this kind of mythography, and Abbey's book itself was inspired by and inspired real life eco-warriors. They become a symbolic corpus of idealized subject-positions that provide a practical and mythological grounding for future actions, even if those do not involve monkeywrenching. The monkeywrencher is a symbol of the not-yet, providing solidarity for a decentralized group of radical environmentalists and potentially awakening the consciousness and imagination of moderate environmentalists to the extreme edges of the ideology. "Though our way is hard, the hard is our way. Our cause is just (just one damn thing after another) and God's on our side. Or vice versa. We're against a *mad machine*, Seldom, which mangles mountains and devours men. Somebody has to try to stop it. That's us" (Abbey 216). Here the monkeywrencher is an agent of the not-yet, and by acting in the face of impossible odds and facing a monster they cannot defeat, a hopeless task becomes a task of hope. Even if they cannot save wilderness, they awaken the wilderness within through a Fanonian "all-cleansing fire, [and] all-purifying flame" (Abbey 10).

Perhaps the ecowarriors most profound role is the effect he/she has on awakening the "wilderness gene" and challenging the hegemony of power-over nature (*Eco-warrior* 66). They provide a model by which to embolden the spirit of environmentalists, and hopefully those who are neutral or opposed, by showing that struggle is the necessary first step to ushering in an utopia. It is only in struggle that the "the space of the utopian leap" is revealed (Jameson *Utopian* 38). The eco-warrior is a bridge between base and superstructure, operating on both simultaneously. The "creative destruction" (Abbey 225)

of monkeywrenching challenges the faith in systemic change from above, and instead, infuses “forms of self-determination and articulates alternative conceptions of how the world should be” in the unalienated power-to of the ecowarrior’s refusal (Holloway 156). The ecowarrior’s scream pierces the barrier of nature and culture, fusing the two in a negation of negation, the dialectic of which straddles the boundary between utopia and dystopian by suggesting another world is possible and already exists. The ecowarrior is an agent of time, accelerating the entropy of the machines decay and returning it to the earth from whence it came, while also reaching back into a long tradition of sabotage and civil disobedience that attempts to provide a space for imagining the not-yet of a concrete utopia rooted in a critique of the material conditions of the present.

Monkeywrenching is such a temporal realignment. Dave Foreman describes a bulldozer as “the Earth, transmogrified into a monster destroying itself. By monkeywrenching it, you liberate a bulldozer’s dharma nature and return it to the Earth” (Levine 46). Monkeywrenching is thus conceptualized as a fleeting utopian moment of pure liberation when the future and past inhabit the moment in a Fanonian explosion of resistance. The scream, the dialectics of negation, unravels and demystifies the naturalized logic of industrial civilization in order to reveal the “root of all evil”: the domination of nature by culture (Jameson *Utopia* 36). The creative destruction of monkeywrenching opens up a space of resistance and creates the possibility for another world. The question becomes, how can you maintain this moment? The present dystopia returns and the totalization of the system reveals itself in the logic of a sublime immobility, for although the act or negation creates a rift in the system, it is only temporary and fleeting.

Thus the struggle of Earth First! must not be limited to destroying equipment, but also focus on a struggle for a new collective identity, one that includes the natural world we are a part of. Timothy Ingalsbee argues that Earth First! is struggling to create a “transpersonal ecological consciousness,” an “ecological self” that unlocks the “wild within” (268). The act of monkeywrenching symbolically and materially enacts a release of the wild within by aligning the monkeywrencher’s sense of self with the entire biosphere. A utopian-dystopian dialectical space creates “new cultural identities of ecotopian human beings that can emerge from and integrate with the natural world” (ibid 268). Foreman is careful not to incite too much violence, stating that “we will not officially spike trees or roads but we will report on the activities of those who do. They are heroes” (Lee *EF!* 67). This latter part is important because it indicates that while monkeywrenching is a material act, it is also important in the creation of a deep-ecological vanguard that reinforces the groups no-compromise stance: Earth must come First! The obligatory exclamation mark reminds us of this. The ecowarrior is engaged in a “war with industrial capitalism” (Lee *EF!* 69), and as such, heroes become necessary components of the collective subjectivity of radical environmentalists. For those unable to place their bodies in between the machine and wilderness, the ecowarrior provides a lens through which to refract their subjectivity. She is the embodiment of the no compromise ideal, even if in reality not everyone can take the same steps. The movement’s cowboy image resonates with many people, and the ecowarrior spirit emboldens civil disobedience actions, even if non-violent, by shifting the standard further towards the extreme and providing a mythic vanguard. As Steven Vanderheiden states, “those on the ideological extremes can have the effect of moving the median in the

direction of those extremes” (437). Moreover, in the same way that the good-cop bad-cop dialectic between radical and reform environmentalists benefits the mainstream because they seem much more reasonable, non-violent direct action is seen as more acceptable.

Stories like the oft-repeated tale of Dave Foreman being run over and dragged 100 feet by a logging truck, make their way into the camp-fire tales of a group of people that are marginalized by society. Because of the enormity of facing an entire system of environmental destruction, many people suffer from environmental by-stander apathy and feel there is very little they can do to change the system. This Fanonian moment of violence “hoists the people up to the level of the leader” (Fanon 51), even when it is lived vicariously through narrative. The stories embolden the actions of environmental radicals by providing examples of success in the tradition of David and Goliath narratives. Thus Earth First! need not ‘succeed’ in stopping the despoliation because their effect transcends each particular action and enters a circuit of narrative that infuses the environmental movement with Bloch’s principle of hope. The narrative violence of the ecowarrior mythology is important as a tool of organization, inspiration, and hope. This is especially important in a non-hierarchical, decentralized movement like Earth First! that has no way of disciplining a party line. These stories function as an ideological glue that holds the disparate elements of the movement in a dynamic constellation. Without them, the movement would have no discernable shape or purpose. The mystique of night work and the ideological acceptance of monkeywrenching on principle is what separates Earth First! from many other “soft” environmentalists.

For example, Christopher Manes argues that Earth First!’s first action, the unfurling of a three hundred foot long crack along the Glen Canyon dam was an

“important event in the iconography of the radical environmental movement, dramatizing what a growing number of activists believed: that our technological culture with its intrusions on the natural world had to be curtailed, perhaps undone” (Manes 7-8). These metaphoric forms of narrative violence participate in Castoriadis’ radical imaginary and thus open up a potential new world. They are vital in maintaining social cohesion and providing a kind of quasi-religious redemption for EF!ers who believe they are living in a corrupt world. “By acting in defense of wilderness Earth First!ers could restore the Pleistocene and in doing redeem themselves” (Lee *EF!* 84).

This is what I would like to call visual or ideological monkeywrenching, a tactic that is important in an economy increasingly predicated on the sale of signs. Visual warfare is vital in the ecotage of a visual economy, throwing a monkeywrench into the production of the anesthetizing images of mass culture. When the “world [is] transformed into sheer images of itself” (Jameson *Postmodernism* 18), monkeywrenching must also act on the level of image, providing counter-narratives that challenges the visual hegemony of stylized depictions of benign industrial progress, economic growth, and globalization by revealing exactly what these forces entail: the violent destruction of Nature. As such, the eco-warrior is an important figure for the entire environmental movement, providing a radical imaginary and subject-position that by sheer centrifugal force exerts an influence on the moderate centre. Moreover, the misanthropic impetus of the eco-warrior reverses the role of colonizer and colonized, opening up the individual to be (re)colonized by Nature, in the sense that separation is identified as an illusory state. The act of liberation frees the human from the oppression of industrial capitalism, but also, effaces the identity of the individual into the totality of Nature—literally earth first.

The call for eco-defense is thus an act of narcissistic self-aggrandizement, and also an act of self-effacement that holds in tension the contradictory elements of future primitivism and creates a subject position that is at once outside and within the very system it critiques.

The ecowarrior is a kind of translation matrix that solidifies the spirit of Nature into a body, but also extricates the poison from a sick or dying body. The act of ecotage is the work of mourning, but also a *jouissance* that, in the tension between self-aggrandizement and self-effacement opens up a dialectic space between past-present-future and the base and superstructure that allows for the discourse of redemption to coexist with an apocalyptic discourse of the end. In this liminal space, binaries fail and thereby allow for the construction of subject positions that challenge the clear-cut divisions of traditional dualistic thinking. So while EF! is based on an impossibility, on the one hand, the movements future primitivism and apocalyptic utopianism allows members to redeem themselves without committing to the millenarian undertones of many other environmentalists, and thus holding on to a radical vision of antimodernism that, in its contradictions, can open up the space for imaging a new world beyond technocracy.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Yet, the language of Earth First! can be quite millenarian in the use of imagery of quasi-religious redemption. More on this in the section on narrative violence.