# Form and Responsibility:

# Radical Politics and the Novel in the USA

By

David Carlyle Aitchison

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(English)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2012

Date of final oral examination: 12/12/12

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the final oral committee:

Thomas Schaub, Professor, English
David Zimmerman, Professor, English
Caroline Levine, Professor, English
Russ Castronovo, Professor, English
Michael Bernard-Donals, Professor, Jewish Studies and English

**Table of Contents**

## Acknowledgments

For instruction, guidance, and friendship my thanks go out to my adviser Thomas Schaub and readers David Zimmerman, Caroline Levine, and Russ Castronovo in the Department of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, whose influences I am happy to recognize throughout this dissertation: never was a moment wasted with these rigorous thinkers who teach and mentor with inexhaustible generosity, energy, and delight. Similar thanks go to my external reader Michael Bernard-Donals, without whom my proposal and defense conferences would have been much less thought provoking. Though not directly involved, Sean Teuton and Susan Friedman also lent nuance to select lines of inquiry—as did Alan Nadel under the auspices of Dartmouth College's *Futures of American Studies* summer institute.

I am likewise indebted to Jennifer Berner, Emily Clark, and Sarah Harrison—friends, peers, and constant readers with a knack for encouragement and good advice.

It was a privilege to present and discuss parts of this project at the Marxist Literary Group's Institute on Culture and Society, *What is Revolution?*, held at the University of Illinois, Chicago (June 2011), the Norman Mailer Society's Eighth International Conference at the University of South Florida, Sarasota (November 2010), and the Society for Utopian Studies' 35th Annual Meeting on *Civil Rights, Social Justice, and the Midwest* at the University of Milwaukee, Milwaukee (October 2010). These and other trips were made possible with generous subsidies from UW's English Department, Americanist Literature and Culture Research Circle, and Graduate School. Further thanks are owed the Graduate School for allowing me to complete this project as a Chancellor's Fellow.

My Ph.D., finally, would have been unthinkable without the many peers, mentors, helpers, and companions who have encouraged and inspired me throughout my graduate studies at Madison—who are, I am happy to say, far too many to mention: roommates, office mates, fellow writing center tutors and composition instructors, fellow Americanists, program directors and coordinators, librarians, secretaries, students, and slithy toves. I salute them all.

# Introduction

This dissertation examines the ways in which artists and critics have implicated the American novel in struggles for social revolution. The critical task is to inquire into the feasibility of "committed" literature in the Cold War and late-capitalist eras, and to understand why writers still assume the novel, of all possible forms, might compel us to rethink our social and political responsibilities.

## Radical Politics and the Novel

My primary subject is the "radical novel"—a genre category familiar to literary studies since at least Walter B. Rideout's mid-century survey, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society* (1956). Rideout accounted for two waves of leftist fiction in the early to mid twentieth century, a first wave of socialist novels produced in the early decades, and a second that peaked in the 1930s with the proletarian novel. If by twenty-first century standards his archive has come to seem overly biased toward white, male, urban, East-coast writers, it nevertheless remains a significant artifact, an undertaking that daringly spoke for the achievements of the U.S. literary left when the fires lit during the McCarthy witch-hunts were still smoldering. The classic radical novel as Rideout defined it was "one which demonstrates, either explicitly or implicitly, that its author objects to the human suffering imposed by some socioeconomic system and *advocates that the system be fundamentally changed*" (12, emphasis in original). More precisely, it was "an attempt to express through the literary form of the novel a predominantly Marxist point of view toward society" (3). Though we might take exception to this conflation of the radical and the revolutionary—to the extent that radical acts can thrive regardless of politics, let alone revolutionary politics, to guide them—

what Rideout called the radical novel was radical precisely to the extent it sanctioned social revolution. In this dissertation, I follow this loose but fundamental prescription.

The desire for revolution and reform, of course, is hardly exclusive to the left. That is, there is no intrinsic dimension to what we mean by radicalism, no essential radical identity. It is, rather, an oppositional impulse, arising out of dissatisfaction with the order of things and a sense that intervention is both necessary and possible. As Rideout intimated, that literary radicalism in the twentieth-century USA coincided most popularly with the politics and aesthetics of the left was, in a sense, incidental—though by no means historically insignificant. Put another way, defining a subgenre of rightwing radical novels would be just as feasible and just as valuable an enterprise, though for different reasons: a genre coalescing around, say, Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905) and Andrew Macdonald's *The Turner Diaries* (1980), along with more recent fictions by Martin Nakell (*Two Fields that Face and Mirror Each Other* 2001), Francine Prose (*Changed man* 2005) and Glen Beck (*The Overton Window* 2010) to name a few. But in this dissertation I am interested in novels of the left, primarily because leftist logics of self and society are sometimes so at odds with certain conventional elements of the novel—the ways, for example, fiction indulges so readily in private desires and internalist logics removed from collective concerns—that they lend themselves well, in their struggles to find viable solutions, to theorizing what it means for a novel to be political.

I take my lead here from Rideout, who, in concluding his survey, remarked that the genre's future was not only "precarious" but that it "probably lies almost wholly with the independent radical" (290)—a prediction ostensibly understandable in light of the mid-century collapse of the American left, but one that has nevertheless proven problematic for some scholars. Take M. Keith Booker, who in his own research guide to *The Modern American Novel*

*of the Left* (1999) otherwise acknowledges his debt to Rideout's archive: as Booker sees it, Rideout's conclusion entails "a rejection of communism in favor of a particularly enthusiastic endorsement of the individualist rhetoric of Americanism. It means, in short, a focus on individuals, rather than classes, as the agents of history, as if an isolated individual, alone, could ever determine the course of public events" (*The Post-Utopian Imagination: American Culture in the Long 1950s* 2002, 74). Booker's chagrin, however, stems from an inattentive reading of Rideout's real subject, which is not as Booker implies the Marxist novel but a more diverse body of work that happened to yield "a *predominantly* Marxist point of view." Indeed, Rideout says explicitly that the archive could have represented novels engaging with other radicalisms, such as anarchism, though no such novels had been produced in the period: as he puts it, "[a]narchist literature was limited to the critical, the philosophical, and the polemical" (90). At odds with Booker, I take Rideout to speak soundly when he makes the point that the radical genre, after a half-century of coalescing around the revolutionary-Marxist paradigm, was changing—that it was beginning to engage with political logics that, if maddeningly for some, increasingly deviated from the classic Marxist paradigm.

In the decades following the first publication of *The Radical Novel in the United States* (it received a second printing in 1966 and a third in 1992), the tendency seems to have been to discuss literary radicalism, whether in fiction, poetry, or criticism, according to a narrative of rise and decline: one that began with the Bohemians of Greenwich Village, peaked with the Communists of the 1930s, and faltered in the thick of postwar anti-Stalinist backlash. This, at least, is the story told by Daniel Aaron in *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961) and James Gilbert in *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (1968). The tendency to figure the "red decade" of the 1930s as the hub

of American literary radicalism was concretized further with the renaissance in leftist studies beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, spearheaded by works such as Alan Wald's *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left From the 1930s to the 1980s* (1987), Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945* (1989), Paula Rabinowitz's *Labor and Desire: Women's Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (1991), and Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (1993). Wald, to be sure, often looks well beyond the 1930s in his historical biographies, but the thirties spirit typically provides the motive source for his inquiries. He, along with Rabinowitz and Foley, made the most memorable and enduring interventions in the archive as Rideout left it, accomplishing a richer and more nuanced concept of both radical novel and novelist in the USA in terms of race, sex, ethnicity, regionality, and politics. All three, notably, and in the company of Nelson, refused to relinquish the primacy of class as a keyword for inquiry precisely at a moment when it was unfashionable with scholars, critics, and culture workers alike.[1]

1930s Marxism, then, remained and in many ways still remains the touchstone for studies in U.S. literary radicalism.[2] But just as—if not more—relevant for this dissertation was the further diversification of the field when scholars began to shift attention to radical politics and the novel after the Old Left. Signal works here were Maria Lauret's *Liberating Literature:*

[1] In this period Alan Block also overtly took up where Rideout left off, extending the Marxist archive temporally, if modestly, with the addition to the archive of three novels written since the 1950s in *Anonymous Toil: A Re-Evaluation of the American Radical Novel in the Twentieth Century* (1992).

[2] As, for example, in the work of Laura Browder (*Rousing the Nation: Radical Culture in Depression America* 1998), Robert Shulman (*Power of Political Art: The 1930s Literary Left Reconsidered* 2000), Janet Galligani Casey (*The Novel and the American Left: Critical Essays on Depression-era Fiction* 2004), and Julia Mickenberg (*Learning From the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* 2005), not to mention the continuing contributions of Wald (*Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* 2002; *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Anti-fascist Crusade* 2007; and *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* 2012) and Foley (*Specters of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* 2008; and *Wrestling With the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* 2010).

*Feminist Fiction in America* (1994) and Lisa Maria Hogeland's *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement* (1998). Admittedly, part of Lauret's project is to connect women writers of the 1930s including Zora Neale Hurston, Agnes Smedley, Meridel Le Sueur, Ann Petry, and Tillie Olsen with later authors such as Toni Morrison, Marge Piercy, and Alice Walker, but the ultimate task is to trace the emergence of those feminist politics that could not be wholly explained or absorbed by the earlier Marxist paradigm. Lauret, along with Hogeland, made rare and new claims for radical subgenres beyond the orbit of the Old Left. Jerry H. Bryant and James C. Hall broached comparable if more tentative claims for a Black Power genre in *Victims and Heroes: Racial Violence in the African American Novel* (1997) and *Mercy, Mercy Me: African-American Culture and the American Sixties* (2001), respectively, though as their titles show, singling out the radical black novel for consideration or definition was not a core concern. More recently, and more coherently in terms of genre claims, Sean Teuton has examined the Red Power novel in *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* (2008),[3] bringing a critical-realist perspective to bear on the politics of American Indian identity and culture.

Importantly, these and similar studies have begun to yield fresh archives, from the Cold-War and late-capitalist eras, of novels that one way or another sanction social revolution, helping us to think horizontally in terms of genre pools rather than vertically in terms of author oeuvre. That is, they usefully resist what is a still-dominant paradigm of accounting for individual works as the idiosyncratic achievements of single authors. It is all but impossible, for example, to find a

[3] Other recent studies of note include those by Cathy Moses (*Dissenting Fictions: Identity and Resistance in the Contemporary American Novel* 2000), Luis Manuel Martínez (*Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent* 2003), Josh Lukin (*Invisible Suburbs: Recovering Protest Fiction in the 1950s United States* 2008), María Carla Sánchez (*Reforming the World: Social Activism and the Problem of Fiction in Nineteenth-Century America* 2008), Stephanie Brown (*The Postwar African American Novel: Protest and Discontent, 1945-1950* 2011), and Kimberly Drake (*Subjectivity in the American Protest Novel* 2011).

dedicated study on Norman Mailer's *Barbary Shore* (1951) that either faithfully contextualizes the novel in terms of the previous half-century of socialist and communist fictions or that does not ultimately explain it away as the misstep in Mailer's early career—a poor follow up to *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), though one evidencing some of the promise to come in *Armies of the Night* (1968). As it happens, this dissertation is less interested in the novelist and more in the novel, thinking of commitment only insofar as it produces committed works. Otherwise, we fail to catch a particular quality of American literature in the last half-century: in adding up the anarchist, Black Power, radical feminist, Red Power, Chicano movement, "ecotage," gay liberation, animal liberation, socialist, and communist novels written and published in the last half decade (only some of which I touch on in this project), we find an incredible amount of fictions that are not only critical of American culture and society, not simply protesting or challenging dominant logics, but suggesting better orders of things. That said, what also matters is showing the American novel to be not just radical but, more generally speaking, political, especially when we remember that early commentators such as Irving Howe (*Politics and the Novel* 1957) thought there were no American political novels really worth talking about.

## Form and Responsibility

I take this as my starting point: that, in spite of the apparent vanishing of the radical genre with the virtual collapse of the revolutionary-Marxist paradigm, novels of social revolution continued, and still continue, to be written and written about. To be sure, the movements and theories to which these subgenres respond offer competing interpretations of what constitutes actual crisis: class stratification and economic exploitation, racism and domestic colonialism, male chauvinism and patriarchal oppression, environmental injustice, and so on. But they nevertheless

share a conception of the novel *as a form* capable of intervening in the ways we know and use the world, able to transform social consciousness on the way to transforming the structure of society. If this seems an old-fashioned ideal, a remnant of the "literature of political engagement" that otherwise lived and died with the Socialist revolution, the fact remains that many of our novelists, including some of our most acclaimed (and I think here of, among others, Norman Mailer, E.L. Doctorow, Ishmael Reed, Don DeLillo, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Paul Auster), have never stopped meditating on the radical possibilities of the novel.

By bringing these diverse politics and aesthetics together under one category of radical novel, I am proposing a broad genre description interested in thematic concerns (conceptions of society inflected with particular political assumptions) only to the extent these interrelate with formal engagements (how elements of the novel function in serving such political assumptions). This is important if we presume—as critics from Ian Watt (*The Rise of the Novel* 1957) to Michael McKeon (*The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740* 1987) and Deidre Lynch (*The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* 1998) have argued— that the novel has conventionally corresponded with particular conceptions of the individual and society more attuned to one side rather than the other of the political spectrum. That is, never a form that the leftist imagination can take for granted, the novel must sometimes be worked hard to bring particular visions and presumptions to bear. If my interest in formal logics is influenced by Theodor Adorno's skepticism as to the viability of overtly propagandistic literature ("On Commitment" 1962), I do not, however, renounce those surface gestures he wrote off as too didactic or propagandistic. For too long, it seems, we have thought of such elements as the obnoxious if not belligerent guests who hamper us as we try to make our way into the house of fiction. Such surface gestures seem crude, however, only because they are typically read as

ends in themselves, which is to say we all too often overlook how they have their own formal functions of signposting the way into deeper and more social engagements with form. Propaganda is not a primary concern of this project, but I assume all the same that a radical political novel must *announce* itself as such in order to draw us into its otherwise submerged figures, chronotopes, character structures, and discursive frames—elements of form whose own particular political logics might otherwise escape notice even (or especially) as they go to work on us.

A major premise of this dissertation, then, is that the novel as a form teaches us how to read and judge the social: in conceptions of time that orient us toward hope or resignation; in character structures that suggest certain configurations of social relations and responsibilities are of more value than others; in narrative frames that make and break certain ways of knowing, appropriating, and using the world; and in self-conscious meditations on the possibilities of the author as interventionist in the social realm. I take Caroline Levine's lead ("Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies" 2006) in insisting that the concept of form, in spite of its denigration as a critical tool in the late-twentieth century, is essential to understanding not only literature but also the social: that our existence is patterned to various degrees—here crudely, there subtly—in the parceling and hard landscaping of our physical environments, in the rhythms of our clocks and the windows of our calendars, in the rituals of everyday life and the practices of our institutions, in our epistemologies and methodologies, and in the vocabularies that cluster around us in particular places at particular times. It is this notion, that our social structures have much in common with our textual structures, that suggests the possibility that the novel might be suited to responding to actual crises in the world of action, capable of disclosing and suggesting alternatives to our more damaging assumptions and interactions.

## The Archive

This dissertation expands the radical genre descriptively and diversifies the archive, an operation drawing multiple and diverse types of novel simultaneously into a single grand orbit: socialist, communist, African American, feminist, American Indian, and environmentalist. In addition to select fictions from the classic archive, the novels I discuss have mostly been chosen for their correspondence with radical political theories that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the Black Power, Women's Liberation, Red Power, and revolutionary-environmentalist movements. The point has not been to exhaust the radical scene of the last five decades, which I am far from achieving, but to suggest something of just how much application the radical paradigm has *across* subgenres of novels and eras. The body of fifty or sixty novels from which I draw my primary texts ranges from the overly familiar (Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and E.L. Doctorow's *Book of Daniel*) to the comparatively obscure (Gabrielle Burton's *Heartbreak Hotel* and Richard Melo's *Jokerman 8*). Staking out this radical genre matters most when we think of how skeptical theorists such as Fredric Jameson have been in the past few decades as to the possibility of a radical literature—on account of capitalism's capacity to absorb, commodify, and co-opt its biggest detractors, leaving little to no space for critics to gain the detachment necessary for a real or effectual critique. This is not to say that all these novels identify capitalism as the source of crisis, though capitalism is typically figured, whether as engine or symptom, as inextricable from whatever forces have foreclosed on freedom and equality. Regardless of whether the individual novels I discuss meet Jameson's expectations, the sheer number of these fictions gesturing toward a radically other structure of society must count for something. In spite of perennial predictions as to the novel's inefficacy if not outright expiry, the fact it reveals a radical mien

even in the hands of our most cherished writers, in a country whose mission of late has been "to bring democracy to the world," must give us pause.

## Outline

My four chapters pair formal elements of the novel with contested aspects of socio-political life: narrative and political time; character and social relations; setting and environmentalist concerns; and the fiction of the author and literary commitment. Acknowledging that we can hardly understand radicalism, whether as instrument of change or as problematic, outside of the global context, my focus remains on U.S. texts because of a strong tradition of fictions invoking a particularly American heritage of revolution and democracy. I trace an implicit arc as the genre moves out of the age of ideology and into the age of identity politics, from the climate of modernism and social realism to that of postmodernism, from revolutionary Marxism to explicit neo- and post-Marxisms.

In chapter one, "Lost Causes, Affective Affinities: Radical Chronotope in the Age of Liberal Narrative," I discuss the mid-twentieth-century crisis for literary radicalism when the revolutionary sense of the future came under exceptional duress: when the left was in retreat and leftist novels from Myra Page's *With Sun in Our Blood* to Abraham Polonsky's *A Season of Fear* dwelled not on the cause, as such, but on the *lost* cause. In keeping with what Booker calls the "post-utopian imagination" and what Thomas Schaub calls the "liberal narrative" (*American Fiction in the Cold War* 1991), the radical novel at mid-century dwells on leftist exhaustion, defeat, and loss. Departing from Schaub and Booker, however, I argue that the radical novel immerses itself in political suffering to actually bolster the radical imagination, reminding us that social *movements* not only make for affective affinities but are sometimes at their most *moving*

precisely when at their most precarious. Drawing on theories of time, narrative, and affect (Mikhail Bakhtin, Mieke Bal, Laurent Berlant, Paul Ricoeur), I read Howard Fast's *Spartacus* as one of a number of communistic novels thinking positively about political suffering in an era marked heavily by critical dispassion and anti-left hysteria. I show how the radical novel reconstitutes what I call its "radical chronotope," a kind of revolutionist time anticipating a future realm of freedom, and persuades its leftist readers to muster the strength to pick their way through an atmosphere hurtful, indeed harrowing, for the left.

Pursuing the genre as it leaves Old Left ideology for the multiculturalism of the 1960s and 1970s, my second and third chapters focus on two pairings of representations of political groups: Black Power and Radical Feminist activists; and environmentalist and American Indian activists. The first pairing might be explained historically as Women's Liberation theorists absorbing the lessons in self-determination yielded by the Civil Rights and Black Power struggles, since the so-called race-sex analogy—by which women compared their subjugation by male supremacists to that of blacks oppressed by white supremacists (but which really dates back to the discourse of first-wave feminists and abolitionists)—informed most early radical-feminist manifestos. As for my second pairing, I take the environmentalist and American Indian movements to have grounded their concerns for the human community in certainly distinct but still comparable ecological terms. I do not mean to romanticize American Indians in general as "stewards of the earth" or as necessarily in touch with the earth or eco-friendly, as some green anarchists and other environmental activists sometimes do; but I do presume tribal activists—such as Dennis Banks and Leonard Peltier—to have defined their particular struggles precisely in terms of nature and environment. In these two middle chapters, the move away from Marx becomes progressively more pronounced: in the neo-Marxism of the Black Power and Women's

Liberation theorists, who insist on modifying classic Marxist analysis with the insights of Frantz Fanon and Sigmund Freud, respectively; and in the explicit anti-Marxism of those American Indian Movement activists who thought communism's lack of care for the environment just as despicable as capitalism's.

In my second chapter, "The One *Versus* the Many?—Minority Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Radical Novel," I consider how the radical novel uses character functions to challenge conventional conceptions of novelistic and social identity—both of which have tended to valorize individuation, atomization, and self-interest. Responding to Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (2003), I show how John Williams's *Captain Blackman* (1971) and Gabrielle Burton's *Heartbreak Hotel* (1986) resist conventional character structures by refusing to develop their protagonists as singular individuals at the expense of minor characters. If these novels render their characters "flat" by conventional standards, however, they achieve a kind of social depth in turning character interiority over to historical and collective consciousness. Putting into practice the radical-feminist slogan "the personal is political," Williams and Burton curiously posit neither racism nor sexism but social detachment as the major obstacle to an inclusive politics of responsibility. Interrelating major theories of character (Woloch, Northrop Frye, Irving Howe, Georg Lukács) with classic theories of Black Power (Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale) and Radical Feminism (Shulamith Firestone, Anne Koedt, Carol Hanisch), along with more recent reconsiderations of identity (Satya P. Mohanty), I show how the later radical novel describes, on one hand, identity thinking as a failure to think democratically and, on the other, identity politics as a strategic response to that failure—a means of renegotiating how the one comes to consciousness *with* rather than *against* the many.

For chapter three, "Place, Space, and Ecotage: The Radical Scene in the American Novel," I consider how the genre, following the emergence of the modern environmentalist and American Indian movements, newly understands place, space, and habitat as grounds both for and of struggle. I pair Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* with Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* to show how the Red Power and what I call the "ecotage" genres, in their visions of struggle over land rights, land use, and borders, go out of their way to disclose the competing conceptual frameworks through which we read, know, and all too often endanger the world. I interrelate Mieke Bal's narrative conceptions of "place of action" (in which space is relegated to a background, against which characters act) and "acting place" (in which space comes to the fore as a subject in its own right) with Kenneth Burke's dramatist "scene-act ratio," (accounting for the ways a scene yields particular motives and logics), to show how the radical novel, self-conscious in its capacity to make and break frames, shows us how to resist endangering worldviews, especially those imposed on territories by the technological apparatuses of westward expansion. These novels speak in particular to Martin Heidegger's theory of *technē*: that, while modern technology "enframes" and reveals the world merely as a repository of resources to be exploited and exhausted, it shares with art the primal functions of revealing and representing the world—an idea meant to render technology vulnerable to intervention from the realm of art. I term this a "technical imagination," an aspect of what Lawrence Buell calls the "environmental imagination," in its specific appeal to narrative frames as a way of re-describing scenes of degradation as sites of radical possibility, to recuperate a sense of place beyond the instrumental and of action beyond the exploitative.

In my fourth chapter, "Making Raids on Human Consciousness: Literary Commitment and the Late Cold-War Novel," I conclude my dissertation by situating the late twentieth-century

radical novel in a much larger and ongoing history of literary radicalism. In particular, I turn to the debate on literary commitment: the question of to what extent fiction can or should be political without sacrificing its status as art. I trace this debate from early proponents of revolutionary-socialism to purveyors of late Cold War metafiction—who embed writers, artists, and intellectuals as protagonists in their stories to characterize and dramatize contests of art and politics. I deem this debate (articulated in the theories of Friedrich Engels, Jean-Paul Sartre, Theodor Adorno, Milan Kundera, and Fredric Jameson) essential to our understanding of the later radical novel, especially when this can be read as characteristically postmodernist. Crucially, postmodern metafiction erupts at the end of a century-long tradition in which artists and critics had deliberately outlawed both the figure and figuring of the political author in fiction—put forth in the anti-propaganda aesthetics of the early Marxists and capped by the theoretical turn heralded by Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author." Singling out Don DeLillo's *Mao II* from a cluster of novels including Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*, Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, and Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, I make a case for the author-fiction in the late Cold War radical novel as a conscious response to this political quieting of *the idea of the author as interventionist*, and as an intervention, in its own right, in the debate over art and activism. I close with the insistence that the later radical novel, no matter how far removed from the politics of its Marxist forerunner, in a real sense continues the earlier mission to interrelate art and social life.

# 1.

## Lost Causes, Affective Affinities:
## Radical Chronotope in the Age of Liberal Narrative

Theories of American literature have long characterized the mid-twentieth century as an era of leftist decline, marked by the demise of the socialist realists and literary proletarians, the turn from socio-economic toward psychological fictions, and, more broadly, the onset and upset of postmodernism.[1] Usually implicit, if not explicit, is a common assumption that the "literature of political engagement" was more or less rendered untenable in the postwar years. What often goes unremarked, however, is that even if socialistic and communistic fictions had their day, notable thematic and formal continuities exist between these earlier works and multiple radical variants since—fictions, to name a few, of Black Power, Red Power, Women's Liberation, revolutionary environmentalism, and LGBT activism. Taking as their predicate, like their Marxist predecessors, the future idea of a more just and equitable world, what all these subgenres share is a certain attitude to time and narrative as they work aesthetically to sanction social revolution.

For this reason I consider the radical novel as less a doctrinaire and more properly a formal undertaking to politicize our sense of the historical present and the ways we anticipate change—a problem of and for narrative. Loosely, I speak of a "politics of time," as determinant for the radical narrative, and what I will call more precisely a "radical chronotope." The chronotope—as Mikhail Bakhtin defines it, "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial

[1] See, for example, Morris Dickstein's *Gates of Eden* (1977), Stacey Olster's *Reminiscence and Recreation in American Fiction* (1989), Alex Callinicos's *Against Postmodernism* (1989), Thomas Schaub's *American Fiction in the Cold War* (1991), Terry Eagleton's *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), and M. Keith Booker's *The Post-Utopian Imagination* (2002).

relationships that are artistically expressed in literature"—is a narrative variable in literary history, a placeholder for numerous treatments of time and space around which literary genres conventionally cohere (84). Just as Bakhtin discusses "adventure time" or "biographical time," I speak of a kind of political time underwriting the radical genre, yielding a narrative in which the everyday present manifests as an index of inequities to be actively and eventually undone. What made the classic (proletarian) radical novel radical, after all, was not the disclosure alone of the present pattern of modern urban-industrial life as damnable—a disclosure which had long been a guiding principle of the social novel—it was the narrative anticipation of a future world yielding an alternative pattern of life, one calling for an unprecedented redistribution of resources, care, and responsibility.

Stressing this anticipatory function, we better understand the crisis in radical literature in the long 1950s, when the revolutionary sense of the future came under exceptional duress: when the left was in retreat and leftist novels—from Howard Fast's *Spartacus* and Myra Page's *With Sun in Our Blood* to Peter Matthiessen's *Partisans* and Abraham Polonsky's *A Season of Fear*—dwelled not on the cause, as such, but on the *lost* cause. Rather than explain this retrospective preoccupation with thematics of defeat as symptomatic of a conservative turn, as Thomas Schaub might have it (*American Fiction in the Cold War* 1991), or a failure of utopian energies, as M. Keith Booker tells it (*The Post-Utopian Imagination* 2002), in what follows I read these thematics of defeat as, on the contrary, a bolstering of the leftist imagination. Singling out *Spartacus*, one of a number of mid-century radical fictions invoking leftist suffering, I consider how the novel as a form seeks to *move* us at that moment when the political movement has otherwise ceased moving.

## Radical Chronotope(s): Feeling Out the Future

In broad strokes, the radical chronotope establishes cognitive and affective frames by which anger with the present and hope for the future are caught up in a gesturing toward social revolution. In the idiom of the neurocognitive sociology of emotions, the guiding principle is hopefulness—a joyful anticipation of a better future—produced by, and producing dissatisfaction and discontent with, present circumstances.[2] Though not necessarily doctrinaire, this revolutionism is probably best known in the Marxist story that we will only achieve our full humanity when, collectively, we master the forces of history and make the leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom (Engels 1878, 305-10). As such, we could forgive Mieke Bal for describing the kind of work I allude to as "ideological" or "slanted" in vision, "argumentative" or "subjective" in perspective, over-determining our responses as readers to the narrative in hand (32; 145). Such terms, however, leave no room for the properly political work of radical fiction: not merely situating us as readers passively persuaded that certain theories of value or structures of feeling are more coherent than others, but signaling us to engage actively with our responsibilities in the social. When Theodor Adorno argues that "[h]e over whom Kafka's wheels have passed, has lost for ever both any peace with the world and any chance of consoling himself with the judgement that the way of the world is bad" (199), he suggests just this: that narrative fiction, with its potential to touch us as thoughtful and feeling creatures, might have force in the world by disclosing that which can only motivate us to rethink our complicities with the damaging patterns of existence.

To be sure, fictions in revolutionist time rarely go so far as to depict what that future might actually look like; in fact, radical novels as varied in politics and critique as Ernest Poole's *The Harbor*, Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty*, John Oliver Killens's *Youngblood*, John A.

[2] I draw on Warren Tenhouten's *A General Theory of Emotions and Social Life* (2007).

Williams's *Captain Blackman*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *The Almanac of the Dead* end deliberately snagged on unresolved conflict. But in this, in a way, they follow Marx, critically disclosing the present order of things while relegating anticipation of the resolved future to but a gesture. If such a conspicuous elusiveness has proven problematic for a practical Marxism, there is nevertheless good reason, in narrative terms, to resist giving formal closure to what remains in actuality under contest—to resist, invoking Frank Kermode's classic study, any substantive "sense of an ending." That is, it is not in the interests of a radical narrative to give us lasting satisfaction if our dissatisfaction figures as an engine for change. If revolution is called for, what formal closure is brought to bear must suggest something other than resolution when the reading is done. Consider the end of Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930):

> A man on an East Side soap-box, one night, proclaimed that out of the despair, melancholy and helpless rage of millions, a world movement had been born to abolish poverty. I listened to him. O workers' Revolution, you brought hope to me, a lonely, suicidal boy. You are the true Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit. O Revolution, that forced me to think, to struggle and to live. O great Beginning! (309)

If, conventionally, "fiction (this is one of its consolations) imagines for us a stopping point from which life can be seen as intelligible… the angle of retrospect, which is the storyteller's premise," in that "[a] story is already over before we hear it. That is how the teller knows what it means" (Silber 8), then the radical narrative strives for the unconventional. Strategically reorienting our sense of the ending, by closing on the evocation of a beginning—itself figured causally as a response to actual ongoing impoverishment to which the novel up to now has attested—the radical narrative in Gold's hands affects us with a sense not of conclusion but of

continuation. It signals a present moment in which we are to turn away from the world of the text, while bearing its appraisal of the endangered world with us, toward the world of action: revolution *will* come.

Paul Ricoeur makes a compelling case for an instrumental interrelation between the work of art as narrative and the world of action in *Time and Narrative* (vol. 1 1983). His treatment of time-as-problematic is especially relevant for considering the radical novel when, as we shall see, a crisis of futurity as both thematic and structural principle becomes characteristic. Though sharing many of Kermode's assumptions in *The Sense of an Ending*, conceiving narrative as a means of grounding ourselves existentially, for Ricoeur what is at stake in narrative is something more than the bare human condition. Taking narrative to be synonymous with Aristotle's *muthos* ("emplotment" or the "organization of events"), Ricoeur posits mimesis ("representation of action") as narrative's "one all-encompassing concept" (33-6). Refusing to equate mimesis with mere imitation, however, he theorizes an operation making porous the intersections among the worlds of action, text, and reader: "[i]f, in fact, human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms. It is always already symbolically mediated" (57); "the composition of the plot is grounded in a pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character" (54). Mimesis, here, is only one element of a threefold function: the *prefiguration* of reality in cultural practices, its *configuration* in the text, and its *refiguration* by the reader. These are decisive claims for a theory of the political novel: that the narrative work, underway before the text proper begins, is a constitutive element in the world of action; that something of the world of

action is carried over into the text; and that something of this interrelation carries into the consciousness of the reader where it is, in turn, acted upon.[3]

This is not the place to prove that radical fictions really do revolutionize our social structures. My point here, less ambitiously, is to lay bare their formal presumptions as endeavors in narrative organized around a certain politics of time. To be sure, time has long been held a general constitutive element for the art of fiction: whether, as Joan Silber has it, "always in some way the subject of fiction" (8); or considered key to understanding the major formal innovations in the larger history of the novel, as suggested by A. A. Mendilow (*Time and the Novel*), Hans Meyerhoff (*Time in Literature*), Bakhtin (*The Dialogic Imagination*), and Ursula K. Heise (*Chronoschisms*); or more narrowly identified as thematic and principle for the modernist novelist (Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Stein, Mann, Dos Passos, Faulkner). Dominant categories of modern politics similarly distinguish themselves by their temporalizations of experience: the progressive, the conservative, the reactionary, and the revolutionary all bespeak attitudes to orienting the social in relation to forces of history and development in terms of past, present, and future (Osborne). But as quotidian as the engagement with time appears in fiction and politics, we only grasp the radical novel when we acknowledge that, definitively, its chronotope hangs on a narrative anticipation of the future transformation of our patterns of existence, an anticipation figured ethically and politically as a *cause*, as explanation of and motivation for struggle and action in the present.

In making this explicit, we get at the crisis in radical literature in the long 1950s when the leftist cause in the USA was so obviously undone—evidenced especially in the Popular Front abandonment of proletarian revolution, but also in the purge trials of former Bolshevik heroes,

[3] If this sounds idealistic, it is worth remembering that radical writers from E.L. Doctorow and Marge Piercy to Edward Abbey and Leslie Marmon Silko, each writing across the different forms of polemical essay and political novel, presuppose the idea of narrative fiction as affecting us politically in ways less narrative forms do not.

the Nazi-Soviet pact, and the rumors of persecutions and executions abroad—not to mention the schisms and intrigues of American Communists on home soil. One effect of this crisis, in the ensuing retreat of writers and critics from the left toward center, was the forging of what Schaub calls the "liberal narrative," when the U.S. intellectual community recast the history of its former leftist allegiances as a "Blakean journey from innocence to experience, from the myopia of the utopian to the twenty-twenty vision of the realist" (5). Hence, in *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (1949), for Schaub one of the liberal narrative's more explicit manifestations, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. could claim that "[t]he degeneration of the Soviet Union taught us a useful lesson," in that "[i]t broke the bubble of the false optimism of the nineteenth century… The Soviet experience, on top of the rise of fascism, reminded my generation rather forcibly that man was indeed, imperfect" (viii-ix, qtd. in Schaub 9-10). As "a recurrent storyline" emerging in the works of an otherwise heterogeneous array of critics and writers (5), from the New York intellectuals to the New Critics, the liberal narrative told of a conservative turn for the leftist imagination, one still often underpinned by socialist impulses yet caught up with explanations of historical change that began to look less to socio-economics and more to psychology and behaviorism (17), at a time when, "for the writer as well as for the critic, politics became the politics of culture" (61).

Underwriting this altered analytic of the mid-century social, it should be stressed, is the re-temporalization of a particular politics. Subordinating the old radical hope within the new liberal narrative, the old story within the new, that hope's determinant element—its revolutionary anticipation—is narrated away. Which is to say the liberal narrative reorients the radical narrative by transforming its "sense of an ending," making it speak to a wholly different historical consciousness. In Gérard Genette's technical terms, the *prolepsis* of the radical

narrative (by which we are given "advance notice," even if only implicitly, of future revolution) is overwritten by the *analepsis* of the liberal narrative (by which we are told, after the fact, that our desire for the future came to nothing). This matters because the radical anticipation of the future is something much more active and productive than merely signaling an event to come, since the point of naming such a future in the first place is to collude in generating it—comparable to Marx's calling on the proletariat to realize their role in the dialectic of history, *compelling what is not quite there* to assume form. In both instances, our calling on what must come to be is undertaken with a sense that historical potential will, without us, go unfulfilled.

Though Genette discusses "prolepsis" rather than "anticipation," deeming the latter term too psychologistic, Ricoeur's description of the roughly comparable "expectation" gets closer to what is altered, temporally and politically, in the liberal narrative's conservative turn. "Expectation," for Ricoeur, "consists of an image that… precedes the event that does not yet exist"; an analogue to memory, "this image is not an impression left by things past but a 'sign' and a 'cause' of future things which are, in this way, anticipated, foreseen, foretold, predicted, proclaimed beforehand" (11). What the liberal narrative achieves, according to this idiom, is the transposition of revolutionism from sign to impression, from cause (calling the future into being) to lost cause (reflecting on the mark left—"the 'press' in 'impression'"[4] —by our having failed to call the future into being). Bearing in mind that, as Schaub tells us, the production of the liberal narrative cohered around discussions of literature and especially the novel as a form closely related to social "reality" (25), the dominant intellectual tendencies here leave little to no room for such a thing as a radical novel, or a radical chronotope, to flourish.

In fact, given the predatory rightwing climate of U.S. politics and culture in the 1940s and 1950s, it seems incredible that any species of leftist novel could have made it as far as mid-

[4] Sara Ahmed, "Collective Feelings" (2004), 30.

century. The Smith Act of 1940 made sedition a crime punishable by law, rendering untenable any Marxist-Leninist position; used to imprison leaders of the Socialist Workers Party in 1941 (Johnson), and to indict leaders of the Communist Party in 1948, as Walter Rideout put it, the Smith Act "made words punishable rather than deeds" (257). In 1947 the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began their war on domestic Communism, spawning a culture of blacklists and censorship that hung like a pall over the entertainment industry until as late as 1960 (Haynes). Most spectacularly, Senator Joseph McCarthy, between 1950 and 1955, worked anti-Communist sentiment into national hysteria. The politics of fear prevailing at mid-century, indicating from a sociological perspective a structure of domination marked less by legitimate democracy and more by totalitarian repression, thus converged to manufacture an appalling atmosphere for those remaining on the left.

Similar hostility asserted itself in the literary-critical sphere. According to Booker, the New Critical orthodoxy "furthered the Cold War project of discrediting Soviet socialist realism and, with it, the American proletarian culture of the interwar years" (40). Indeed, as Barbara Foley notes, "much of the political motivation for the formalist critical program" of the New Critics was a stolid "anti-Marxism" (5)—a tendency she also detects in seminal studies in radical literature by Phillip Rahv, Walter Rideout, Irving Howe & Lewis Coser, and Daniel Aaron (15-29). Leftist writers were thus damned in the narrower literary establishment—where the realism they had favored was being outmoded by the official valorization of modernism, and where politics was outlawed as an intruder on aesthetic territory—and in the broader socio-cultural sphere, where the politics they favored were rejected by Democrat and Republican alike. Hence the contention that it might seem incredible that something like a radical novel could make it as far as mid-century, let alone continue beyond it.

## A Post-Utopian Radical Chronotope?

Still, certain fictions remained staunch in their critiques of orthodox culture and society, suggesting, whether overtly or tacitly, that the order of the social could be radically other, radically better. As such, there remains in the age of the liberal narrative something we can call a radical novel. Then again, if it is marked by anything it is the sudden and problematic proliferation of thematics of defeat and plots oriented toward the past rather than the future. I am thinking here of Lloyd Brown's *Iron City* (1951), Howard Fast's *Spartacus* (1951), Norman Mailer's *Barbary Shore* (1951), Myra Page's *With Sun in Our Blood* (1951), Fast's *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* (1953), Peter Matthiessen's *Partisans* (1955), Steve Nelson's *The 13th Juror* (1956), Abraham Polonsky's *A Season of Fear* (1956), Alvah Bessie's *The un-Americans* (1957), Alfred Maund's *The Big Boxcar* (1957), Harvey Swados's *On the Line* (1957), and, perhaps, Alexander Saxton's *Bright Web in the Darkness* (1958). Few, if any, of these novels have a confident sense of time moving forward without complication. Rather, they figure history as a complex in which any easy relation between the then and the now has been disrupted, if not corrupted—developing as if needing to orient themselves, politically, by a moral compass that was lost, if not broken, in some other time, some other place. Consequently, the radical chronotope suffers to the extent it attempts to steer by the impression rather than the sign, by the lost cause rather than the cause.

Such is the case for those fictions like *With Sun in Our Blood*, *On the Line*, *The Big Boxcar*, and *Bright Web in the Darkness* that persisted in the proletarian vein, exploring the complex class concerns and positionalities of working men and women. Representative here is Page's protagonist, Dolly Hawkins, who returns repeatedly, imaginatively, to her childhood in

the mining camp and the figure of her deceased father—the one man shrewd enough to have made the workers as a body politically strong, he "who had given honest labor a chance to make a fair living again" (47)—yet whose failure as an unfaithful husband and father makes Dolly pathologically afraid to repeat the tragic pattern of her parents' life.

Perhaps bolder are those novels lambasting the anti-communism of the postwar years—in the spirit of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*—such as *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* and *A Season of Fear*. In the latter, memory rises, palpably, to haunt Hare, the engineer in the age of loyalty oaths who is wracked with the fear of having stored, in the basement of his otherwise comfortable home, communist books that once belonged to his wife's brother, now deceased. A broader historical concern for time and its passing informs *Sacco and Vanzetti*, with Fast telling of the last day before the two anarchists were sent to the chair in 1927, insisting that something vital was lost when the state of Massachusetts carried out the execution—a loss, *affecting* us now like a "passion." Indeed, as we shall see, Fast and Polonsky exemplify the over-determination of political feeling in the radical narrative as it renegotiates its sense of political time in an era of mass hysteria and ideological commotion.

Bolder still are those novels taking a pro-communist stance, such as *Iron City*, *Spartacus*, *The 13th Juror*, and *The un-Americans*. In *Iron City*, anti-Communism has led the three protagonists to jail, where their commitment translates as a grassroots activism as they try to mobilize public support in defense of a fellow African-American sentenced to death by a racist judicial system. *Spartacus* similarly casts the communist impulse as one firmly of the folk, and just as firmly in jeopardy, a tribal ideal embodied in the gladiators whose revolt against Rome's colonial forces is brutally crushed. Comparable themes play out in *The 13th Juror*, with Nelson's fictional-autobiographical counterpart jailed for his communism but still fighting for justice—for

prisoners' rights and freedom of expression. Meanwhile, the recent past, in Bessie's *The un-Americans*, provides grounds for recriminations as the old allegiances to the Spanish Civil War loyalists surface in the "better-dead-than-red" era to indict and divide the left.

Of note, also, are those novels dissident twice over, dissenting from the American mainstream and the dominant leftist contingent: *Partisans* and *Barbary Shore*. Motivating Matthiessen's novel is the idea of the corrupt cause, with Sand—a journalist asked to aid an international Party in the purging of its most faithful revolutionary, Jacobi—finally giving his allegiance to the persecuted Jacobi on the strength of his memories of his childhood encounter with the radical. In *Barbary Shore*, finally, Mailer provides the decade's strangest radical novel, imagining an ex-Stalinist bureaucrat who, having assisted in assassinating Trotsky, rejects Soviet Communism in defecting to the USA, only to reject American liberalism and try to salvage the radical legacy by a return to first principles.

At first glance, these novels, in their shared tendency to depict the present moment as locus of defeat and define it as a point from which to look backwards, attest to Booker's thesis on the "post-utopian imagination"—according to which even the leftist novel at mid-century suffered a failure of utopian energies symptomatic of a much wider crisis of culture and politics. Indeed, Booker discusses several of these same titles. In the broader context, he speaks of a "failure to project viable utopian alternatives to the present social order" (4) aligned with a "rejection of specifically socialist forms of utopian thought during the long 1950s," one given official sanction in public policy but also "consonant with more subtle ideological messages that tended to dismiss any sort of public (political) solutions in favor of the promotion of private (individual) solutions" (28). Though giving invaluable insight into the class-conscious strand of the leftist imagination, Booker, curiously, refrains from asking what it means if a genre hitherto

marked by a revolutionary hopefulness suddenly seems to lose hold on the future. Though acknowledging that the "lost golden past" was a common preoccupation for the literature of the long 1950s (44), and that it is "telling" that some works "had to reach back to the 1930s to recover such utopian energies" (90), Booker does not explore that reaching back except to corroborate it as a turn away from the utopian. As such, he does not recognize how these novels might look backwards not so much to borrow failed political energies but to understand the failure itself, an understanding that in turn might be reworked in such a way as to sustain rather than foreclose on the radical narrative. As I will argue, these novels work formally to make the lost cause signify against the grain of a post-utopian or liberal narrative—their purpose being neither to tidy up or sweep away nor mourn what was lost, nor even to reanimate it as such, but to sift through the loss itself and discover something affectively and politically viable.

Bringing to the fore this heavy sense of loss of political purpose and existential hope—a loss expressed well in Christopher Lasch's hyperbolic description of "the agony of the American left"—reminds us that the social movements spoken of, and spoken to, in the radical novel (and I speak here of not just the communistic but also the Black Power, Red Power, Women's Liberation, and ecotage novel) make overt what Raymond Williams called "structures of feeling"—our "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (132). Sociology has long described emotions, in general, as working to cement social relations: in classic studies, loyalty, anger, fear, and shame are presumed to support structures of domination, while hate, distrust, and contempt, as symptoms of disaffection, work more subversively (Flam and King 19). Against this background, political awakening for the individual consciousness is often thought to entail what Helena Flam calls a "process of emotional liberation," by which one severs once-positive emotional bonds with certain institutions and practices and seeks alternative

attachments (31-2). Emotions are also put to more strategic use in the socio-political world—as, for example, when shame and guilt, conventionally used to subordinate certain identities ("queers," for example) are resignified to empower such identities.[5] Indeed, at the collective level, as Ron Eyerman tells us, "[m]ovements are often spurred into existence by cognitively framed emotions, anger, frustration, shame, guilt, which move individuals and groups to protest, to publicly express and display discontent, engaging in… contentious actions and protest events" (44-5). In effect, "the force of emotion is an essential part of what keeps a movement moving and its lack helps explain its decline" (43). Eyerman shares with scholars such as Sara Ahmed an interest in asking what is *moving* about movements. It is a question, as noted, especially useful for thinking about progressive narratives whose political temporalizations are suddenly marked less by movement and more by cessation.

It is in this sense that I make a case for negative political feelings and emotions—exhaustion, defeat, loss—proving productive for understanding the radical chronotope at that mid-century moment when the leftist idea of the future was nothing less than vexed. Interrelating ideas of political time and the "affect realm," in what follows I consider how the radical novel figures itself—as an exemplary medium of affect—as continuing the political work of the world of action in the realm of narrative, just as the structure of domination in the world of action seems to shift from the legitimate to the repressive and so seems to render radical action less tenable. A useful keyword here is "movement"—like the word "emotion," coming from the Latin *movere*, meaning "to move" or "to stir up"—reminding us that as political actors we are typically *moved* to action, if not moving others to action, and that social movements make for *affective* affinities. Turning now to Howard Fast's *Spartacus*, one of a number of radical novels

[5] Kathryn Bond Stockton's *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame* (2006) is a good example of recent interest in negative affect—here, feelings of shame and debasement where black meets queer—used politically to rethink historical consciousness.

thinking sentimentally and historically about the play of dispassion and political suffering in an era otherwise marked by mass anti-leftist hysteria, I examine the ways in which the radical chronotope reconstitutes its principle of hopefulness as a means of preparing us to pick our way through a historical present whose atmosphere for the left seems at best hurtful, at worst tortuous.

## Untimely Fiction: *Spartacus*

When Fast published *Spartacus* in 1951, the romantic figure of the gladiator turned revolutionary had already enjoyed two hundred years as a literary and political symbol of resistance to oppression: in Bernard Saurin's play *Spartacus: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1760); in Voltaire's remark that the Spartacus revolt was "the only just war in history" (1769); in Robert Montgomery Bird's play *The Gladiator* (1831); in Jacob Jones's play *Spartacus, or, The Roman Gladiator* (1837); in Elijah Kellog's popular rhetorical monologue "Spartacus to the Gladiators at Capua" (1842); in Marx's note to Engels that "Spartacus emerges as one of the best characters in the whole of ancient history… a genuine representative of the ancient proletariat" (1861); in Raffaello Giovagnoli's novel *Spartaco* (1874); in the identifications of Rosa Luxemburg and the *Spartakusbund*; in James Leslie Mitchell's novel *Spartacus* (1933); and in Arthur Koestler's novel *The Gladiators* (1939). These works and allusions take as their subject the actual slave revolt of 73 BCE, when some seventy gladiators escaped from their training school in Capua to amass an army, mostly of renegade slaves, that for two years routed the orthodox military forces pursuing it until defeated by the legions of Crassus and Pompey.

Making a straightforward comparison between ancient servile and modern proletarian conditions, Fast describes a class war between the oppressed masses and a ruling elite of slavers,

politicos, and landlords. Less straightforward is his narrative attitude to the historic struggle, which he introduces as a *failed* endeavor, opening on a moment when the Roman forces have overrun the Spartacus army and publicly crucified along the Appian Way the last six thousand subversives. Beginning with the tortuous end of the struggle, and only then proceeding to recall its origins in the remembrances of principle characters, Fast makes a significant break with the plot conventions of the Spartacus story: of his major precursors in drama and fiction, Bird, Jones, Mitchell, and Koestler all find their narrative impetus in the inception and gathering momentum of the slave revolt, staying close to the chronological ordering of events laid out in the primary historical sources of Sallust (*The Spartacus War*), Plutarch (*Life of Crassus*), and Appian (*Roman History: The Civil Wars*). Bearing in mind that Kirk Douglas's 1960 adaptation of Fast's novel for the big screen restored conventional historical chronology—leading from bondage, to revolution, to defeat—the novel is conspicuous in plotting the story's dramatic conclusion, thick with leftist suffering, as the narrative starting point.[6]

Foregrounding the abortive *end* of a communistic revolution—Spartacus's struggle for a world where "men could change and become fine and beautiful, if only they lived in brotherhood and shared all they had among them" (335)—Fast, in the McCarthy era, admittedly comes close to articulating his own liberal narrative. Indeed, as he tells in his autobiography *Being Red*, he was personally bearing the brunt of this notorious epoch: hounded by the FBI for his communism, imprisoned for refusing to answer questions posed by HUAC, not only did he see his books withdrawn from public libraries on J. Edgar Hoover's orders, he also found himself blacklisted by the major houses when he attempted to publish *Spartacus*. As such, it is not

[6] The film has its own fraught history: on one hand, it helped to break the Hollywood blacklist by openly giving credit to screenwriter Dalton Trumbo (Cooper 14); on the other, compelled by Universal Studios under pressure from the anti-communist right, it replicated the "prevailing Cold War consensus… that social and political revolutions fail: violent revolutionary action can not succeed" (Malamud 142).

difficult to read *Spartacus* as post-utopian: an indictment of the agonizing "crucifixions" of the McCarthy era, to be sure, but more bluntly an admission that the idea of a people's revolution was exhausted. Yet it remains that Fast refuses to give the dramatic conclusion in the story—the quelling of the revolt—the status of stopping point: leftist defeat, rather, figures as a means of embarkation for a radical imagination intent on salvaging the raw energies on which the movement had thrived.

It is in this sense that I consider *Spartacus* an untimely work, a novel resisting those attitudes that would sooner write off radical logics as over and done with, as shameful even. To be sure, Fast leads us into complex emotional territory, putting pressure on what William Flesch calls "noncausal bargaining"—that "exercise of active willing on our part where our experience of our own willing measures the distance but also the connection between our perspective and that of the fictional characters and the willing they do" (6). That is, Fast forbids the reader from rooting for Spartacus and his army—though not for the *story* of Spartacus. What takes place in the present, after all, is primarily a series of reflections on how that story should be told, yielded as a number of nobles travel along the crucifixion route: the novel begins with the "storyteller" under the crucifixes (5), who points out the "profound ignorance there is here and there about, concerning the wars of Spartacus" (10); it proceeds through the recollections of the Romans Crassus, Batiatus, and Caius, offset by the insights of the narrator and the crucified gladiator David; and it ends with the radical tales Spartacus's escaped wife, Varinia, bequeaths to the German folk (363). In other words, the real subject of *Spartacus* is not the hero as such but his symbolic *after*life—in the stories, and stories within stories, that constitute the novel.

Put another way, the worldly field of conflict that Fast examines is heavily determined by narrative forces competing over the meanings of the monumental suffering of a defeated left.

This is explicit in the transition from the orthodox histories evoked in the novel's opening phrase, "It is recorded…" (3), to the closing idea of the Spartacus story as folktale (363). Within this frame, vying conceptions of the revolt as a temporalized event play out: in the introduction, a thing of the past; in the conclusion, of the present and future. These alternatives of orthodox and radical narratives find their agents in the novel in the characters of Marcus Tullius Cicero and Varinia, respectively. Introduced as the statesman working "upon a short monograph on the series of servile wars which had shaken the whole world," Cicero is

> intensely interested in the various examples of slaves hanging along the Appian Way… It occurred to him that in this vast passion there was a reflection of some new and mighty current which had come into the world—a current with ramifications which would stretch out into ages still unborn; but it also occurred to him that in his own particular time, a person who could coldly observe and analyze and interpret this new manifestation of servile revolt would be in a position of unique power. (131)

So Cicero is a writer who understands the historical and emotional significance of the revolt, though his interest translates into a self-serving callousness. His fellow statesman, Gracchus, clarifies the failing here when—having lived a similar life to Cicero—he awakens to a newly critical conception of state politics. "History," he tells Cicero, "is an explanation of craft and greed. But never an honest explanation" (303). He insists that "politician" means nothing more than "faker" (304) and describes Rome's statesmen as "magicians. We cast an illusion, and the illusion is foolproof. We say to the people—you are the power" (306). Gracchus thus functions positively, as Cicero does negatively, to cast doubt on the narrative form and political content of state-sanctioned History. That history is in the hands of those such as Cicero is meant both to disturb us and to imply the need for an alternative, more caring, form of history.

Accordingly, when Varinia flees the clutches of the Roman state with Gracchus's help, she carries with her not only a child but also a story, the precise task of which is to counter the orthodox histories. Educating the boy, whom she names Spartacus, "Varinia told the story many times again—told how an ordinary man who was a slave put his face against tyranny and oppression, and how for four years mighty Rome trembled at the very mention of his name" (362). The novel closes with a quickening in narrative time, relating how

> the son of Spartacus lived and died—died in struggle and violence as his father had. The tales he told his own sons were less clear, less factual. Tales became legends and legends became symbols, but the war of the oppressed against those who oppressed them went on. It was a flame which burned high and low but never went out—and the name of Spartacus did not perish. It was not a question of descent through blood, but descent through common struggle… And so long as men labored, and other men took and used the fruit of those who labored, the name of Spartacus would be remembered, whispered sometimes and shouted loud and clear at other times. (363)

Setting in motion this radical folk tradition (in ways perhaps worth comparing with the end of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*), Varinia secures for the novel a tempering of the radical chronotope, qualifying its hopefulness with what some might call more "realistic" expectations. As such, Fast seems to concede to the forces at work in the liberal narrative, in that the future signaled here no longer seems to transcend the realm of necessity. But this concession offers no grounds for recriminations, for it too is modified—by that conditional "so long as," a phrase now *speculating* on the life-expectancy of the realm of necessity rather than *anticipating* the realm of freedom. Arrived at, then, is not the undoing of the radical chronotope but its accruing less

certainty and more risk. We might go so far as to suggest that something of the future has collapsed, though not enough to trip the revolutionist in his stride.

If not for this last passage of the novel, we might be tempted to think Fast makes a case for what Wendy Brown, after Walter Benjamin, calls "left melancholy"—indexing

> a Left that has become more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness, a Left that is most at home dwelling not in hopefulness but in its own marginality and failure, a Left that is thus caught in a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, whose structure of desire is backward looking and punishing. (26)

But there is nothing melancholic in what is leftist in *Spartacus*: if it lingers over "marginality and failure," it is with a view to picking its way through it, discursively, adventurously. Hence, when the gladiator David is on the cross, he remembers and confirms that "he found his hero and pattern for life and living in Spartacus" (266), convinced even as he dies that "[e]veryone takes sides. You are on the side of life, or you are on the side of death. Spartacus is on the side of life" (267). If the novel mourns, like all good social novels it does so to indict: not only the worst excesses of colonialism, and the failure of the masses to join the revolutionaries, but also that certain orthodox dispassion embodied in Cicero—a mode of making sense of political history that over-determines the historical narrative by dispensing with what Lauren Berlant calls "the production of emotion" (2004, 448). Even if, as Crassus insists, "History dealt with Spartacus" (333), Varinia is nevertheless able to be "happy. It was not the happiness she had known with Spartacus; but he had bequeathed to her a knowledge of life and the rich reward of existence. She was alive and free, and her child was alive and free; so she was content after a fashion, and she looked upon the future with hope and anticipation" (360). In much the same way Berlant asks us

to "give more thought to the modes of subjectivity that are disorganized, or noncoherent, or negative, or lagging in a more profound way than even Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* or deferred action would suggest" (449-50), Fast at mid-century asks us to find political suffering productive, showing agony and bereavement to lay bare those forces that, on a vast scale, impose order on the social and make possible certain patterns of social relations over others.

If, as I suggest, a similar case can be made for the fictions noted earlier—those works by Page, Maund, Polonsky, and others, in which the present is overshadowed by the failure of expectations or fear of repeating past mistakes—this is even more true of Fast's 1953 novel *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*. Like *Spartacus*, this is another fictionalization of actual radical defeat opening on an end day, when the state execution of the anarchists after seven-years delay, despite mass protest, is to proceed. Again, unless we are ignorant of the fate of the two Italians, rooting is out of the question. In naming the ordeal outright a "passion"—a word we saw in the free-indirect lexicon of Cicero—Fast consolidates his interest in the political realm as realm of affect, relying on a word etymologically bound up with the suffering of the martyr (whether religious or political) and its instrumental objectification in historical accounts. In both novels, the word hyperbolizes a certain kind of emotionally-laden political exhaustion, used to remind us that social movements are sometimes at their most "moving" precisely when at their most precarious: in particular, when, despite their numbers, they fail miserably to have effect on what appears to be the cruel or corrupt order of things.

Exploring how political feelings might be instrumentalized in the narrative of the monumentally lost cause, Fast signals a tipping point between two different engagements with radicalism: on one side, the lived struggle of the masses in the world of action; on the other, the symbolic afterlife of that struggle in a narrative apparently given the charge of moving the reader

to reinvest politically in the world of action. One of the main questions *Spartacus* addresses, in fact, is how to make leftist suffering signify productively for a leftist imagination when that suffering comes channeled almost exclusively through enemy discourses. Fast's simplest response is to have the narrator deviate within reflections attached to Roman protagonists, allowing otherwise sympathetic insights into the sentiments of the radicals Spartacus, Varinia, and David. David's ruminations on the cross (247-79), in particular, carry much of the novel's sentimental force, agonistically reflecting on the whole revolt, from the "time of hope… when he fought with Spartacus" to "the time of despair… when it became known to him that their cause was lost" (284) – all given voice "[i]n that peculiar, pain-ridden *forever*, [when] the mind of the gladiator fell apart… [when h]e was playing over what he most desired to rescue from the meaningless ruin that was his life" (262-3).

But rather than allegorizing the collapse of the left as a comparably "meaningless ruin," Fast more meaningfully is pitting the novel itself, as sentimental history, against the dispassion of official conservative political history. This is achieved, on one hand, by casting a pall on Cicero, whose notion it was—"'not his alone but a good deal his – to make the tokens of punishment, the six thousand crucifixes along the Appian Way'" (49), who "could appreciate the awful suffering of the endless crucifixions, but… did not allow himself to be moved by them," opting instead to "coldly observe and analyze and interpret" (131); and on the other by glimpsing a narrator who, unlike Cicero, is sensitive to that "pain of six thousand men who died so slowly and so cruelly pervaded the whole countryside" (129). Fast accuses Cicero, holding him responsible for the single most "disturb[ing]" (16), "merciless" (129), "terrible" (177), and "unpleasant" (192) event in the fabula, while this event in turn, this massive display of "the rotting, bird-eaten, sun-baked flesh of the men who were crucified along the Appian Way" (136),

emerges as an awful signifying, a cruel symbolizing of state justice. As such, when Fast attempts to move the reader with the sufferings of the crucified, he conflates action and discourse to make the road signify anew: historically intended to prohibit the radical subject, as narrative element it produces that very subject.

Pivotal, then, are the structures of feeling informing the scenes of crucifixion—the subjective and objective sides intrinsic to what Cicero and narrator both call the "passion." But even if Marxist hopefulness shares much with that of Christian eschatology, we might be inclined to think this a strange way to characterize a political consciousness. One explanation is that it does so to appropriate for the left a religiosity that had "bec[o]me an expression of Cold War Americanism" (Malamud 123-4): a way of inflecting mainstream religion, which was undergoing revival in the 1950s, to render it less hostile to those otherwise "un-American" socialistic elements. Comparable is the penultimate image in Mailer's *Armies of the Night* (1968) of the Quakers jailed for their part in the March on Washington—who, naked and near-mad in their hunger strike, are possibly praying for "the Vietnamese dead," though Mailer can only speculate since "there are places no history can reach": "if the end of the March," he asks, "took place in the isolation in which these last pacifists suffered naked in freezing cells, and gave up prayers for penance, then who was to say they were not saints?" (287). Fast, just as forcefully as Mailer, reminds us that the political realm at mid-century was a realm of hyperbolically heightened affect: here, disillusionment, disaffection, distaste; there, the manufacturing of hysteria, the mongering of anxiety, and the prevalence of what Frank Furedi presently calls a "politics of fear." As such, Fast's accomplishment might well lie in making us complicit, as readers, in enduring rather than transcending the pain we are sometimes made to feel as political subjects. If so, he speaks presciently to Berlant's work on history and affective events:

> tak[ing] on the linked problem of writing the history of the present and the literary history of the present… see[ing] this problem as a problem of affect, a problem of apprehending heightened moments in which certain locales become exemplary laboratories for sensing or intuiting contemporary life. (2008, 845)

But if *Spartacus* tells the history of the mid-century moment, it also insists there is something enduring about the duress under which the radical subject now functions, and so it asks us to think less about events and more about the ongoing conditions of the "so long as…" Yet even this might be understood as a deconstruction of one consummate event: that moment at which we dramatically confuse conditions with event, mistaking what Fast calls in his autobiography the "small terror" of the witch-hunts for something exemplary or uniterable rather than systemic or recurring. That is, Fast sensitizes the reader to those moments in time better conceived as leaping-off points for the long haul.

## Conclusion

Put another way, if the radical chronotope "normally" denotes a particular kind of narrative time-space, in which the everyday present registers inequities actively to be undone, in the age of the liberal narrative it is compelled to characterize the present anew: longer in duration, harder to endure. This is not to say that classic radical novels had never suffered anxiety over the timeliness of the revolution—think no further than Jack London's *The Iron Heel,* whose form and content are fraught with the near inability to imagine an end to the centuries-long revolution—but we are hard pressed in the long 1950s to find a revolutionist fiction as sure of the present and the future as, say, *Jews Without Money*. Even so, and perhaps most importantly, this recalibration of the radical chronotope need not and did not hinder the thematic and formal

sanctioning of social revolution in American literature. The last sixty years, in fact, have yielded a remarkable tradition of revolutionist fictions (if typically unsung as cohering within a single genre): of decolonialization (Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, John Williams's *Captain Blackman*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*), Women's Liberation (Alix Kates Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, M.F. Beale's *Amazon One*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*), environmental activism (Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth*, Richard Melo's *Jokerman 8*), and LGBT activism (Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and *Drag King Dreams*).

On the contrary, what the reoriented chronotope suggests is the production of an altered engagement, a heightening of the consciousness of political feeling, in that the object of consciousness becomes not so much the cause, nor even the lost cause as such, but the feeling of involvement itself: it becomes the "figure" standing at the center of consciousness rather than the "background."[7] What this in turns lends itself to is the production of a subject equipped with a more muscular revolutionist time, a new patience—geared more not to waiting, as such, but to enduring, one who never ceases to act even (or especially) when struggle in the present crowds out the idea of the future. In this sense, the radical narrative in the age of McCarthy—conventionally the period in which twentieth-century leftism declined to the extent of (by some accounts) ushering in a woefully apolitical postmodernity[8] —can be understood in fact to formally amplify its radical structures. Now, more than ever, does it refuse consolation in the sense of an ending. Now, more than ever, does it leave off before its own narrative anticipation is

[7] I draw on Agnes Heller's *A Theory of Feelings* (2009), 15.

[8] Olster, in the spirit of Ricoeur, claims the faltering of Communism meant for the left a simultaneous faltering of an ordering principle (millennialism) to impose on experience. Callinicos and Eagleton, as Booker notes, also allocate "much of the impetus behind postmodernism to the experience of political defeat for the Left… arising from a loss of faith in the utopian alternatives provided by the possibility of socialist revolution" (192).

over. In this way what it offers is an antidote to the liberal imagination, and a disavowal of the post-utopian, continuing rather in its attempt to consolidate our discontent with all that is repugnant, to render us less capable of complying with the damaging patterns of modern existence.

# 2.

## The One *Versus* the Many?—
## Minority Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Radical Novel

The novel has long been understood by artists and critics on the left as a fitting form for speaking to crises of politics and ethics, sensitizing readers to the depravations of industrialism, class stratification, racism, and sexism. Yet, in its propensity to single out individual lives as the nubs around which meaning revolves, it remains a risky form for a leftist imagination. In fact, in its long love affair with the inner lives of characters, the novel perhaps more than any other medium has acclimatized us to the idea of human existence as a sum of *discrete* challenges and *private* solutions: insular patterns of thought and action far removed from the collective responsibilities typically demanded by the left. What this means is that a genuinely leftist novel—one gesturing toward, if not sanctioning outright, social revolution in the name of greater equality—must perform a kind of double duty if it is to avoid undermining its own political logic: it must disclose and challenge not only the structure of society but also the conventional structure of character relations in the novel itself. This is, of course, what the "social" and "collective" novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries attempted, with authors from Dickens to Dos Passos generating expansive casts of characters who, whether by interconnection or juxtaposition, shared the labor of plot development to lay bare inequitable social realities vaster than any one life could ever disclose. But even the most memorable experiments in collective character structures in American literary history, such as Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy (1938), have tended to confirm rather than renounce the dominant logics of social stratification—have, in fact, more

often than not tended to multiply and aggregate the failures of individual lives to connect in coherent, caring communities.

This interrelation of narrative and social structures has been taken up in numerous theories of the novel from Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987), Paula Rabinowitz's *Labor and Desire: Women's Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (1991), and Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (1993), to Deidre Lynch's *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (1998) and Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (2003). But still more needs said, especially about the politics of character structures. The ways in which authors figure their characters, after all, yield commentaries on our capacities for freedom and responsibility: conscious of it or not, characters are either free or unfree to think, act, and aspire; and, for good or bad, they are often given the task of questioning if not challenging the balance of power around them. In this sense, any novel comes to us as an allegory for the body social—not so much by mimetically reflecting the social realm but by codifying the values and meanings of social interaction and responsibility. We might even go so far as to say that literary genres are determined fundamentally by the kind and degree of human relations they sanction in their character structures: the comedy of manners, the utopian science fiction, the hardboiled detective story, the sentimental romance, and other such examples—each is premised on a vision of community with its own strict ideas of what kinds of caring, sharing, and collaboration will be rewarded or, perhaps more to the point, punished. Utopian, dystopian, fantastic, mundane, realist, idealist, classical, or experimental, the characters in our novels

confront us with judgments precisely on the role of the individual in relation to her society and on how "the one" comes to consciousness in terms of "the many."

Conventionally the problem, as Woloch puts it, has been one of "asymmetry" transposed between social and narrative structures, a problem he lays out in his exhaustive study of the "two extreme modes of characterization" in the novel: "the protagonist, whose identity rests on a narrative centrality that always threatens to take the form of wrath (erasing or absorbing all the other persons who surround him), and the minor characters who, simply through their subordinated multiplicity, hover vulnerably on the borderline between name and number" (7). His point is that the novel in its classic form—for Woloch, epitomized by Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)—gives to its characters uneven attention and development: singular protagonists distinguish themselves at the expense of minor characters that are subsequently flattened and marginalized, revealing, at least in the case of Austen, narrative structures "homologous to the social structure of capitalism" (124). It needs said that Woloch's theory of the novel does not wholly cohere *as* a theory of the novel: since his blueprint for "the one versus the many" is Homer's treatment of Achilles and the host of Greeks and Trojans in *The Iliad* (hence the "wrath" invoked above), the inequality he detects in Austen is hardly specific to capitalism, nor its representation to the novel as such. But he does well to remind us of the relation between social and narrative structures, of how characters in fiction, when put to work characterizing social relations, have tended conventionally to reproduce hierarchical and divisive political logics. In this sense, Woloch's paradigm of the one versus the many provides a litmus test for the politics of the character-driven novel, a measure of just how much the novel's formal grasp of social possibilities resists or overcomes the stratified order of things.

Partly at issue here is what we actually mean by character in the novel, a point obvious but worth making if it reminds us that theorists have at times taken exception to certain kinds of character, or else have classified character in such a way as to preclude certain functions. Take Northrop Frye's definition, in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), of the novel as a form in which "the technical problem is to dissolve all theory into personal relationships"—a form he contrasts with the anatomy, or Menippean satire, which more crudely "presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent" (307). Thus, for Frye, the classic radical novel—the proletarian novel of the 1930s—is more properly a hybrid of novel and anatomy, which is to say characters that bear explicit political ideas are deemed extrinsic to the novel aesthetic. This is a critical point, one still resonating in the work of theorists distinguishing, as Deidre Lynch and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty do, between characters, persons, protagonists, and selves. Even Frye's contemporaries who were deeply invested in the political novel, such as Walter Rideout (*The Radical Novel in the United States* 1956) and Irving Howe (*Politics and the Novel* 1957), shared the premise that the novel must resist overburdening its characters with ideas or else run the risk of mere propagandizing. The function of character for these mid-century critics, briefly, is to afford insights into the essence of the human, not the ideological, condition.

The danger of such a theory—one presuming the humanism it espouses is not only apolitical but somehow serves to protect art from the taint of politics—is that it forecloses on certain subjects in the fictionalized body social: it insists that the life worthy of novelistic depiction cannot be one in which the politics at stake is explicit. In other words, it makes it all but impossible for *consciously political* characters—intellectuals or activists, say—to live their fictional lives in any full sense *as* consciously political, or to populate the novel *as* characters: either their politics must be "dissolved" or they must be designated as non-citizens, formally

speaking, in the realm of the novel. The idea of politics dissolved is further at odds with what we have come to think of as the politics *embodied* in, for example, those racial, ethnic, sexual, and gendered identities whose mere presence in select contexts cannot but speak volumes politically: as Satya Mohanty and other revisionists of identity politics have it, "[i]dentities are theoretical constructions that enable us [to] read the world in specific ways" (*Literary Theory and the Claims of History* 1997, 216). Bluntly, dissolving ideas is not viable if the novel is to have a chance of inquiring into the meanings and possibilities of life in those eras when dissent, activism, and reform become ongoing and even everyday projects.

In making it difficult for certain kinds of character to thrive—as Howe and others did, for example, in denigrating Norman Mailer's protagonists in *Barbary Shore* (1951) as flat, unrealistic, allegorical politicos—these and other arbiters of the novel made it difficult for certain conceptions of society to thrive. *Barbary Shore* is a case in point. Writing off Mailer's symbolic novel (about an amnesiac recovering his radicalism) as the work of a "stale pamphleteer," "hauled from the literary graveyard of the '30s, when 'social consciousness' was in vogue," critics declared Mailer's Marxist politics and aesthetics at mid-century to be out of date.[1] It needs stressed that what is at stake here are competing ideas of not simply politics and the novel but of how to characterize human society. For the Marxist tradition, as Engels described it, humankind would only achieve their full humanity in the leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom by *collectively* mastering the objective forces of history (*Anti-Dühring* 1878). The transition from capitalism to communism, that is, comes only with transcending the individualist solutions institutionalized under liberal democracy. To use Woloch's language, the capstone of

[1] Irving Howe, "Some Political Novels," *The Nation* 172 (June 16, 1951): 568-9; Anonymous, "Last of the Leftists?" *Time*, May 28, 1951.

human development comes only with a reconfiguration of how the one relates to the many, in a strategic undoing of all that is uneven or asymmetrical.

The fullest image of the human by this account, logically speaking, if to be found in the individual, surely has to be sought not in the inner life as such but in the way one looks and acts beyond oneself: by no means a disavowal of the subjective but certainly an insistence that the subjective matters most when plugged in, by interconnection and collaboration, to the vaster social complex. The inverse assumption here, that the logic of individualism is dangerous for human society, has particular significance for the novel—especially if, as Ian Watt has it, that the novel emerged in correspondence with the experiential foundationalism of a bourgeois worldview, a textual counterpart to philosophic and economic individualism, mapping the self-conscious *I think therefore I am* of Descartes onto the self-interested *homo economicus* (*The Rise of the Novel* 1957). Though scholars such as Deidre Lynch have since taken Watt to task—inverting, for example, the formative relation between world and text to suggest it was the novel that influenced the development of individualism in the real world and not the other way around—certain assumptions remain in place: that, as Alan Palmer confirms in *Social Minds in the Novel* (2010), the study of structure, plot, and character development in the novel for the most part has made a shrine of the interior realm as the highest locus of meaning and value. This seems especially to be the case when reliant on free-indirect discourse, epiphany, stream of consciousness, and other such modes and features. What Engels's humanism brings to the theory of the novel is a rationale for characters that might resist those more insular conventions historically attributed to bourgeois society—a rationale justifying the collective structures already mentioned but also giving sanction to a wholly different kind of character, one whose self-interest is categorically in equal service of both the one *and* the many. This, as we shall see,

is precisely what certain radical novels in the age of identity politics attempted: novels revealing that the so-called "flat" or allegorical character need not signal, as it does for Woloch, a sign of narrative subordination or, as it did for Mailer's critics, aesthetic failure; novels in which the flat character gestures, rather, toward a different kind of depth, extending outward by the inward route, personal only to the extent that the personal is intrinsically political.

Irving Howe and Georg Lukács broached something of this textual-social relation in their theories of the novel when they asked what it would mean for a character-driven fiction to be political in the broader sense (meditating on the play and distribution of power between individuals and communities) and radical in the narrower (advocating a redistribution of power favoring social over private interests). In *Politics and the Novel*, Howe describes the novel of politics as rooted in the nineteenth-century social novel, which bifurcated into the novel of private sensibility and of public affairs and politics—with the public subgenre further divided between neutral social and interested political paradigms (18-19). "The ideal social novel had been written by Jane Austen," he says, but "the novelist's attention had necessarily to shift from the gradations within society to the fate of society itself":

> It is at this point, roughly, speaking, that the kind of book I have called the political novel comes to be written—the kind in which the idea of society, as distinct from the mere unquestioned workings of society, has penetrated the consciousness of the characters in all of its profoundly problematic aspects, so that there is to be observed in their behavior, and they are themselves often aware of, some coherent political loyalty or ideological identification. (19)

Howe, to be sure, still resists the idea of the overly political character by defining the political as something discernable at the level of behavior and consciousness rather than action and dialogue.

But, at the same time, if Howe's political novel delves into the individual psyche, it does so to find a vantage point from which to look critically outward on the social realm; which is to say that something of the inner life—*as* inner—is purposively resisted. The same holds for Lukács, in his essay "Art and Objective Truth" (1954), for whom the private sensibility in modern literature is taken to be synonymous with the bourgeois worldview, exalting excruciatingly subjectivist perspectives: that is, at odds with the objective cognition of reality exemplified by the classic Marxist socio-historical consciousness. The logical conclusion of art that makes a cult of subjectivism, says Lukács, is art's growing detachment from all significant social problems and its emptying out of all content (33). Though hardly advocates of flat or implausible characters, both Lukács and Howe acknowledge the need at one and the same time to contain the individual as potentially detrimental for the social imperative *and* to mobilize her politically in service of that imperative.

Put another way, the personal is to be harnessed as energy in serving the political, a logic that more typically finds its fulfillment in the kind of character designated by Frye as a creature not of the novel but of satire. It is the logic of the radical novel—especially, as I will argue, when configured as a novel foregrounding identity, precisely when "theory" is considered neither abstract nor "dissolvable" but categorically embodied. In what follows, I examine these peculiar tensions between self-determination and socialization, a pairing of terms that Moretti thinks decisive for the specific genre of *Bildungsroman* but which I take more generally as a key to understanding the social politics of any character-driven novel—though I single out the radical genre as offering a salient point of entry into the debate. While Foley and Rabinowitz, along with Alan Wald, have given excellent accounts of Old Left engagements with character structures, little has been said about comparable concerns for radical novels in and beyond the New Left

era—when identity came to the forefront of the political imagination in the USA as the key to explaining and countering racism, sexism, and other dominant forms of oppression. Looking in particular at black and women's liberation fictions, I consider the ways authors instrumentalize characters, as bearers of identity (at the mimetic and thematic levels of narrative), to negotiate (at the synthetic level) the tension between individual and collective interests—what I take to be the crux of New-Left-era ventures in group self-determination and consciousness raising.[2]

## Old Left, New Left

The classic radical novel, collective or not, had always understood looking too intently on the inner life of the private soul as a failing of, and a danger to, society. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), for example, though heavily invested in the intensely personal anguish of its anti-hero, conspicuously withdraws him from the plot before the story finds closure. Sinclair, instead of resolving his infamous stockyards novel with Jurgis's private conversion, shifts attention in the final chapters to Socialist Party successes in local and national elections. The immigrant's personal journey through capitalist purgatory, that is, is but an extended prelude to a collective context of redemption. Similar projects to decenter the efforts and effects of singular characters are evident in the ways classic radical novels displace and disperse key narrative agents so that focus rests less on idiosyncratic sensibilities and more on group and class structures. Some—as Foley has explicated well—deploy collective casts so that each character only makes sense in the access she gives to an aggregate critical vision of life in the capitalist world—such as Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty* (1934), Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy, Mailer's *The Naked and the*

[2] I draw here, and throughout, on Phelan's definition of character in *Living to Tell about It*: "An element of narrative that has three simultaneous components – the *mimetic* (character is like a person), the *thematic* (any character is representative of one or more groups and functions in one way or another to advance the narrative's thematic concerns), the *synthetic* (character plays a specific role in the construction of narrative as made object)" (214).

*Dead* (1948), Alfred Maund's *The Big Boxcar* (1957), Harvey Swados's *On the Line* (1957), and Alexander Saxton's *Bright Web in the Darkness* (1958). Others relegate heroes and heroines to spectral presences in letters, accounts, and reminiscences—as in Josephine Herbst's *Pity is Not Enough* (1933), Howard Fast's *Spartacus* (1951) and *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* (1953), Peter Matthiessen's *Partisans* (1955), and Abraham Polonsky's *A Season of Fear* (1959). Briefly, these and other earlier radical novels go out of their way to safeguard the prescription against characterizing too private an engagement with the world.

We might be forgiven for expecting a New Left novel, written in the thick of identity thinking, to sanction a more vigorous engagement with the individual character *as* individual—scrutinizing particular minds and bodies for the effects of racism and sexism. Alternatively, acknowledging that the radical novel after the long 1950s is indeed often a novel of identity politics, we might perhaps expect this new generation of radical novelists to invert class-race and class-sex priorities and deem the logics of racism and sexism not only integral but antecedent to modern exploitation. But to say the genre poses a whole new set of questions would be misleading. The earlier radical novel, after all, had always argued that the racial, ethnic, sexual, and gendered coordinates of society made certain demographics more or less exploitable than others: in addition to Sinclair, think no further than the fictions of Anzia Yezierska (*Bread Givers* 1925), Erskine Cauldwell (*Tobacco Road* 1932), Richard Wright (*Uncle Tom's Children* 1938) and William Attaway (*Blood on the Forge* 1941).

Yet a contrast does emerge between these earlier radical fictions and those in and beyond the New Left era, one registering the development of that increasingly critical and militant revolutionism that came to mark the Black Power, Women's Liberation, and Red Power movements. The black proletarian novel in the hands of Wright and Attaway, for example, had

made a case for a black nationalism inhering without any ill effects within interracial class solidarity.[3] Faith that unionization with whites need not jeopardize black workers' capacity for self-organization continued after mid century in radical black fictions such as John O. Killens's *Youngblood* (1954). However, when we arrive at the Black Power novel—informed by the black militancy popularized by the Black Panther Party and the earlier activism of Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and Robert F. Williams—the logic of identity thinking challenges and even prohibits multicultural class action.

Thus, Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969) ends in stand-off as urban blacks rise up in arms against white government and police forces, while John Williams's *Captain Blackman* (1972) concludes with blacks en masse neutering white America and taking flight for Africa. For these and similar novels, identity as a problematic goes unresolved, and what prevails is a sense of intrinsic (black-white, male-female) rather than incidental (class) difference. Comparable fictions in both black and women's liberation subgenres are Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967), Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), M. F. Beale's *Amazon One* (1975), Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), and Gabrielle Burton's *Heartbreak Hotel* (1986), none of which foresees any inevitable resolution to the problematic of race difference. Also comparable are Julian Moreau's *The Black Commandos* (1965) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and *Vida* (1979), novels that do imagine black-white or male-female compromises, but which typically defer resolution to a far-off future. Meanwhile, radical novels like Alix Kates Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (1971) and *Burning Questions* (1979) that claim social revolution is genuinely and successfully underway are rare. In sum, Old Left solidarity no longer seems tenable for the radical novel informed by identity thinking, indicating what looks like schism in the genre.

[3] See Foley's chapter on "Race, Class and the Negro Question" in *Radical Representations*.

## The Personal Is Political: The One *and* the Many

If the New Left era yielded a slogan with properly revolutionary potential it was surely "the personal is political," a phrase indebted to the Port Huron Statement's call for "personally authentic" politics and concretized by the consciousness-raising groups of the Women's Liberation Movement (Lauret 46-50). New York Radical Women and other early radical feminist groups defined consciousness-raising as the process by "which personal experiences, when shared, are recognized as a result not of an individual's idiosyncratic history and behavior, but of the system of sex-role stereotyping. That is, they are political, not personal, questions" (Koedt 280-81). The point was to transcend the private remedies and therapies to which women had typically turned in seeking consolation for their underclass condition: to rouse women *en masse* to political consciousness and promote a cognitive shift from a private realm of suffering to a public sphere of activism. Accordingly, when later cultural feminists appropriated the slogan to valorize individual development—espousing the idea that "one woman's power empowers all women" (Echols 279)—they generated a popular ideal that was anathema for their radical counterparts: entailing piecemeal gains, mostly for white middle-class career women, they signaled a return to liberal first-wave reformism, with women once again aspiring to enter male domains whose sexist structures remained otherwise intact. From pole to pole the slogan lays bare the radical need not only to mobilize the private realm of experience for political service, but also to curb its worst excesses, ensuring that collective interests inhere within self-interest.

Commentators often interpret the epochal shift signaled here as a narrative of declension—a failure of nerve, commitment, and doctrine as New Left advocates turned their backs on theories of class struggle for politics of recognition. Walter Benn Michaels, for

example, describes it is as a transition from an age of ideology in which difference is disputable, and so we necessarily take sides in consolidating what's right or taking apart what's wrong, to an age where differences are tolerated, and so right and wrong cease to function as categories for inquiry into inequality (*The Shape of the Signifier* 2004; *The Trouble with Diversity* 2006). Yet identity politics itself need not necessarily entail a significant remove from the old climate of ideology. The age of ideology, after all, had been marked profoundly by identity thinking, with Communism commonly written off in ethno-nationalist terms as other, foreign, and un-American. More to the point, identity politics itself emerged precisely to curb the worst excesses (racism, sexism) of centuries-old identity thinking.

Still, it is worth restating the ostensible deviation of the radical novel from its earlier faith in proletarian revolution to its later invocation of identity-based liberationism, since rethinking Marx was a vital step for Black Power and Women's Liberation advocates alike. As Alice Echols (*Daring to Be Bad* 1989), Maria Lauret (*Liberating Literature* 1994), and Barbara Crow (*Radical Feminism* 2000) testify, though Women's Liberation was diverse in its theories and principles, it entailed at least a distinct shift away from the Marxist analyses of the early "politicos" to the sexual politics of the "feminists." For Shulamith Firestone, feminist revolution called for "an analysis of the dynamics of sex war as comprehensive as the Marx-Engels analysis of class antagonism was for the economic revolution" (*The Dialectic of Sex* 1970, 12). The problem was that "the doctrine of historical materialism, much as it was a brilliant advance over previous historical analysis, was not the complete answer, as later events bore out" (13). What Marxist analysis failed to fully perceive was the "sexual substratum" of a class system in which the original division of labor was between man and woman. So Firestone's solution is "to correlate the best of Engels and Marx (the historical materialist approach) with the best of Freud (the

understanding of the inner man and woman and what shapes them) to arrive at a solution both political and personal yet grounded in real conditions" (21). Put another way, Firestone and likeminded radical feminists found Marxism lacking when it came to theorizing the private realm of experience from which to extrapolate its political significance.

For the emerging generation of feminist theorists, however, interest turned disproportionately toward the psychoanalytical as they learned to rely more and more on the Freudian Lacan—a shift coinciding with the cultural mainstreaming of feminism, the gravitation of feminist theory from grassroots communities to the academy, and what the radicals saw as a sorry falling off in activism. Yet many women's fictions of the long 1970s remained staunch in advocating the radical ideal. Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (1977), Piercy's *Vida*, and Shulman's *Burning Questions* all sensitively meditate on actual revolutionary movements within which radical feminists worked. Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Russ's *The Female Man*, meanwhile, inventively imagine post-revolutionary worlds: the one attentive to actual cooperative possibilities in which male-female differences drop off the social radar, the other lingering deliberately on differences and the violence they yield. Burton, writing from the Reagan era of anti-feminist backlash, reflects optimistically on revolutionary promises as yet unfulfilled. As striking as all these novels are, Burton's stands out—not for the postmodernist satisfaction it takes in language play, nor for its relentless litanies of female complaints, but because, where her peers go to great lengths to invent arresting central characters with strong voices, often situated in high-action drama, Burton tells a story at the heart of which lies an alarmingly still and silent radical.

## The Militant Character of Feminism

Several years before she tried her hand at the novel, Burton authored a Women's Liberation primer, *I'm Running Away From Home, But I'm Not Allowed to Cross the Street* (1972), a work intended to bring radical-feminist theories to a lay audience. "The style" of the primer, as one reviewer put it, "has the effect of getting across the feminist politics without a sense of being 'heavy'… The book is also practical in the sense that [Burton] discusses how she could take this feminist theory and bring it home."[4] In many ways *Heartbreak Hotel* continues that earlier work: consciousness raising is the order of the day as theories of sexual oppression, repression, and liberation play out in this fiction of a feminist safe-house annexed to a "Museum Of The Revolution," a repository for assembling a documentary history of patriarchal oppression. Like Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Burton's novel finds traction with the violence of male chauvinism: when Quasi—the museum's hunchbacked curator—is critically injured in a road accident orchestrated by the "city fathers" in their last-ditch attempt to close the museum and oust the feminist community. Hospitalized and comatose, "[u]gly, bestial, monstrous, menacing, scary Quasi" (86) is, as a character, an activist strategically contained and quieted. More allegorically, she figures as an embodiment of the effects of male violence on women and as a cipher for the endangered state of Women's Liberation thinking in the Reagan decade.

Without the dichotomy of chauvinist males and progressive females, *Heartbreak Hotel* would have little to go on, yet Burton is just as concerned with the lack of consensus within the all-female sanctuary. That is, she conceives of two realms of social relations, the wider sexist city and, situated within this, the feminist enclave. Until the accident, Quasi is one of seven women living in Heartbreak Hotel: "One is Daisy, Two is Pearl, Three is Rita, Four is Meg, Five

---

[4] Edelson, Carol. Review of *I'm Running Away From Home But I'm Not Allowed to Cross the Street*. *Off Our Backs* 3.3 (Nov 30, 1972): 14. Print.

is Gretchen, Six is Maggie, Seven's Quasi" (7-8), a group now divided as to who is rooting for Quasi to live (Rita, Daisy, Pearl) and who wants to pull the life support (Meg, Gretchen, Maggie) (183). Dramatically, these characters are at odds. But in revealing the denotations of Quasi's actual name, Margaret, to include "'[a] pearl' (Greek)… Diminutives and variants: Maggie, Meg, Peg, Rita, Gretchen, Daisy, Mattie" (231), Burton asks us to understand her female characters, in spite of their conflicting interests, as manifestations of a single identity: the one *is* the many in this feminist community. Prevailing here, however, is not essentialism but *nominal* essentialism, a tacit understanding that identity has been secured strategically, in the realm of language, for the deliberate purpose of transposing the anchor point of the one onto the many. Indeed, the novel is less interested in what constitutes Quasi in her own right and more in what it means for her community to *respond to* and *feel responsible for* her. This is ratified in the novel's conclusion when the women reach consensus that Quasi must live and that her life depends on their total reconnection in a "whole family of selves" (231).

In a conventional sense, to be sure, *Heartbreak Hotel* revolves around the development—from endangerment to recuperation— of the one in the thick of the many, who in narrative terms serve that singular development. Less conventionally, Quasi is not made to offer up her interiority: for almost the entire novel, she is physically and psychically incapacitated—"a form on a bed [that] swells and heaves and makes unintelligible sounds" (13); what little we know of her comes filtered through the reflections of the other women, who, by their own admission, "don't know a whole lot about her" (18). Precisely a "flat" character, she draws the other characters into orbit around her, putting us in mind not of the subjective space of her private experience but the objective complex of socio-political relations. This is an achievement: it reorients what we typically think of the flat versus the round character—at least in the tradition

inaugurated by E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) and brought up to date by Woloch in *The One vs. The Many*. Forster famously told us that flat characters "are not in themselves as big achievements as round ones" (73), a deceptive turn of phrase that seems unequivocally to celebrate the merits of the round over the flat character. But putting us in mind of characters as achievements *in themselves*, Forster is really only championing a different kind of flatness—as if characters in themselves, rather than in their textual and social contexts, could yield the vision of humanity he seeks from his novelists. In other words, as we saw with Frye, this influential theory of character is really a theory of human society, teaching us not only to think hierarchically but also to look for the deepest meanings and values not within but beyond the realm of social interaction. Burton's accomplishment is to suggest otherwise: that the deepest meanings are found in mutual interconnections, and that sometimes it takes a so-called flat character, rather than a round, to surprise us and convince us of this.

It needs said, however, that while Burton goes out of her way to renegotiate the critical differences between the women in their enclave, no such formal resolution is suggested between the women and the men in the vaster sexist city. For a radical critique of actual sexual inequalities this is by no means a misstep, since the purpose is to disclose that which still needs resolved in the real world. So textual and social asymmetries do persist. Nor is this a novel about being at that political stage of actually transforming the male-female realm; rather, in the consciousness-raising tradition, it is about that more preliminary rite of passage that comes in finding the time and space to garner a historical consciousness in preparation for future action. The novel's denouement confirms this when Daisy strikes a deal with the city fathers to give up the museum and "tak[e] the show on the road" (205), a turn of events indicating only at the last a readiness for mobilization. What they trade Heartbreak Hotel for is nothing less than spectacular:

> Every museum exhibit has been carefully packed: there are campers, semis, railroad cars, army convoys, six Sherman tanks, helicopters, a carillon, a red, white, and blue ambulance with Quasi and Maria Onesti RN, a Ticketron, a carousel, clowns, stilt walkers, trapeze artists, color guards of every color, a full-size replica of the Statue of Liberty, precision units, gas balloons, streamers, loudspeakers, ponies, elephants, tigers. (295)

With this image the novel draws to a close, fittingly, in an act of liberation: with the artifacts of feminist history freed from the confines of the patriarchal city-blocks, the feminists having given up the safe-house, and Quasi, awoken, being led off beyond the confines of the sexist city. If this cavalcade looks like the great sell-out of radical feminism, it is worth bearing in mind what it means for these women to have Quasi with them. Consider an earlier moment when Rita recalled a night she was assaulted by a "secret admirer" and woke up to find Quasi watching over her: "Next to Quasi is Rita's attacker, his neck broken in two, his balls crushed like overripe plums. It is one of the men in the corner who jack off during Rita's act… Soundlessly, Quasi picks up the rag doll body… in the moonlight, Quasi's massive, curved form moving the earth rhythmically looks powerful and graceful, not grotesque" (89). At stake all along, has been feminism's militant character, inhering now, like a kernel, within the feminist community as it mobilizes and goes forth to educate and proselytize. That a lost *aggressive* feminism is recuperated here is, of course, crucial. But just as important is how the one has come to mobilize, rather than absorb, the many: how one character, emptied of self-interest, has figured as a hub around which the collective can gather, connect, and above all recognize—much like Marx's proletariat—its historic mission to strike out and rethink the asymmetrical structure of things.

Like the Women's Liberation theorists, whose work Burton was continuing long after it had fallen out of favor with most feminists, Black Power spokespersons commonly assumed Marx to be essential but insufficient, an idea that had less to do with Freud and more to do with Frantz Fanon. "The cause," Fanon said of the colonial problem, "is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 1961, 40). For Fanon, capitalism in the stage of colonial expansion worked beyond the conventional logic of economic relations: the ruling classes were no longer distinguished by their ownership of the means of production or their wealth, but by the simple fact they came from somewhere else: they were "Others" (42). Class still determined the contest of exploiting-exploited forces, but it was now premised on race difference. Orthodox Marxism, however, seemed ill equipped to explicate this logic of identity thinking: color-blind, it "lacks the conceptual apparatus to explain who exactly will fill the 'empty places' of the economy" (Leonardo, 485). Hence, while one such "empty place" in U.S. history was filled by Africans brought to labor for whites, that they of all people filled this place had less to do with economics and more to do with the understanding that Western forces (as set forth by the *First Charter of Virginia* 1606) could appropriate foreign lands and peoples on the proviso they were non-Christian. What ensued for blacks in the New World, once emancipated, was "internal" or "domestic" colonialism, with subsequent generations of American-born slaves and their descendants treated as if non-Americans.

A century after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (1862-3), Black Power advocates followed Fanon to figure this as the paradigmatic African-American condition. As Stokely

Carmichael and Charles Hamilton put it in their influential *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), "institutional racism" in the USA was just another term for "colonialism" (5). Quoting Kenneth B. Clark's *Dark Ghetto* (1965), they reiterated that "[t]he dark ghettos are social, political, educational and—above all—economic colonies. Their inhabitants are subject peoples, victims of the greed, cruelty, insensitivity, guilt, and fear of their masters" (2). This rhetoric of the black colony in the USA more famously informed the Black Panther Party's "Platform and Program" (1966), a document circulated in almost every weekly edition of *The Black Panther* newspaper until 1980.[5] Chiefly written by Huey P. Newton, though also attributed to Bobby Seale, the Panthers' manifesto unsettled white America with its call for oppressed blacks to rise up in arms against the nation's racist institutions. Augmenting an otherwise classical Marxist analysis replete with a call for communistic living was the image of the black ghetto as a "black colony," used to compare urban African Americans with America's founding fathers who had set the precedent for revolting against colonial "tyranny." Newton's "ten-point plan" appealed explicitly to the *Declaration of Independence* and the U.S. *Constitution* to justify its revolutionism by claiming that it was in fact honoring America's most fundamental principles.

Six years later, John A. Williams set himself the task in *Captain Blackman* of rethinking how black militancy was the key to understanding the continuing effects of such domestic colonialism. Typically read as a Vietnam story inflected with Black Power politics, *Blackman* makes use of a narrative split between the present and a historical past catching up. In the present sequence, Abraham Blackman, an African-American soldier fighting for the U.S. Army in the Vietnamese conflict, is shot down in action while trying to save his black troops from walking

[5] It should be noted that the Panthers also articulated the condition of suffering as "color-blind": as Eldridge Cleaver put it, "the victims of Imperialism, Racism, Colonialism and Neo-colonialism come in all colors, and… they need a unity based on revolutionary principles rather than skin color" ("An Open Letter to Stokely Carmichael" 1969, 105).

obliviously into enemy gunfire; like Quasi, throughout the novel he remains hospitalized, in critical condition. The historical sequence, meanwhile, offers an episodic history of U.S. military battles from the American Revolution to the Vietnam War. Implicitly, the present comprises a culmination of centuries-old tensions in race relations as blacks struggle to fight on equal terms alongside whites in the U.S. Army. Remarkably, Blackman is present in each of the numerous epochs—or so he thinks, as he unconsciously works through the content of the "black history seminar" he teaches to his unit. Put another way, the narrative literalizes how, in his class, "[h]e'd gone back to the American Revolution to Prince Estabrook, Peter Salem, Crispus Attucks and all the unnamed rest; from there to the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Plains Wars, the Spanish-American War—all the wars" (14). With the anachronistic hindsight of the traveler from the future, Blackman imaginatively embarks on his adventures in eighteenth-century New England "[a]s in a dream" (15).

But it is a strange dream, in a realistic—at times even documentary—mode, with Williams interested in Blackman's psychic life only to the extent it brings us closer to objectively understanding a vaster social reality. Blackman's dream-narrative function, after all, is to witness history in the making: a flattened character, who neither ages nor develops, he reappears in war after war to reveal the U.S. Army—allegedly "the most democratic institution in America" (316)—as a white supremacist institution from first to last. Typically, he watches one generation of black soldiers after another serve as front-line fodder. Thus, in a Civil War exchange with a sergeant, whose black troops have declared that "they'd be damned if they'd lead another charge," Blackman reasons: "Whether they want to or not, they'll have to go. Otherwise these Yankee sonsabitches'll just line em and shoot em and bring some more niggers in here before tomorrow morning to do the same thing" (76). That his personal realm is in the

service of something much more public is corroborated further when his dreams become documentary. His eyewitness account of the Rough Riders during the 1898 war with Spain in Cuba, for example, merges with two fragmentary passages presented as historical artifacts: the first, attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, disparaging the "Negro soldiers [who] were peculiarly dependent on their white officers"; the second, from Senator Nathan B. Scott, countering with the claim that "[a]s I understand, had it not been for the gallantry of the Tenth Regiment of Cavalry, a colored regiment, at that battle there might not have been a sufficient number of Rough Riders left to tell the tale" (131). These and similar passages, leading us into dialogues and debates with real-life policy-makers, concretely suggest that Blackman's is a historical consciousness, impersonal yet sensitive as it goes about uncovering enduring patterns of racial oppression.

Faithful to Woloch's paradigm, Blackman, as protagonist, is surrounded by many minor characters, several of whom resurface alongside him in multiple historical periods—his black troops Harrison, Griot, and Woodcock; the white racist Major Whittman; Jewish Robert Doctorow; and his black lover, Mimosa Rogers. Quite at odds with Woloch's paradigm, however, these characters are more often than not the stuff of Blackman's consciousness, which is to say they *share* character space with the protagonist. What matters is the way, once again, this character with such incredible potential for detaching from the realm of social responsibility tends toward just the opposite. This is evident in his attachment to his troops, who—as in the opening sequence—are perennially oblivious to the full extent of their plight. Hence Blackman's recollection of the end of his seminar: "they stood and gave him the salute, the fist, the arm. The same one being used all over the Army these days, wherever there were Brothers. He'd saluted back. He hoped they'd remember the lessons he tried to teach. He hoped they now had that sense

of continuity that everyone tried to keep from them, from kindergarten up" (15). Resolved "to take it upon himself to tell the young legs about black soldiers, because the white man sure wasn't going to do it and do it right" (312), the pedagogue Blackman intervenes in the way the dominant culture informs the consciousness of its minority subjects. He challenges those scripts (encountered "from kindergarten up") that rob them of a "sense of continuity"—a phrase clarified when the historical narrative reveals how the common black soldier in each epoch acts on the belief that he can provide military service in exchange for freedom and full civil rights, but who is disappointed at every turn. What Blackman understands is that as long as the aggregate knowledge of repeated failure is withheld, his fellow blacks are prevented from believing alternative action possible, let alone necessary. His character function, as such, is consciousness-raising in the sense of both reaching out to rouse others politically and reaching in to model how the one gets his mind around the many.

Unlike other black radical novels deploying social histories to recoup and mobilize black energies in the fight against white oppression—such as *Youngblood*, *The Black Commandos*, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, and *Meridian—Blackman* leads thematically to an utter rejection of America for the black, morphing from historical into futuristic novel to imagine a national uprising of blacks who neutralize the white power structure then take flight for Africa. Like William Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer* (1962), it speculates that a black evacuation in itself would cripple the U.S. economy and disorient remaining whites. But if Williams's eleventh-hour impulse seems to offer cultural nationalism as a solution, it is worth remembering that in *The Man Who Cried I Am* he indicted the Africanist dream as a false hope for black Americans. Almost lost in *Blackman's* provocative denouement is the simple fact that desire throughout has been for multiracial belonging and cohesion: if finally the character of Blackman

is what Louis Althusser might call a "bad subject,"[6] a centrifugal force disturbing the depicted social, he has tried before now to be an utterly "good citizen," a centripetal force attempting to secure a cohesive community for blacks and whites (and others) alike. Like the protagonist of Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1853)—by some accounts, the first black novel inflected with radical desire—what Blackman wants is full citizenship in the USA. What prevents him from achieving this is the systemic racism he finds there. In other words, his impulse to rouse his Brothers has little to do with racio-cultural essentialism, since all they have in common is a heritage of oppression, a "linked fate": to be black in this army is to be persuaded, through promises of upward mobility, to enlist, only to be paid off with containment at the lowest strata. Structural determinism is everything: while the black man seeks to reposition himself and redefine his identity as a free American with full rights, the institution consigns him to a permanent place, as a black, at the bottom of society. Like Douglass's Madison Washington, Williams's soldier tries to transcend what it officially means to be black, aspiring to gravitate from exploitable property to sovereign personhood. The difference lies not in the extent to which the two authors figure this desire for citizenship, but in Douglass's belief that America might redeem its principles and allow the slave to emerge free—contrasted with Williams's giving up hope in America's ability to accommodate a multi-ethnic imaginary. It is the difference between Washington's aspiration to be a good subject and Blackman's final resignation that he has to be a bad.

---

[6] For Althusser, "[t]here are no subjects except by and for their subjection," subjection being the way ideology reproduces the relations of production in the consciousness of individuals, so that when addressed—when "hailed"—they respond as if they "'recognize' the existing state of affairs (*das Bestehende*), that 'it really is true that it is so and not otherwise,' and that they must be obedient"—whether to church, government, employer, God, conscience, etc. ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 1964, 181). Actually described here are "good subjects," distinct from "bad subjects" "who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (Repressive) State Apparatus" (181).

## Conclusion

Novels of different decades, beholden to different conceptions of what is wrong with America and what must be done, *Heartbreak Hotel* and *Captain Blackman* revolve around comparable struggles over the value and meaning of identity. Both are exemplary consciousness-raising novels, forbidding us to pit the one in any individualist sense against the many, insisting from first to last that the singular experience must find its significance in the vaster structures of social and political life.

As radical novels, whose critical disclosures of modern life call for social revolution, they share much with their revolutionary-Marxist predecessors. This is especially so in the ways these later fictions disperse and displace the individualist impulses of their protagonists, skeptically flattening if not outright sealing off all that is self-interested for the sake of a more socially sensitive and responsible character. That is, what they take to task is precisely those conventional character structures indebted to more atomistic conceptions of self and society. The historical consciousness suggested by these two novels is also, structurally, little different from that of Marx's proletariat coming to consciousness as a class: the Museum Of The Revolution and the black-history seminar rouse their respective minorities to identify themselves, historically, as the underdogs of history—who, if only they realize their collective potential, will achieve the freedom and equality they long for.

Yet new tensions also emerge. Both novels, after all, opt ultimately for evasion and escape, signaling their inability or unwillingness to absorb the enemy in the way Marx predicted the proletariat would the bourgeoisie in the future commonwealth. As far as Burton and Williams can see, there is no end to the racists or the sexists, only a strategic avoidance of them. In other

words, while the same formal desire prevails—to ensure that the development of the one brings a critical solidarity with the many—the principle of identity and the practice of identity thinking trump that desire, resisting the kind of closure anticipated by the literary socialists and communists. Alternatively, and put more kindly, we might perhaps consider these radical black and feminist character-driven fictions understanding a real need for class analysis while having cause to mistrust both the limits of Marxism and the implications of going too far beyond it. Putting pressure on the play of social and psychological realism, of individual agency and structural determinism, they alert us to the stalemates of ideology and identity thinking alike.

# 3.

## Place, Space, and Ecotage:
## The Radical Scene in the American Novel

In discussing the influence of the radical tradition on the treatment of space and place in late-twentieth-century American fiction, Nicholas Spencer has proposed a genealogy—ranging from Jack London and Upton Sinclair to Joan Didion and Don DeLillo—to be understood in terms of "the aftermath of utopianism's spatial commitment" (*After Utopia: The Rise of Critical Space in Twentieth-Century American Fiction* 2006, 11). The story he tells is one in which "the analysis of social space increasingly displaces political commitment," where the novel, once guided by the principles of socialism, communism, and syndicalism, begins to function less in terms of strict political identities and more in terms of "critical space": that is, "fictionalizations of spatiality that identify, analyze, oppose, and imagine alternatives to the forms of social domination implemented by American capitalism" (10). Bearing in mind that Spencer here more or less claims there is such a thing as a radical novel, one able to "imagine alternatives to the forms of social domination," it seems a misstep to think political commitment, as such, displaced. Better to say, rather, that *certain* commitments have been displaced, in fiction and in American life alike. What Spencer interprets as the displacement of commitment, after all, could just as easily be interpreted inversely as the displacement of *space*: a speculation on the good space of the future traded for a disclosure of the bad space of the present—by no means necessitating a transformation of commitment, though certainly demanding a different slant of social, and also environmental, imagination. This distinction matters when we acknowledge that

the radical genre in the late twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries has increasingly interpreted crisis in environmentalist terms.

The classic radical novel, of course, had always evinced a complex understanding of place, space, and habitat as grounds both *of* and *for* struggle: from tenement slums and factory floor to hill-country mines and apple orchards. Indeed, socialist and communist fictions of the early to mid-twentieth century were more often than not guided by a sense of what is now called "environmental injustice": an understanding that the burdens and benefits of living, working, and natural spaces are unevenly distributed across classes and communities. Following the emergence of the modern environmentalist movement—typically marked by the publication of Rachel Carson's chemical-conscious *Silent Spring* (1962)—this sense of injustice begins to take on a different cast in the radical novel, at least in its Red Power and what I call "ecotage" forms.[1] In fact, in their visions of struggle over land rights, land use, borders, and sovereignty, the ecotage and Red Power subgenres demand a broadening of what we mean by radical in the context of U.S. fiction, primarily because 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 (Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*), or treating the so-called wilderness as a sacred site of asocial, if not animalistic, recuperation (Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*). Characteristic of both subgenres is an understanding that place itself suffers because it is *enframed*, imposed upon by large-scale if not totalizing apparatuses that over-determine the ways we relate to the more local physical world.

In narratological terms, these later radical fictions are marked by a renegotiation of what Mieke Bal terms "frame-space": the space authors devote to their characters as a "place of

[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" plus "sabotage" to denote a "branch of tactical biology."

action," to be distinguished from the "acting place" that, in contrast, is that space which is brought to the fore and thematized "for its own sake" (*Narratology* 2009, 139). Though Bal seems to suggest that frame-space is so called because it frames action, such a notion runs the risk of distracting us from the ways this space too is instrumentally framed: enclosed, relegated to the background, and called on only to the extent it serves character structures. In fact, she potentially distracts us from the fact that *all* spaces are framed in narrative, entailing—as Bal otherwise knows well—the biases and ideologies of focal points and perspectives. Yet a qualitative difference remains in our experience of space relegated to the background as "scene" or "setting" and the thematized space that compels us to recognize the "fact that 'this is happening here' is just as important as 'the way it is here.'" Treating the two kinds of space as strict alternatives, however, prevents Bal from fully exploring the relation of the one to the other in any narrative sense: to consider, for example, what it might mean for place to emerge in narrative in the course of casting off such an obviously subordinating frame; alternatively, to consider how a narrative might stage a coming to consciousness of the discursive or conceptual frames by which an environment has been subordinated or exploited. These are, as we shall see, the narrative logics of the radical novel as environmental novel, whose function might otherwise be described as taking us to the end of, rather than simply taking up, Spencer's critical space: not wholly preoccupied with belaboring the ills of the present, nor with anticipating the promise of the future, but rather with deconstructing that which prevents the one from leading to the other.

Bal does, however, give us coordinates for schematizing the function of narrative invested in the environmental imagination—the task of which, as Lawrence Buell defines it, is to rouse us to respond to a world physically and increasingly in crisis: affecting our sense of where we are to such an extent that we alter our worldviews and, subsequently, our practices. "The

success of all environmentalist efforts," as he sums up, "finally hinges not on 'some highly developed technology, or some arcane new science' but on 'a state of mind': on attitudes, feelings, images, narratives" (*Writing for An Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* 2003, 1, quoting Ulrich Beck). What Bal prompts us to consider in such an undertaking is the fundamental role of the narrative frame, perhaps the primary means by which writers impose meaning and value on the physical world as they interpret and parcel it out to their readers.

The stakes here are not new to theorists of frame analysis, whose core assumption is that we organize experience according to the ways dominant discourses "frame" reality for us, chiefly by conferring structure on, and lending context to, experience. Recently, scholars such as Robert J. Brulle and Daniel J. Philippon have begun to explore how such frames function specifically for the environmental-activist imagination. In *Agency, Democracy, and Nature: The U.S. Environmental Movement From a Critical Theory Perspective* (2000), Brulle takes a standard approach: he describes the "discursive frame" as cementing the identities of social-movement groups, binding individuals together with shared interpretations of political reality that motivate them in their collective actions (76-7). Philippon, drawing on Brulle, is more interested in those denser conceptual frames provided by 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" (*Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement* 2004, 5). Thus the function of long-familiar metaphors such as "frontier," "garden," "park," "wilderness," and "utopia" has been to enable narratives that give sanction to

transformative ways of knowing and using the physical world, framing particular locales by means of instrumental vocabularies so as to save them from, or seal for them, particular fates.

Notably, both Brulle and Philippon rely on Kenneth Burke's dramatism to explain how frame analysis makes sense of environmentalist social-movement organizations.[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" (*A Grammar of Motives* 1945, 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)

Conspicuously, for critics intent on environmentalist concerns, neither Brulle nor Philippon comment on the subordinate *scenic* role given the world here, "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,

---

[2] Only Philippin cites Burke directly; Brulle cites Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton, Jr. whose *Persuasion and Social Movements* (2001), however, draws explicitly on Burke's dramatism.

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 the most obvious choice for an environmentalist imagination. Yet this is precisely what makes him useful—his literalizing (rather than allegorizing) conventional conditions under which we habituate ourselves to framed and framing spaces. He reminds us, after all, of the theatricality of the *scenic*, by which the world comes to us in fragmentary representations and stylizations, a practice and logic of the building up and boxing in of perceptions and conceptions of the world. Not just a hackneyed metaphor for a scripted life, the stage-set signals that exemplary space in which we literally discover the world at its most blatantly framed and apportioned and to which, as convention demands, we respond by suspending belief.

At which point we arrive at something paradigmatic, the work of the literal scene lending itself to a consideration of those spaces and places in the vaster world that we habitually frame, whether conceptually or 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. Hardly new, the idea that the world is "enframed" was given its classic articulation in Martin Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology" (1964). Buell of course cautions us to acknowledge that Heidegger, though "a key precursive figure for many environmental critics" is "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 with the same brush" (*The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* 2005, 165, n11). Yet Heidegger's argument—that the realm of art offers a viable locus for confronting a technological imperative that forces us to frame the world injuriously—is in many ways a blueprint for Buell's. That said, where Buell claims precedence for the environmental

imagination over the "political unconscious"—"[i]nsofar as the where of existence precedes the what of social practice" (2005, 44)—Heidegger insists that the what and the where are inseparable. To this extent, Heidegger offers something more than simple ideology critique, grounding his deconstruction of modernity in a fundamental sensitivity to the environment. As such, and as we shall see, he affords a paradigm fitting for considering those radical subgenres of Red Power novels and "ecotage" novels —as represented by Leslie Marmon Silko's *Alamanac of the Dead* (1991) and Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), respectively—that resist the presumptions about nature and society that a more conventional (that is, in the Marxist tradition) ideology critique might make.

## A Technical Imagination

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). His intention is to disturb the common conception of *technē* as merely 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 the appeal to pre-modernity secures a way of conceptualizing technology 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*. It was a single, manifold revealing. It was pious, *promos*, i.e., yielding to the holding sway and the safekeeping of truth. (315-6)

Just as he tempers what is meant by technology, then, so he tempers what is meant essentially by art, drawing each into the same realm of activity and purpose. But this is what *technē* used to mean, a pre-modern attitude at odds with the way technology now "sets upon" us so that everything in sight is reduced to a "standing reserve" of stock or resources: revealing is still the fundamental operation, but "[t]he revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging" in the sense it

> puts to nature the unreasonable demand that is to 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)

So the historical narrative is one of decline, and the name Heidegger gives to 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). This is the claim to which the essay leads, and it calls for what we might call a "technical imagination." Like Buell, Heidegger insists that the environmental crisis is not in the last analysis a problem to be resolved in the urban, industrial, or political sectors. What he appeals to, rather, is the critical power of art.

If enframing speaks of conceptual strangleholds on space, place, and habitat that compel us to conceive the world so that it appears as little more than a storehouse to be plundered at will, then the technical imagination is that aspect of the environmental imagination conscious of the aberrant discursive frame and intent on deconstructing it. As a function for the novel, its task is to recuperate a sense of place beyond the merely instrumental and 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—that, 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." That is, whatever damaging logics prevail are intrinsic to the way we have framed the scene—or the way the scene has been framed for us. As to alternative logics, what Heidegger tells us of the world of action is that just because a quality is implicit by no means guarantees it will achieve presence: sometimes we must intervene and draw what is implicit out. This is, after all, what he models with his etymologies, taking residual traces of language and thought and coaxing them to speak against the enframed order of things.

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 not so much new but old possibilities for the ways in which we might order our environments. Another way of saying this is that novels like *Almanac of the Dead* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* look at enframed locales with a view to breaking the (usually large-scale and totalizing) assumptions that determine how those places and the ways of life therein are known and used: for Silko the Americas under European civilization, for Abbey the Utah-Arizona desert under urban-industrial encroachment. Primarily, they signal their authorial interventions with narrative frames that teach us to read and re-read the territories laid out in the narratives proper—which is to say the

frame, as counter-frame, becomes both thematic and guiding principle. Silko achieves this with a prefatory *narrative* map prophesying 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 territories and 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. The function here is not strictly to protest, nor even to demystify as such, but to put an end to that critical space Spencer describes: to achieve a perspective from which the world no longer indexes the hurtful and the wasteful.

These formal and thematic framings work to establish irreverence for the "unreasonable demands" of globalizing forces and a correlative reverence for comparatively local spaces that have been subjugated—for Silko, the continent and its indigenous peoples, for Abbey, the desert and its romantic devotees. On the one hand, such novels show the environments we dominate to be laden, naturally, with forces other than our own—the animal, the insect, the vegetative, and the elemental. Realizing places as sites of activity in their own right, regardless of the human community, the liberationist impulse here complicates what we mean by social revolution to the extent that the ecological at times takes precedence over the social. It is a complication familiar in the play-off between the "shallow" ecology already operating in many of our cities—whereby our environmental consciousness seeks to save the world only to the extent that saving the world will save the human community—and the more radical "deep" ecology—which seeks to reintegrate the human into nature and save the vaster, non-anthropocentric biosphere. On the other hand, and more importantly for this study, such novels do yield human counter-agents who emerge in response to crises of endangerment: activist characters who, as noted above, help to re-make scenes of degradation as sites of radical confrontation. As such, and as we shall see, the

radical novel as environmentalist novel imagines a redistribution of the motives actively at work *in* and *over* our environments, thinking through local ways of dismantling our most injurious frames and apparatuses.

## Environmentalism and the Radical Novel

Abbey's celebration of machine saboteurs working against urban-industrial despoliation has famously influenced many other radical fictions, most recently Neal Stephenson's *Zodiac* (1988), T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth* (2000), Dave Foreman's *The Lobo Outback Funeral Home* (2000), Carl Hiassen's *Hoot!* (2002), and Richard Melo's *Jokerman 8* (2004). In the spirit of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, if to varying degrees, all these works interrogate the meaning of environmentalist activism. Meanwhile, Silko's figuring of the indigenous homeland as grounds for Native politico-cultural revival figures more as the capstone to an earlier subgenre marked by N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), and Silko's *Ceremony* (1977).[3] One way of describing these and similar novels is as works asking to what extent we should disrupt prevailing frames: whether to attempt reform through orthodox channels, or to assume all such channels beyond repair and so pursue extra-legal options. This questioning is particularly noticeable in the ecotage subgenre. On one hand, *Zodiac* and *Hoot!* generate relatively normative situations for radical protagonists to caution and temper corporate excesses: take Stephenson's Sangamon Taylor, a "*professional* asshole" (7, emphasis added) forcing chemical companies to comply with legal requirements and clean up their toxic spills in Boston Harbor. On the other hand, radical characters in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, *A Friend of the Earth*, and *Jokerman 8* venture into the consciously criminal territory of economic sabotage. Meanwhile, *The Lobo Outback Funeral Home* makes this range of possibilities a

[3] I draw here on Sean Teuton's superb introduction to the Red Power novel, *Red Land, Red Power* (2008).

principle of character development with Jack Hunter beginning his story as a conservationist lobbyist and ending it as a libertarian environmentalist.

Not insignificantly, Foreman—famously the founder of Earth First!—was also responsible for *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* (1985), a non-fiction instruction manual for strategic sabotage in the service of "protecting wild country from the depredations of industrialism gone berserk" (4). "[T]o make our defense of the wild even more effective," Foreman asserts, "[r]oad spiking and destruction, and decommissioning of heavy equipment and trucks deserve to be more widely employed than heretofore" (5). If one learns the lessons of the guide, "[e]ven mechanical idiots should be able to take on a bulldozer." It is no accident if Foreman here puts us in mind of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*: not only does he cite Abbey as the inspiration for the *Field Guide*, but Abbey himself supplies a foreword ("Forward!") consolidating the figuration of "American wilderness" under assault:

> For many of us, perhaps for most of us, the wilderness is as much our home, or a lot more so, than the wretched little stucco boxes, plywood apartments, and wallboard condominiums in which we are mostly confined by the insatiable demands of an overcrowded and ever-expanding industrial culture. And if the wilderness is our true home, and if it is threatened with invasion, pillage and destruction—as it certainly is—then we have the right to defend that home, as we would our private rooms, by whatever means are necessary. (8)

Laying the problematic invocation of wilderness to one side for the moment, we find Abbey and Foreman advocating a position held presently by the Earth Liberation Front (ELF): that

"environmental protection is a matter of self-defense, and ELF actions are a natural and necessary response to the very real threats to life on earth."[4]

Though Foreman argues in *Ecodefense* that there is nothing revolutionary in monkeywrenching, his novel attempts to sensitize us to that brand of revolutionism theorized elsewhere by Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella, II, who "renounce reformist approaches that aim only to manage the symptoms of the global ecological crisis and never dare or think to probe its underlying dynamics and causes"—that is, "[t]he objectives revolutionary environmentalists raise as necessary for a viable future cannot be realized within the present world system and require a rupture with it" (*Igniting a Revolution*, 21). Described here, as in *Lobo*, is a rejection of the professionalization of the environmental movement and an indictment of its continuing to negotiate with those orthodox powers underwriting the very abuses in need of remedy. From this perspective, a qualitative difference holds between the radical potential of, say, Greenpeace in its formative years and its alleged degeneration into a "Gang of Ten bureaucracy" (16), at odds with the more extreme implications of "no-compromise" movements like Earth First! and the ELF.[5] As Mark Somma, co-founder of the *Journal of Green Theory and Praxis*, sees it, "while tactics such as direct action and ecotage may be 'radical,' they are not revolutionary because they cannot, by themselves, bring about a qualitatively new social system": "radical is a word best left to describe behavior and tactics…. [t]he demand for change is radical; [but] the overthrow and replacement of the existing social paradigms and institutions of society constitutes revolution" (38).

---

[4] *Igniting a Revolution – an Introduction to the Earth Liberation Front*, film distributed by the North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office. Accessed online Jul. 25 2011.

[5] The flipside of this debate is that mainstreamers in turn denounce extremists such as the ELF and the Animal Liberation Front as terrorists (an appellation resisted by these groups who insist that their business is not violence against life in any form but the destruction of private property as a means of stopping despoliation). In fact, in 2005, the FBI described the ELF as America's greatest domestic terrorist threat (Somma 47).

I think this a fair critique of practical politics in the real world. But it does not lend itself to a politics of literary forms. The point of the radical novel, if we follow the seminal definition given by Walter Rideout (*The Radical Novel in the United States* 1956), is that it sanctions, whether implicitly or explicitly, social revolution. It is not to be confused with the protest novel, which typically has a strong sense of that which is abject in human society but does not get beyond oppositionalism. That is, what inheres like a promise within literary radicalism is a sense that humankind is not about to fix or patch things up, it is about to transform them to the extent of producing new social and economic relations. For Somma, the radical can agitate all she wants, but revolutionism that does not aspire beyond the level of insinuation or representation is no revolutionism at all. Somma's forthrightness, of course, should remind us that Rideout was writing in a time of deep McCarthyist reaction, in the context of which even the most oblique allusions in the realm of discourse could have profound political resonance. Which is to say that even if the last half-decade has shown that radical actions do not necessarily find consummation in actual revolution, the idea of a radical novel—as well as a radical criticism—can suggest labor in the service of social revolution, of anticipating without necessarily depicting a radically other order of things.

At play in the interaction between Foreman and Abbey is a striking recycling of politics and literary form: Abbey's 1975 novel fuels Foreman's non-fiction, which brings aboard Abbey's polemic, both of which can then be seen to feed into the two authors' subsequent novels, *Lobo* and the sequel to *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, *Hayduke Lives!* (1990). What results is a blurring of the boundary between the remit of the novelist and that of the ecotage-propagandist, with the same cluster of aesthetic and political attachments to the land guiding the formal constructions of partisan essay and popular novel alike. When Foreman writes in

*Ecodefense* that "[b]ecause direct communication among monkeywrenchers is dangerous, this book and its future editions, as well as the *Earth First! Journal*, is probably the best medium for communication among ecodefenders" (1), and since his later fiction in many ways continues the explorations of the field-guide, he invites us to overlay that template of "radical medium" onto the novel. That is, we can consider *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *The Lobo Outback Funeral Home* as instructive and directive in determining what is to be done in the face of profit-driven environmental degradation—one answer, to use Heidegger's words, being a radical "challenging-forth" turned against the cultures of destruction: that is, a challenge put to the challengers.

In what follows, I consider similar challenges in the later radical novel, in which the technical imagination probes imperialist-capitalist conceptions of space and place for the sake of outlining what we might call "liberationist ecologies": where the struggles of human communities to wrest themselves free of endangering forces are simultaneously struggles for habitat and environment. Making a case for the purveying of a "radical scene"—an endangered environment, from which characters emerge who are capable of not only resisting but posing radically other motives and purposes—I stake out formal grounds for thinking through politics of responsibility typically left underdeveloped in mainstream environmentalist discourse. 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 of the environmental imagination in the U.S. radical novel, this essay 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. In 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, vital for the testing of what it means to act in, and respond to, an endangered world.

## Megamachine in the Garden: *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

*The Monkey Wrench Gang*, with characteristic cheek, 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 the encroachment of industrial culture, breaks the machine frame. Abbey applauds an ethos of direct action with a lively cluster of allusions: an epitaph to "Ned Ludd" (given a dictionary definition of "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 on its own page 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 just a lunatic, in proceeding from Ludd's "rage" to Shelton's environmental mourning, Whitman's poetics of resistance, and the figure of the seminal environmentalist-activist, Thoreau, Abbey sensitizes us to a machine-breaking ethos informed by a romantic attachment to endangered place—an ethos itself endangered. In sum, what Abbey broaches is the cultural enframing of this frame wrecker, whose smashed frame we read as both the apparatus of a machine culture historically imposed upon sites of labor for profits' sake, and as a conceptual boxing in of the human community to an exploitative logic. To smash the frame, then, is to rail against a local intrusion that is simultaneously a cipher for a much larger encroachment set in motion by industrial modernity: resistance is not to the machine *per se* but, rather, to the machine in the hands of technology's exemplary accomplice, the industrial-capitalist.[6]

If, as Burke claims, the scene suggests the action to follow, in the ensuing story Abbey looks to a place enframed by corporate-political interests and re-conceives it so that we expect nothing less than the emergence of counter-agents. The novel's expert frame-wrecker is Hayduke, a Vietnam veteran "returned to the American Southwest he had been remembering only to find it no longer what he remembered, no longer the clear and classical desert, the pellucid sky he roamed in dreams":

> 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

[6] I paraphrase from Philip Hobsbaum's "The Machine Breakers" (1952): "In some cases, indeed, the resistance to the machine was quite consciously resistance to the machine in the hands of the capitalist" (11).

> 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)

This motif of the fallen land reappears in the perspective of Sarvis, the surgeon, who claims "a consortium of power companies and government agencies are conspiring to open more strip mines and build even more coal-burning power plants in the same four corners area where all that filth is coming from now… in what was once semi-virginal wilderness and still is the most spectacular landscape in the forty-eight contiguous bloody states" (51); and of Smith, the wilderness guide, who "remembered the real Colorado, before damnation, when the river flowed unchained and unchanneled in the joyous floods of May and June" (58).

The struggle from the outset is one of 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" (more on this later) and "real river" constitutes an indictment of that worldview in which all is reduced to mere resources. Refusing to let such scenes of degradation persist, Abbey sets Hayduke, Sarvis, Smith, and Abbzug (the doctor's receptionist) on a project of wrecking the soil compactors, excavators, bulldozers, tractors, earthmovers, loaders, geophones, and drilling rigs, not to mention the roads, bridges, and barbwire 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 a new 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.[7] Taking every opportunity to vividly describe how to go about this radical surgery, Abbey's novel generates a narrative comparable to Foreman's field guide for economic sabotage, dramatizing and characterizing what a grassroots challenge to a world force might look like.[8] What remains a conceptual maneuver for Heidegger is here given literal representation in fiction as a systematic dismantling of the apparatus corrupting our environmental imagination, and a radical deconstruction of what it means to set our world in order.

Scott Slovic makes a valiant effort to read *The Monkey Wrench Gang* as something more than an expressly political novel. He claims Abbey's goal "is not to imbue his readers with a shared, placidly adopted ideology of environmental protection, but to alert us to our essential wildness, to stir us out of the complacency which allows us to give up our own freedom." Slovic is right to deem Abbey not reducible to any precise protectionist ideology. But Abbey himself (as quoted by Slovic) insists that any such "wildness" be understood as just as much a political as a philosophical concern—or that the philosophical and aesthetic serve a function that is, in the last analysis, socio-political. "The reason we need wilderness," says Abbey in the interview quoted

---

[7] Though Heise makes it clear that the pastoral mode has proven a mainstay in environmentalist fictions, as Leo Marx saw it, the American pastoral was a defunct mode by the mid 1960s (*The Machine in the Garden* 1964). At its peak – exemplified in Jefferson's agrarianism – the pastoral functioned to reconcile the countervailing forces of nature and over-civilization. But railroaded by the late-nineteenth century's "technological sublime," and driven toward the wastelands of the modernists, the pastoral faltered, "obsolete," in the face of "the machine's increasing domination of the visible world" (364). What we subsequently require, Marx concludes, are "new symbols of possibility, and although the creation of those symbols is in some measure the responsibility of artists, it is in greater measure the responsibility of society. The machine's sudden entrance into the garden presents a problem that ultimately belongs not to art but to politics" (365). Marx is right to understand the problem as hardly a literary one; but his own understanding of Jefferson's agrarianism generating symbols that not only saturated but guided American culture and policy, gives the lie to that stark separation of art and politics. Indeed, the eventual triumph of machine over garden, as Marx tells it, is itself an appropriation of the popularized literary mode, insisting we do not separate out the play of politics and aesthetics. If, then, as Marx finally claims, "the aspirations once represented by the symbol of an ideal landscape have not, and probably cannot, be embodied in our traditional institutions" (364), the answer would seem to lie in working toward not only alternative symbols but alternative institutions.

[8] Abbey is here in keeping with anarchist ideas of his times – as George Woodcock put it two years after the publication of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, "[n]owhere has a spontaneous rebellion in recent years resulted in a radical change in the actual structure of power… A Recognition of this fact has led some contemporary anarchists to abandon the direct attack on the citadel of power, on the assumption that it may collapse through undermining if they can change the attitudes of people at the grassroots level" (53).

by Slovic, "is because we are wild animals. Every man needs a place where he can go crazy in peace… For freedom and delirium. Only then can we return to man's other life, to the other way, to the order and sanity and beauty of what will somewhere be, unless all visions are false, the human community" (in Slovic, 114). So Abbey gives primacy to the politics and aesthetics of the social: the human community does not serve wildness in the way wildness serves the human community. To use Heidegger's words, there is a saving power in nature that, curbing our techno-industrial tendencies, allows us to *return* (Abbey's word) to social life. In keeping with classical anarchism, Abbey sees wilderness as not the antithesis of a life lived artificially in the social realm but the primal pattern for that life, affording a provisional freedom just as impossible to find in the human community as order and sanity are in the wild. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* does not alert us to our essential wildness so much as to the endangerment of that wildness—which is, primarily, a problem of the social, making it a cause not only for philosophical contemplation but, more properly, political action.

Once we acknowledge the protagonists in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* as actors in an anarchistic scene, the particular Utah-Arizona environment depicted—clear desert, semi-virginal wilderness, and real river—takes on 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 comes close to a conception of American wilderness that has since incurred substantial criticism as a culturally constructed phenomenon motivated by what William Cronon identifies as a Romantic-era bourgeois "frontier nostalgia."[9] 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

[9] "The Trouble with Wilderness" (1996).

from urban-industrial production. But if Abbey invokes such frontier nostalgia, he does so to turn it against any 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 human community attempting to demarcate the limits of an empire that abhors limits.

In doing so, however, Abbey lays bare the limits of his own democratic affinities, and it soon becomes clear that he is no longer wrecking but shifting the frame: implicitly, in his valorizing a conception of wilderness capable of sanctioning both the unreasonable despoliation of the land and its radical recuperation; and explicitly, in his disdain for all things Native, manifesting in a thematic belittling channeled through the reflections of characters and narrator alike. First introduced, this theme 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). This setting up the Indians to bear the brunt of an indictment of white culture continues when Sarvis rants about those "'Damned redskin savages'" who are "'[t]oo cheap to string up fences. What do we pay them welfare for? You can't rely on these aborigines to do anything right'" (188). Admittedly, the narrator seems sympathetic to "the sold-out, deceived and betrayed Navajo Nation" (171), but such sympathy is undercut by Hayduke's characterization of "the Hopi elders, the American Indian Movement, the Black Mesa Defense Committee" as nothing but "bleeding-heart types" (169). Indeed, when next invoked, Indian politics is a joke: to throw the authorities off their trail, Abbzug leaves behind slogans like "CUSTER WEARS AN

ARROW SHIRT – RED POWER!" (193) and "HOKA HEY! HOSKINNINI RIDES AGAIN!" (200).

We could, to be sure, commend Abbey for refusing to mythologize the "ecological Indian" and showing the Native not immune to environmental problems, or for signaling in the corrupted Indian a failed white-colonial administration. But elsewhere Abbey makes explicit his own racializing sense of justice: in his essay on "Immigration and Liberal Taboos" (1988), he calls baldly for closing the border against immigrants from Mexico and the South on the assumption that their accumulative presence will damage American civilization. "At least until we have brought our own affairs into order," he conjectures, "it might be wise for us as American citizens to consider calling a halt to the mass influx of even more millions of hungry, ignorant, unskilled, and culturally-morally-genetically impoverished people" (43). If this ethno-nationalism is what motivates Abbey's Native representations, whether or not it offends sensibilities, it poses a formal problem for the novel, establishing a logic that demands ousting not only the machine from the garden but the machine breakers too. That is, since the wilderness narrative claims that treating the land as public and uncultivated rather than private and domesticated should take precedence (arguing it was a better place before urban-industrial encroachment), conspicuous by its absence is any acknowledgment of aboriginal precedence (that it was logically a better place before Anglo-European encroachment). The point of the novel, however, is not to reclaim a country untrammeled by immigrants, but to sanction a radical presence that happens to attribute the most useful action and agency exclusively to its white actors, which culminates in the construction of an effectively white "scene."

This conflict of logics suggests that the later radical novel's vision of the realm of freedom is at times spurious—that, without a coherent doctrine, it fails as a novel of social

justice. Yet the conventional concept of the realm of freedom always was, in a real sense, exclusionary. While the utopian tradition begun by More imagines an unequivocally gated community, a similar logic holds for Marx's cooperative commonwealth of the future: if "the dictatorship of the proletariat" means anything, it means a policing of the transition between epochs, working toward an absolute prohibition or impossibility of capitalist desire. Such logic is also concretized in Ernest Callenbach's radical novel *Ecotopia* (1975), in which the "stable-state" ecology of a seceded Northwest hinges on an isolationist framing of place enforced by strict border control. All of which brings to the fore the fact that what motivates *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, after all, is not the idea of the wild but the need to police the wild. What the novel comprises is a regulatory frame, part of which—the anti-Indian *argumentum ad hominem*—reveals itself as a way to reduce a particular people to a residual and ridiculous presence, rendering them culturally and politically exhausted, which, in an era that saw the rise of the activist Indian Movement, proves just another form of sabotage, though without any democratic impetus to sanction it. My point is not that progressive politics are prone to regressive logics, but that such contradictions endanger the radical novel as a form to the extent it fails to reconcile its contradictory political logics.

If Abbey's novel sets out in exuberant libertarianism, then, 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 as a "standing reserve" of "stock" characters mined for cheap laughs. This need not make it any less of a radical novel, but it does reveal instability in the libertarian subgenre, which seems ill at ease with its own Romantic attachments. Without freeing the radical novel from the exploitative imperative, Abbey 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 actually 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 real world and the realm of literature, for the task in hand for both the activist and the radical novelist is precisely to help re-conceive 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 lie of the politically and culturally exhausted Indian.

## Revolution as *Technē*: *Almanac of the Dead*

*Almanac of the Dead* has proven a controversial novel in ways that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* has not, perhaps because it flips the ethnic script to undertake one of the most damning fictional indictments in recent decades of the Anglo-European legacy in the Americas.[10] If Abbey leaves room to yet practice a kind of rugged individualism not too far removed from the classic American creed, no such case can be made for Silko. 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 social and political revolution in the name of tribal reclamation of stolen lands. Appropriately, it announces itself as a novel of geo-politics. Opening with a "contents" section showing chapter clusters organized under territorial headings ("the United States of America," "Mexico," "Africa," "the Americas," "The Fifth World," and "One World, Many Tribes"), what follows is a custom-drawn "five hundred year map" of the Americas giving emphasis to the Tucson-Mexico area, a typographic mapping of

[10] See Rebecca Tillet's "Anamnesiac Mappings" (2007, 150) on "notable critical hostility" in Ryan's "An Inept 'Almanac of the Dead'" and Birkerts's "Apocalypse Now: A Review of… *Almanac of the Dead*."

characters, scenes, and events from the story soon to follow. Recent scholarly readings using the lenses of post-colonialism, decolonization, multiculturalism, and the transatlantic describe this map as designedly transgressive[11]: laying out narrative movements resisting standard cartographic conventions premised on the fixity of physical features, it is read as challenging the colonial forces presiding historically over the institution of map-making.[12] Hence, if the conventional map is—akin to the knitting frame wrecked by Ludd—a capitalist, imperialist, or colonialist technology, Silko sets forth a challenge markedly different from Abbey's, giving figuration not to the skewing of the dominant frame but to its wholesale destruction.

Silko herself describes her map as "a 'glyphic' representation of the [novel's] narrative" (*Yellow Woman* 119). In the Americas, the glyph came to popular attention when Frederick Catherwood and John Lloyd Stephens published their *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1841), a book comprising text and engravings documenting their so-called discovery of the glyph-carved ruins of Mayan civilization. If Catherwood's glyph—typically a monumental carving in stone, mediated through drawings rendered as engravings—served the colonial construction of the Americas, Silko re-inscribes it as a means of asserting both a return to Native primacy (the glyph as mark of pre-Colombian culture) and the advent of new indigenous power (glyph as mark of de-colonial self-determination). "This 'glyph,'" says Silko, "shows how the Americas are 'one,' not separated by artificial, imaginary 'borders'" (*YW*

[11] See T.V. Reed's "Toxic Colonialism, Environmental Justice, and Native Resistance in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2009); Tillett's "Anamnesiac Mappings" (2007); Elizabeth Archuleta's "Securing Our Nation's Roads and Borders or Re-circling the Wagons? Leslie Marmon Silko's Destabilization of 'Borders'" (2005); David Mogen's "Native American Visions of Apocalypse: Prophecy and Protest in the Fiction of Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor" (2005); Alex Hunt's "The Radical Geography of Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2004); Bridget O'Meara's "The Ecological Politics of Leslie Silko's 'Almanac of the Dead'" (2000); and Deborah Horvitz's "Freud, Marx and Chiapas in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (1998).

[12] These studies rarely acknowledge how orthodox mapping agencies are also heavily invested in practices defying what we like to think of as 'standard' cartographic conventions: the ongoing project of re-drawing political boundaries in flux, charting movements in human history, recording environmental change, denoting features that do not exist in the real world (to protect against unlicensed reproduction), and, in an age of satellite photography and geographical information systems, generating custom data maps to show whatever clients want.

119). So the map as glyph 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).

Silko suggests that the standard map, and the legal apparatus it underwrites, is just another form of modern technology making unreasonable (here *unrealistic*) demands. In ways comparable to Heidegger's offering of the image of the peasant as a pre-modern alternative, Silko offers the glyphic map as an appeal to a more *natural*, and so allegedly more realistic and reasonable, relation to the world and its setting in order. 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)

That Calabazas refuses to speak of his people's presence in the past as past—insisting that "we *are* here before maps"—reveals the problem as a problem for historical consciousness. The radical sentiment here, implicit in his refusal to recognize the conceptual frames imposed on the continent, has its counterpart when Zeta, another smuggler amassing arms for the coming 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." So she concludes that "[a]ll the laws of the illicit

governments had to be blasted away" (133). Though Zeta here appears as the more properly revolutionary of these 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, Zeta is about the business of "bringing-forth" a particular truth—that a failure of truth inheres within the white establishment—and this is what sanctions her revolutionism. When Heidegger says that *technē* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiēsis*, he speaks of a radical categorical imperative: technology *ought* not to make unreasonable demands on the world; it *ought* to reveal the world in a more truthful way, a way of securing the restraining of the essence of modern technology, and securing in turn the transformation of all those instrumental practices and institutions that presently thrive on unreasonable demands. Silko, it seems, shares this assumption. Hence the problem with the apparatus of the modern map and the legal system it implies, which, as Zeta makes clear, only blocks the way to *veritas*. Zeta's call to blast away the laws of the illicit governments suggests that we are to understand this particular revolutionism as a good technology: a *technē* and *poiēsis* crafting a vision intended to return us to a more truthful conception of the world. Which is to say that environmental revolution figures here as the practical application of the technical imagination.

In broaching what she deems an appropriate revolutionism, Silko works through and ultimately rejects what she seems to think inappropriate revolutionism: Marxism. To some extent, as a novel of social justice, *Almanac* appears to be premised on the same scene-act ratio foregrounded in Marx's materialist assertion that "[j]ustice can never rise superior to the economic conditions of society and the cultural development conditioned by them" (qtd. in Burke 13-14). As Burke explains Marx, "in contrast with those who would place justice as a

property of personality (an attribute purely of the *agent*), the dialectical materialist would place it as a property of the *material situation* ('economic conditions'), the scene in which justice is to be enacted. He would say that no higher quality of justice can be enacted than the nature of the scenic properties permits" (13-14). Silko shares Marx's prioritizing the scenic in the pursuit of justice. Where she departs from Marx is in her interpretation of what constitutes the scenic. As her Mayan revolutionary Angelita puts it, while "Engels and Marx had understood the earth belongs to no one," that "[n]o human, individuals or corporations, no cartel of nations, could 'own' the earth," still "[t]hey had not understood that the earth was mother to all beings, and they had not understood anything about the spirit beings" (749). Here emerges the fundamental premise of *Almanac of the Dead*, the staging of competing interpretations of American place, space, and habitat—a contest informing the ethics underwriting indigenous and European ways of knowing and using the land. Bluntly, Angelita advocates a metaphysics that makes it impossible to conceive of an inanimate or indiscriminately exploitable world.[13]

Comparable here is Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995), whose narrator Angel recalls, having heard that "'[t]he Europeans called this world dangerous,'" that "I thought I understood: they had trapped themselves inside their own destruction of it… Their legacy, I began to understand, had been the removal of spirit from everything, from animals, trees, fishhooks, and hammers, all things the Indians had as allies" (180). As indefensible as such a religious worldview might be as an orthodox Western politics, it provides an allegory commensurate with Heidegger's "reasonable" ordering of nature. To act according to the exploitative imperative, for Hogan, is to box oneself in to spiritless service to it. This is also Silko's claim, for whom the materialistic disavowal of the spiritual is an index of not only discrete cultures but diverging

[13] This is a metaphysics Silko herself, in interview, has claimed to share. See Ellen Arnold's "Listening to the Spirits: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko" (1998).

theories of revolution. Reminding us of Ward Churchill's *Marxism and Native Americans* (1983), Silko argues that Marxism's failure to guarantee an end to excessive environmental exploitation renders it useless for Indigenous recovery. Quality of life, says Silko, hinges not on the matter of whether we do or do not exploit life and earth, but on the quality of that exploitation: humanity is lost the moment such exploitation becomes too materialistic, gratuitously sacrificial, and unnecessarily wasteful, none of which a communist revolution, as long as it continues the industrial mechanisms built up by capitalism, would remedy.

Consonant with *Almanac's* interest in the sacred dimensions of knowing and using the land as they interrelate with the legal, economic, and political status of indigenes in America, are the core engagements of the American Indian Movement (AIM), especially in its pursuit of social reform, treaty rights, and the return to traditional values and practices.[14] Indeed, dramatizing a process of decolonialization in which the idea of the Native homeland provides grounds for political awakening and cultural revival, Silko takes up key elements of the Red Power novel as Sean Teuton defines it (*Red Land, Red Power* 2008). For Teuton, the novels that capture the motive force of the Red Power movement's appeals for Native rights are, as already noted, Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, and Silko's *Ceremony*. Yet none of these novels figures the overt activism and political organization that commonly characterize the radical Indian movement.[15] Though *House* and *Ceremony* distinctly register world systems (in Native, colonial, and imperialist contexts), each narrative journeys toward a

[14] See Kenneth Stern's *Loud Hawk: The United States Versus the American Indian Movement* (1994), and Rex Weyler's *Blood of the Land: The Government and Corporate War Against First Nations* (1992). In *Ojibwa Warrior* (co-written by Richard Erdoes 2004), Dennis Banks casts the rise of AIM very much in the Black Power mold: figuring himself, as in the tradition of Elridge Cleaver and Malcolm X, as a formerly misguided soul politically awakened in prison, he describes a grassroots attempt not only to counter racist police brutality but also to inaugurate community welfare projects for the Indians.

[15] Even core texts generated by AIM members and cohorts – such as Banks's *Ojibwa Warrior* and Mary Crow Dog and Richard Erdoes's *Lakota Woman* (1990) – capitalize on the sensational side of AIM: the Mount Rushmore protest, the Bureau of Indian Affairs takeover, the occupation of Wounded Knee, and the Pine Ridge shoot out.

solitary individual's reconciliation to responsibilities within a particular local tribal culture. *Almanac*, meanwhile, mobilizes a massive cast of protagonists in a continental vision of movement and struggle, where homeland comprises nothing less than all of the Americas. By the same token, while armed self-defense proves not only inappropriate but self-destructive for Momaday's Kiowa Abel, for Silko's pan-tribalists armed resistance offers legitimate and healthy prospects, showing *Almanac of the Dead* closer to Red Power's militant activist tradition.[16]

It ought to give us pause when critics write off *Almanac of the Dead* as a merely multiculturalist work that consequently only teaches us to live with inequality[17] —a novel otherwise regarded as not only prophetic in its anticipation of Mexican revolutionism, but 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.[18] *Almanac* is a story, after all, that looks back to a pre-Colombian emergence of human sacrifice and destruction in Mesoamerica, on top of

[16] It would, however, be wrong to characterize *Almanac* as an AIM novel. When AIM surfaces properly in fiction, it is typically as a 1970s phenomenon – as model for action in Hogan's *Solar Storms*, as source of feminist fear in Margaret Coel's detective thriller *The Girl With Braided Hair* (2008), and as hub of violent desires in Jason Aaron and R.M. Guéra's graphic novel *Scalped* (2007 ongoing). Of these three, Hogan's is the only one to offer a coherent politics commensurate with a Native ontology. *Solar Storms* notably re-conceives a core element of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* to suit a Native logic, positing the central problem – as does Abbey – as one of connectedness between home and a culture of destruction. Both figure this connectedness in the image of a bridge: for Abbey, the one spanning the Utah-Arizona canyon; for Hogan, the one spanning the spirit world and this world, "between bad spirits and people" (102), an idea understood in the context of Angel's mother, who is thought possessed by such spirits, and who figures as a cipher for the indigenous land possessed and disturbed by the colonial Europeans.

[17] Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier* (2004).

[18] Silko captures this best in the story she tells of how she, while working on *Almanac*, spray-painted a mural in Tucson, a symbolic snake begun as graffiti that finally bore the legend: "The people are hungry. The people are cold. The rich have stolen the land. The rich have stolen freedom. The people demand justice. Otherwise, Revolution" (Silko, interview, in Donna Perry's *BACKTALK* 1993, 337).

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 of the world, do we secure survival—which in turn yields the thornier question of how much of what we have and who we are must be exploited, exhausted, and wasted before we go to work crafting a new vision, a new way of framing and revealing the world. Identity in the novel, ultimately, is not a theory of value foreclosing narrative choices but the grounds for challenging the technological apparatuses of an unfinished colonialism.

## Conclusion

*Almanac of the Dead* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* are core fictions for thinking through the role of literature and especially the novel in times of environmental endangerment, even if they evince the ambivalence Ursula K. Heise 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. (*Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* 2008, 8)

Like good environmentalists, novelists like Silko and Abbey (along with Momaday, Stephenson, Boyle, Foreman, and Melo) 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 what might otherwise figure as sequestered

locales. As such, they indeed invoke a way of looking at the local framed by the global. At the same time, speaking to 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 excessive logics 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.

As far as Heise is concerned, "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 this is true for certain locales, even for an increasing number of locales, but if we discuss (as Heise does) societies, cultures, and places in the abstract with no overt interest in actual particular societies, cultures, and places, we run the risk of continuing the logic of enframing: pre-determining the argument against any real sense of place, we write off as outdated or underdeveloped all motives and agencies that favor 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—imagined, for example, as a product of (or vehicle for) modernization, industrialization, or expansion. 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 in the ecotage novel. The same holds if we turn to the real world of, say, Subcomandante Marcos's Zapatista revolutionaries in Chiapas, Mexico,

Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian government in Venezuela, or Evo Morales's Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia—or, further afield, 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 (*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.

Such politics speak to the recent theories of Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman (*After Globalization* 2011), who, while acknowledging the global forces at play in modern life, take 'globalization' to be an ideological fiction, one guaranteed to prevent us from speaking of the true dominant world system: imperialist capitalism in the service of discrete national (rather than transnational) powers.[19] Consequently, until we can genuinely assert a sense of the global that does not necessarily imply the logic of an ontologically exploitative economic imperative, the radical environmentalist novel insists that there is good reason to resist glibly framing the local as global if it means losing all sense of our particular places, cultures, and societies. This is especially true if the local affords the most fertile grounds for establishing resistance to endangering practices, as it did for example in the Civil Rights struggles. In other words, Heise's desire to move beyond the allegedly stale binary of the local and the global seems 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

[19] "For us, globalization… was a new narrative of how the world works that needed itself to be analyzed, assessed and criticized. Globalization was the name for a novel assertion of economic, cultural, and political power that wanted desperately to hide behind the veil of its claims to have identified, in almost scientific fashion, an actually existing phenomenon. At its core was an extension and expansion of US power – the bringing into being of the 'new world order' announced by President George Bush Sr. and most effectively implemented by President Bill Clinton – in order to secure a position of global hegemony" (10).

terms" with a global scene, as such, 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.

The real achievement of fictions such as *Almanac of the Dead* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, 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 as a representation of the world in itself and more as a revealing of the world enframed, in scenes capable of revealing the quality of our actions, and the demands we make, as more or less unreasonable. Evincing what I have called a technical imagination, they self-consciously speak against enframing by giving us alternative interpretations of American place, space, and habitat, with a view to intervening in and disrupting the damaging patterns into which human existence is all too easily boxed and locked—in 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 (even if, as we saw with Abbey, the quality of radicalism is unsettled). 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*, 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.

# 4.

## "Making Raids on Human Consciousness":

## Literary Commitment and the Late Cold-War Novel

While thinking the aesthetic instrumental in shaping the social is hardly a modern invention, modernity has nonetheless provoked unprecedented critical interest in intentionally political art.[1] The late-nineteenth century in particular saw the emergence in Europe of a socialist tradition refuting certain aesthetic theories that championed the artistic as a realm sequestered from social interests: theories indebted to Kant's description of aesthetic judgment as *disinterested*, as necessarily detached from any real desire or action—a description radical enough in its own time for securing art its freedom from orthodox religious constraints. Hence the debate on "commitment" and the question of to what extent the artist can, or should, commit the artwork to political ends without sacrificing its status as art. A strange debate, far from over,[2] it has proven itself protean, servicing the political logics of not only socialism, communism, feminism, anti-racism, and labor activism, but also, in more recent years, Cold War anti-communism and late-

[1] At least as old as Plato's *Republic,* with Socrates censuring the poets for their negative influence on the well-regulated community, the politics of the aesthetic surface in poetics, poems, treatises and philosophies throughout the Western canon: from Horace's *Ars Poetica* to Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, the idea persists that works of literature necessarily shape our sensibilities, theories of value, and social relations. For a concise but fuller genealogy of aesthetics as politics see Govind Narain Sharma's introduction to *Literature and Commitment* (1988).

[2] Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier's *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment* (2011), and Maarten van Delden and Yvon Grenier's *Gunshots at the Fiesta: Literature and Politics in Latin America* (2009) are two recent engagements taking commitment to be a still viable critical category, at odds with the quick dismissal it receives from Jacques Rancière, in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2000). For Rancière, "commitment is not a category of art. This does not mean that art is apolitical. It means that aesthetics has its own politics, or its own meta-politics" (60). This qualification – that the aesthetic realm yields its own politics – productively sensitizes us to the politics manifest in the conditions of lived experience, yet harmfully removes us from certain intentionalities and agencies at work in aesthetic production. Meanwhile, Rancière's casting aside of commitment rests on his taking John Dos Passos, Michael Cimino, Otto Dix, and George Grosz as its exemplars – hardly the most obvious (or even plausible) representatives of an attitude more typically aligned with overtly partisan politics (or anti-politics).

capitalist anti-globalization—logics that describe world crisis and its remedies in formalist terms: they assume ideal patterns of existence that over-determine how individuals relate to, and care for, the social.

I take this debate to be central to our understanding of the later American radical novel—which I define as a form gesturing toward, if not sanctioning outright, social revolution—especially when this novel can be read as characteristically "postmodernist." If scholars of proletarian literature have already expertly contextualized the meaning of commitment for the classic radical novel, especially in U.S.-Soviet terms, such studies ultimately abbreviate an ongoing debate that came to define itself *against* the tenets of the literary proletarians and socialist realists. Indeed, still regarded as core theories of literary commitment, Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?* (1947) and Theodor Adorno's "On Commitment" (1962) constitute not only responses to but gain-sayings of the revolutionary-Marxist aesthetic of the early to mid twentieth century. Admittedly, in terms of the legacy informing the classic radical novel (one more indebted to Engels and Lenin rather than Benjamin, Bloch, or Brecht), neither Sartre nor Adorno makes a typical contribution to the debate on commitment, which, from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, had less philosophical and more practical (if not programmatic) aesthetics in mind. Yet they remain pivotal to our understanding of the radical novel as moving away from strict Marxist doctrine in the long 1950s while, under the auspices of postmodernism, fulfilling certain logics inaugurated by the early Marxist aesthetic.

Adopting this longer view of commitment, in what follows I ask what it means for the "literature of political engagement" when the radical novel in the USA puts the age of ideology behind it and squares up to the aesthetic problematic of a wholly different era. I argue that the debate on commitment is vital to our understanding of the proliferation of metafictions and

author fictions in the late-twentieth century: that what is commonly thought of as the typically "postmodernist" novel—one especially absorbed in the fictions of the author and the authored text—can often be read as a restatement of the realist novel in which explicit author interventions were conventionally forbidden. In saying this, I depart from most major theories of postmodernist metafiction. To be sure, Robert Scholes's *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979), John Barth's "The Literature of Replenishment" (1980), Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction* (1984), Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), and Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) all acknowledge the political and didactic possibilities of the form. But these critics mostly suggest that the novel of politics, following the poststructuralist explications of language as no longer the transparent medium it once seemed, is somehow less concerned than it once was with struggles in the actual social.

For Scholes, though metafiction has a "didactic quality" (3), it entails a turn away from the "fiction of forms" (romance) and the "fiction of existence" (the novel) toward structures of myth and allegory—a shift correlating with criticism's turn away from formalism (aesthetics) and behaviorism (existence) toward structuralism (ideas) and philosophy (essence). Whatever didacticism prevails here assumes less a political and more an ontological predicate. A similar quieting of the political is implicated in Barth's "ideal postmodernist novel," which synthesizes the modernist project and its antitheses to "somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and 'contentism,' pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction" (203); but the question of *how* we rise above the quarrel between "purity and commitment" goes begging. Waugh's conception of metafiction, meanwhile, is premised on the idea that "'all art is play' in its creation of other symbolic worlds: 'fiction is primarily an elaborate way of pretending, and pretending is a fundamental element of play and games'" (34,

quoting Detweiler 1976), a notion leading her exploration of "literary self-consciousness" to focus, again, on the ontological and epistemological (rather than the political) dimensions of consciousness. McHale reaches a similar conclusion, coming close to my thesis in defining the postmodernist author as a "strategist," but concluding that "[t]he author, in short, is another tool for the exploration of ontology" (202). Finally, though Hutcheon claims a political mission for "historiographical metafiction" in its undertaking a "critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society" (4), her postmodernism, bluntly, "is not quite an avant-garde. It is not as radical or as adversarial" (47). How Hutcheon can read *The Armies of the Night, The Book of Daniel*, and *Mumbo Jumbo* as typical postmodernist narratives and still make this claim signals a failure to recognize radical political fictions for what they are: not merely testing the boundaries between art and life, but challenging and suggesting alternatives to prevailing orders of actual existence. Put another way, the fictions of Mailer, Doctorow, and Reed are more likely to deconstruct ideological constructions of reality *without* giving up the core idea that their own fictions will lead us to a more truthful understanding of the world—which is to say the ultimate horizon of crisis is defined not by the paradoxes of language but by a situatedness in actual socio-historical struggles.

To sum up, for all these critics, the novelist's focal plane is snagged fatally on the imperfect linguistic medium, a condition spawning a self-consciousness whose primary undertaking is to reveal the illusions of signification—by playing on paradoxes and conjuring, as McHale puts it, "ontological short-circuits" (215). Such readings, though tackling head-on the complex figure of the author, disregard one salient factor: that the author-fiction sanctions a refiguring of the idea of the author as *intrusive* at the end of an era in which much critical work had functioned precisely to curb authorial intrusions, especially in leftist fictions—in

Modernism's broad turn away from realism, in the anti-propaganda paradigms of both the Marxist critics and the New Critics, and in the theoretical turn heralded by Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1968).

As such, I wish to consider the political postmodern author-fiction as a formal renegotiation of restraints previously placed by aesthetic theorists on the idea of the author: a strategic refiguring of *the idea of the author as an intentional didactic presence*—though one self-consciously void of any sense of bourgeois-liberal autonomy. Looking in particular at Don DeLillo's *Mao II*—which I locate in a cluster of novels typically read as postmodernist exemplars including Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*, Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, Joan Didion's *Democracy*, Paul Auster's *Leviathan*, and Dana Spiotta's *Eat the Document*—I make a case for the debate on commitment as being internalized within the late-twentieth-century novel. What these works have in common, after all, is the figuration within the fiction of artists and activists who characterize extreme interrelations of art and politics: who function to interrogate not so much the vexed relation of the linguistic construct to reality but the novel as a form of intervention in those Cold-War political logics that pay lip service to democracy yet only yield inequality. I call for a reinterpretation of these metafictions as neither primarily contradictory nor inherently ironic but, rather, first and foremost realist in their commitment to disclosing, and didactically intervening in, a world in crisis.[3] The author matters, I will argue, not because she resists the obfuscation of the author-as-politically-meaningful, but because, in doing so, she draws us into the idea of the

[3] If DeLillo takes for granted certain elements of race and sex that are otherwise determinant for authors like Reed and Russ, it is because he pursues the other side of the cultural studies legacy, looking less to the strategic possibilities of identity thinking and more to the totalizing operations of hegemonic structures whose logics seem to function irregardless of racism or sexism. Put another way, I describe *Mao II* as announcing itself as heir to a debate that began and evolved in specifically Marxist, post-Marxist, and anti-Marxist discourses. As such, the genealogy of this debate, as I lay it out, remains only one of multiple possible genealogies.

novel as a politically-meaningful form, leading us to a conception of structure and pattern intended to speak against, and suggest alternatives to, the damaging patterns of existence.

## Art and Social Life: Plekhanov, Lenin, Engels

What I am proposing, briefly, is a thread of continuity between early proponents of literary revolutionary-socialism and certain purveyors of late Cold-War metafiction—a thread traceable less by doctrinal and more by formal solutions to the question of how art relates to social reality. I begin with a genealogy of the Marxist aesthetic, chiefly because I take it to yield formal assumptions about the author as a narrative presence definitive for the metafictional turn. If the classic radical novel in the USA was heavily indebted to the literary proletarianism of the USSR (Foley), the Soviet socialist-realist project in turn had its precedents in the work of the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary-democrats Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolay Chernyshevsky, and Nikolay Dobrolyubov (Eagleton). Deeming art essential to social development, these critics were influential for Georgy Plekhanov and Vladimir Lenin, two of the earliest theorists of a Marxist aesthetic. Indeed, Plekhanov's "Art and Social Life" (1912) tapped an argument that would be pursued by leftist thinkers throughout the twentieth century, that the idea of an apolitical art was a wholly political invention. For Plekhanov, the Romantic idea of "art for art's sake," as a disavowal of the social consciousness of "utilitarian" art, only constituted a defense of bourgeois relations in a period when historical revolutionary potential was thought to be moving from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat—that is, when the dominant paradigm for describing and defining the shape of the social was, he thought, about to yield a different pattern of social and environmental relations, activities, and responsibilities. Defining art, rather, as a means of "mutual sympathy" between the artist and his society, Plekhanov

condemned autonomous art for rescinding "judgment on the phenomena of life, and its constant accompaniment of glad readiness to participate in social struggles" (177). In other words, he inverted the poles of what we think of as literary commitment, positing the consciously socio-political element as a general condition of all art, while describing the supposedly apolitical withdrawal as conspicuously political. Though he deconstructs the antagonism of autonomous and utilitarian art, claiming the autonomous to be just as utilitarian—but with conservative rather than revolutionary designs—these remain the cogent terms for the debate on the political possibilities of art and literature. Yet, as we shall see, what rouses the most controversy has less to do with a strict separation of art and politics and more to do with what exact politics are at stake and the manner in which they are presented.

We could characterize the Soviet socialist aesthetic as an undertaking that began in good faith in the liberal *Proletkult* period (1917-21) only to founder under the increasingly crippling dictates of the Communist Party.[4] By this account, the socialist-realist novel comes to exemplify the ills of programmatically political art, reducing the artist to little more than a puppet of the state and art to mere propaganda.[5] But it is worth distinguishing between the later bankrupt Soviet aesthetic and Lenin's early demands for communist art, especially since critics like George Steiner incorrectly see the latter as the logical result of the former (*Language and Silence*

[4] Eagleton, in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976), provides a useful if abbreviated survey of the rise and decline of socialist realism in Russia, while Barbara Foley's chapter on "Art and Propaganda" in *Radical Representations* (1993) superbly contextualizes the Soviet legacy in terms of the American proletarian novel of the 1930s. For a more recent discussion of the fate of socialist realism under Stalin, see Polly Jones's "'A Symptom of the Times': The Stalin Cult in the Soviet Literary Community, 1953-64" (2006). And for the flavorful first-hand account of the official Party line on the role of the Soviet writer in the 1930s and 40s, see Zhdanov's *Essays on Literature, Philosophy, and Music* (1950).

[5] Key here is the role played by Zhdanov, Stalin's culture minister, who called for the artist "actively to remold the people's consciousness in the spirit of socialism," to be, adopting Stalin's terminology, an "engineer of human souls" (*Essays* 15; 11). The intermingling of this directive tendentiousness with the 'cult of personality' surrounding Stalin, led to a point at which, as Jones describes it, "Soviet literature was in a catastrophic state, paralysed by political control and censorship and dominated by a 'gerontocracy' of writers peddling idealized sagas of the good life under Stalin" (151).

1967). In "Party Organization and Party Literature" (1905), Lenin argues that "[l]iterature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class" (45). It is this 'cog and screw' analogy that draws Steiner's criticism, but it figures in a call not for literature in general but for *party* literature: the writer is free to write what he wants, but if with the Party he should not write against Party interests. Lenin certainly restricts the potential for what Plekhanov called "judgment on the phenomena of life" here, but by no means does he advocate art's absolute subservience to politics. "There is no question," he makes clear, "that literature is least of all subject to mechanical adjustment or levelling, to the rule of the majority over the minority. There is no question, either, that in this field greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed for personal initiative, individual inclination, thought and fantasy, form and content." The point that Steiner misses is not the will to dictate what art should be but the need to acknowledge what art actually accomplishes in the relations it establishes between the artist and her society.

Art as a social phenomenon, says Lenin, can never be wholly autonomous: bourgeois literature in particular exists at the mercies of commercial publishers and whimsical public tastes, and so to think of art as a realm of free play or disinterest—the Kantian legacy on which autonomy draws—is to deny the socio-economic contingencies that make it viable under capitalism. In fact, the bourgeois writer himself personifies a division of labor between the select few who write and the masses who read. In response, Lenin asks for a "voluntary association" of artists who understand their work as concretely situated in particular socio-economic conditions and who understand themselves as writing from within, and belonging to, "the people." The contrast between the bourgeois and proletarian writer, then, reveals the aesthetic as contingent

and contextual: certain aspects of it are not transposable across class lines because they align with (even if only implicitly) specific situated perspectives and theories of social relations. Put bluntly, Lenin suggests that the artist is free—to be responsible or not—but art never truly is. Art's predicament here, as we shall see, will be taken up by Adorno, who insists that the work of art, while indeed situated in relation to social reality, nevertheless makes its own objective demands on the artist. That is, Adorno will remind us that the debate on commitment is not just about instrumentalizing art in service of social reality but also in safeguarding the category of the aesthetic as having its own kind of work to do.

If Lenin's essay is a foundational document providing for a Marxist aesthetic, it is notable that another two—letters written by Engels—deviate wildly from Lenin's call for partisanship. As Engels wrote in his letter to German actress and novelist Minna Kautsky in 1885, "the socialist problem novel"

> in my opinion fully carries out its mission if by a faithful portrayal of the real conditions it dispels the dominant conventional illusions concerning them, shakes the optimism of the bourgeois world, and inevitably instils doubt as to the eternal validity of that which exists, without itself offering a direct solution of the problem involved, even without at times ostensibly taking sides. (N. pag.)

In his subsequent letter of 1888 to English novelist Margaret Harkness, he clarified his critique of the "point-blank socialist novel" (the *Tendenzroman*) as only a medium for "glorify[ing] the social and political views of the authors… The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art. The realism I allude to may crop out even in spite of the author's opinions" (N. pag.). So the mode, of realism, is of more importance than any overtly tendentious narrative or dialogue provided by the author. The classic radical novel in the USA would depend

heavily on this mode, a mode that would in time be dismissed by official academic doctrines as too naïve in its mimetic assumptions and not yielding critical enough reflection on its own status as language construct (Lauret). Citing Balzac's capacity "to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, [in] that he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles, and described them as people deserving no better fate," Engels champions a realism that dispenses with the need for overt political intrusion by the artist: a realistic depiction of the moment is "tendentious" in its own right, disclosing a reality in which the historic force of the revolutionary proletariat is poised to overthrow the bourgeoisie. According to this "cognitive aesthetic," articulated with the bourgeois reader in mind, it is a simple reflection of reality that achieves the mission in hand—to demystify the world for the bourgeois consciousness and induce conversion to the communist cause. What Engels does not consider, however, is the possible reversal of revolutionary actuality that could leave realism in the service of capitalism. Which is to say that his letters do not offer a radical theory of art transposable beyond their historical moment, a point that, as we shall see, proved deeply problematic for subsequent generations of artists and critics influenced by the letters.

In spite of Trotsky's condemnation of the forging of proletarian culture (*Literature and Revolution* 1924), Marxist theorists in Russia and the USA spent the early decades of the twentieth century cultivating a literary proletarianism for which Engels's letters to Harkness and Kautsky, published 1932, proved both inspiring and troubling. As in Russia, American artists and critics—especially those allied with magazines such as *Masses* (1911-17), *The Liberator* (1918-24), *The Daily Worker* (1924-58), *New Masses* (1926-48), and *Partisan Review* (1934-2003)—made concerted efforts to bring working-class writers into the orbit of literary production and to encourage middle-class literary sympathy for the plight of the working class. But a

contradictory logic prevailed for 1930s Marxist critics. Sharing Plekhanov's view that there was no such thing as an apolitical art, they approached literature in the "utilitarian" spirit: art was, the slogan went, a class weapon. But, in the manner of Engels, they decried the propagandistic and didactic as intrusive, trusting the political work, as Barbara Foley puts it, to "a largely positivist conception of 'fact' and 'experience'" (144). "Rather than working out a rhetorical theory that would describe—and thereby legitimate—the didactic strategies peculiar to works written with "propagandistic" intent," Foley tells us, "the 1930s U.S. Marxists subscribed to the bourgeois binary opposition of art to propaganda that invariably denigrated the latter term" (168). Foley's insights into the failure of the proletarian aesthetic comprise one of the most significant contributions to the debate on commitment in recent years. What needs stressed is that in its failure to make a place for the propagandistic, the proletarian aesthetic misconstrued its own function. For a generation of Marxists (such as Granville Hicks, Mike Gold, Floyd Dell, and Joseph Freeman) who, like Lenin, were trying to undo strict class divisions in the production and reception of art, the model laid down by Engels was insufficient. Restricting himself to theorizing a bourgeois readership, Engels provided for an aesthetic intended to rock the enemy sensibility with its disclosure of content yet simultaneously offering consolation to that sensibility with its familiar attitudes to form.[6] Even if the reflection of reality on the eve of revolution could prove bourgeois sentiment an ill fit with the world, remaining aesthetically

[6] It is worth pointing out, as Foley notes, that the aesthetics prevailing here had huge significance beyond the realm of art, caught up as they were with the effective dismantling of socialist principles and practices. As she cogently puts it, "it remains significant that the triumph of the cognitivist position in the USSR was historically associated with the abandonment of large-scale recruitment of worker-writers, the reconciliation of the party with previously alienated middle-class intellectuals, the pronouncement that class war had come to an end, and, increasingly, the substitution of nationalist ideology and material wage incentives for the movement toward egalitarianism and the abolition of wages. The adoption of a cognitive aesthetics based on reflection theory thus coincided with a number of developments that, viewed retrospectively, contributed to the ultimate reversal of socialism in the USSR. The debate over 'leftism' was not a purely literary affair" (165).

within the realm of bourgeois decorum suggested that something deep, at the level of culture, value, and class remained untouched, unaltered.

What Foley and Engels prompt us to acknowledge is that it is not the presence of politics per se that usually offends aesthetic theorists but the presence of *certain* politics, especially those we can align with their authors, and the *degrees* of their presence. Indeed, fictions invoking politics to satirize or undermine them rarely offend in the same ways affirmatively partisan fictions do. What's more, in taking realism in an age of immanent revolution to be intentionally revolutionary, for the reflection theorists it was never a matter of eradicating politicized didacticism in art. Rather, the point was to eradicate the *appearance* of that didacticism, to shift us slyly from a realm of rational cognition into structures of feeling—in Engels's terms, to let scenes and situations undo optimism and instill doubts. In practice, this means the author is to refrain from being explicit in narration and in dialogue—modes we might schematically think of as "telling"—and to rely instead on description, characterization, and dramatic action—modes of "showing"—to achieve the political work. This is an important distinction, for the censuring of the author as overt interventionist not only carries through the anti- and post-Marxisms of midcentury and beyond but also underpins subsequent core theories of the novel, such as Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), and of the political novel, such as Walter Rideout's *The Radical Novel in the United States* (1956) and Irving Howe's *Politics and the Novel* (1957)—all of whom worked to outlaw the direct expression of "ideas" and "theories" in fiction and helped institutionalize dominant reading practices that to this day perpetuate these prejudices. To suggest that sublimating the author intervention—"to dissolve all theory into personal relationships" (Frye 308) or "embed" frameworks of doctrine "almost out of sight" (Rideout 287)—is somehow less "propagandistic," however, simply does not make sense: less

sloganeering, perhaps, but no less didactic in its intent to teach us, through formal strategies, partisan lessons about the social, political, and economic orders of things. Which is to say we need to rethink the didactic as not necessarily expressing itself overtly or obnoxiously, but working exactly as the critics would have it: formally. To think otherwise not only guarantees we underestimate the idea of the author as political interventionist in the postmodern era, it also leaves us little to no ground for thinking plausible any such thing as a *radical* novel.

## Art and Disclosure: Sartre, Adorno

The mid-century moment in which the classic radical novel in the USA lost its momentum also saw a growing sense in Europe of the Soviet socialist-realist novel as a corrupt form. On one hand, it was a moment, in the USA, when proletarian workers were migrating to the ranks of the middle class, the leftist parties were in marked decline, and the unions, though peaking in membership, had been decisively weakened by anti-union conservatives—evincing an epochal shift that seemed to put paid, once and for all, to the possibility of collaborative revolutionary socialism in America. On the other hand, internationally, the capitalist-communist divide not only endured but thrived in the political logic of the Cold War with its competing consolidations of eastern and western blocks. As such, when Sartre wrote *What is Literature?* (1947), he need not have moved us beyond the capitalist-communist binary. Yet the response of the committed writer to the world crisis, as he saw it, was no longer to be understood in the language of revolutionary-Marxism.

Beginning with the idea that the prose writer "is *in a situation* in language" (30), Sartre makes a deceptively meager claim that will lead him to conclude that: first, the act of writing is intrinsically social (one writes to be read, which is to say that what is written is never fully

realized until given into the trust of the "other" who reads); second, writing, in appealing to the generosity and freedom of the reader to carry out what the writer has begun, and reading, as a recognition of the writer's freedom, yields "a pact between human freedoms" (67), by which we feel our freedom "indissolubly linked with that of all other men" (68); and third, in naming the world, writing not only discloses but alters the world: "[i]f you name the behaviour of an individual, you reveal it to him; he sees himself. And since you are at the same time naming it to all others, he knows that he is seen at the moment he sees himself… Either he will persist in his behaviour out of obstinacy and with full knowledge of what he is doing, or he will give it up" (36-7). So Sartre qualifies the conventional alternatives of autonomy and utility, insisting that whether or not we consciously utilize art is irrelevant since it intrinsically bears the burden of ethical practice. Though implying a certain truthful correlation between the written word and its referent world—to the extent he speaks of disclosure and recognition of actual life—the account here of the fundamental relations of the writer to his society anticipates the logic that would find its fulfillment in conventional characterizations of postmodernist metafiction—that is, revealing the limits of the meaning of writing to be bound up in the *act* of writing itself.

Shifting us from partisan political ground to a much broader ethical territory, Sartre describes the primary undertaking of the writer to be "action by disclosure": the writer

> has chosen to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare… the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about. (38)

So Sartre offers us something that is half a Heideggerian bringing the world to presence, and half an idealized muckraking, in that such disclosure is meant as a willful critical practice in the

service of a social contract by which we are held responsible and accountable for the order we encounter in our world. Adorno, notably, rejected this theory outright: Sartre, he says, "does not want to situate commitment at the level of the intention of the writer, but at that of his humanity itself," making for a "determination… so generic that commitment ceases to be distinct from any other form of human action or attitude" (191). But Adorno is right only if we grant that literary activity is an unexceptional kind of action: the critique would make more sense if aimed at Sartre's conceptions of art and freedom rather than commitment as such, which calls for an exceptional response to the world in crisis. As Sartre goes on to say,

> the freedom of writing implies the freedom of the citizen… The art of prose is bound up with the only regime in which prose has meaning, democracy. When one is threatened, the other is too. And it is not enough to define them with the pen. A day comes when the pen is forced to stop, and the writer must then take up arms. Thus, however you might have come to it, whatever the opinions you might have professed, literature throws you into battle. Writing is a certain way of wanting freedom; once you have begun, you are committed, willy-nilly. (69)

If Sartre began by moving us away from literature as political content to writing as ethical action, he returns us now to more solid political goals: democracy and citizenship. In conceiving the act of writing as a struggle in the face of threatening unfreedom continuous with the act of taking up arms, what prevails is a militant-democratic theory of the citizen-artist—hardly an indistinct determination in an era scarred by the excesses of fascism, totalitarianism, and imperialism.

Above all, what Sartre outlines is a shifting of commitment from an openly revolutionary context marked by the clash of irreconcilable differences (class war) to a categorically normative (even regulative) condition. The attitude is still radical in its opposition to prevailing forces—

articulated, most notably, at a moment when the full implications of the Nazi Holocaust and U.S. bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were only just beginning to be felt—yet, in contrast with Engels's cognitive aesthetic, Sartre no longer assumes the mission to be making inroads into enemy consciousness as such. The author as interventionist, if he speaks as a revolutionist, appeals less to mastering the forces of history to make the leap into the realm of freedom, and more to prohibiting our worst excesses in the realm of necessity. He might even be taking a stance in defense of a quality of life already (or perhaps formerly) in our possession, even if critically so. Signaled here, I want to suggest, is an understanding central to novels like *The Armies of the Night*, *The Book of Daniel*, and *Mao II*—in which the radical impulse is entrenched in the idea of the citizen, in what it means to be a U.S. subject in an era when it is one's own culture, one's own political and aesthetic traditions (rather than the failures of an enemy class) that constitute the crisis in hand. It also extends to novels like *Mumbo Jumbo* and *The Female Man*, which insist that specific subjects—blacks and women—in particular have been denied their democratic rights. Each of these novels is a metafiction drawing attention to the narrative and discursive as realms to be fought over for the making and breaking of freedoms. Each, whether by positive or negative example, assumes an underlying principle expressed in the slogan "the freedom of writing implies the freedom of the citizen," a kind of citizen whose accommodation in the national imaginary would demand a radical rethinking of the prevailing structures of society. Yet, to restate, radicalism now starts to look less like revolutionism and more like reform, less striking out for new patterns of existence and more disclosing the deviations of the old. Which is to say that—in contrast with the proletarian novel—something of the expectation of the future seems to have collapsed, even while the novel continues to insist in its own capacity to intervene in, and transform, the political. This, as we shall see, is DeLillo's

assumption—that the promise of democracy, along with the promise of the novel as a democratic technology, is almost behind us, its future threatened by the forces of mass culture.

In his counter to *What is Literature?*, Adorno begins with not the relation of the writer to society but of the literary work as it presents itself to the reader, where "the author's motivations are irrelevant to the finished work, the literary product" (191). Challenging Sartre's subject-oriented theory of literature, while acknowledging that art comprises both artistic and non-artistic elements, Adorno asserts the primacy of form. He distinguishes between successfully political works, whose attempts to change our attitudes are intrinsic, and those "officially committed works" whose attempts are extrinsic (they subject the artwork to non-artistic propagandistic elements). Thus, over Sartre and Brecht, he champions Kafka and Beckett, whose works

> explode from within the art which committed proclamation subjugates from without, and hence only in appearance. The inescapability of their work compels the change in attitude which committed works merely demand. He over whom Kafka's wheels have passed, has lost for ever both any peace with the world and any chance of consoling himself with the judgement that the way of the world is bad; the element of ratification which lurks in resigned admission of the dominance of evil is burnt away. (199)

Adorno complicates the debate by insisting that it is in fact the autonomous, and not the officially committed, work of art that must accomplish the essential political work—which should address not competing party interests but, rather, the whole project of Western civilization, the logic of enlightenment that leads to the barbarism of twentieth century culture. In considering this recalibration of the literature of political engagement as a genre "wordlessly asserting" rather than explicitly proclaiming (202), we might be forgiven for thinking we have simply returned to the ground staked out by Engels in his critique of tendency-literature, though

now in the context of abstract modernism rather than social realism. Both, that is, acknowledge the need for political art while insisting the artist submerge or sublimate the political imperative and trust to the objective conditions of actual life (Engels) or artistic creation (Adorno). Yet, where for Engels this was primarily a means to social revolution (an appeal to a bourgeois sensibility for the sake of converting it to socialism), for Adorno it is, more overtly, a way of safeguarding the category of art itself. This is not to say that Adorno does not speak of art's capacity to transform our worst tendencies—on the contrary, as we saw, he provides one of the most arresting descriptions of art's radical possibilities. Rather, it is to say that, where for Sartre bad art is art that fails morally, for Adorno bad art is art that fails formally.[7]

Persuading us away from earlier ideas of commitment—Sartre by reconfiguring it as an act of existentially honoring freedoms, Adorno by refuting the possibility of any straightforwardly political artistic undertaking—both thinkers make it clear that the context of class struggle no longer adequately defines the ground for what political art should accomplish. At least, if commitment is still commitment to social revolution, it no longer entails hope in, or expectations of, proletarian revolution, a fact that critics sometimes misconstrue as putting paid to the "literature of political engagement."[8] In what follows I pursue what has proven to be the more skeptical side of the cultural studies tradition, in which mass culture and mass technology signal not so much an epoch of new freedoms as an epoch developing, on the contrary, the totalizing and damaging logic of capitalism. It is in this tradition, as we shall see, that our most

[7] Meanwhile, in substituting the language of the economic and political with the language of the moral and religious – invoking peace, consolation, judgment, badness, evil – Adorno strikes exactly the generic note of which he accuses Sartre.

[8] By some accounts this literature more or less ends with Sartre (usually in dialogue with Camus), figuring as a period genre that peaked alongside modernism and faltered at the onset of postmodernism – a view correct only if we restrict our purview to literary interrelations with the socialist, communist, and fascist politics of the early to mid twentieth century. See, for example, Martin Travers's *European Literature From Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice*, 2001.

striking heirs to the debate on commitment emerge—in Alain Robbe-Grillet's anti-socialist-realist novel-as-interrogation, Milan Kundera's Cervantian anti-Communist novel-as-inquiry, and Don DeLillo's anti-mass-culture novel-as-democracy, all of which return us to the Sartrian legacy of the writer as citizen, and also to the Adornian legacy of skepticism in the work of Fredric Jameson as to the political possibilities of art in the late-capitalist world.

## Art and Totality: Robbe-Grillet, Kundera, Jameson

Around the time Sartre and Adorno were refining their political theories of art beyond the propagandistic, Alain Robbe-Grillet entered the scene with the express purpose of writing against commitment, in the process articulating what has since been characterized as seminal thinking for the postmodernist novel as metafictional novel (Waugh, Hutcheon). Making a case for the *nouveau roman* as a departure from both the great realist tradition and Party-led socialist realism, Robbe-Grillet insists that the artist

> puts nothing above his work, and he soon comes to realize that he can create only *for nothing*; the least external directive paralyzes him, the least concern for didacticism, or even for signification, is an insupportable constraint; whatever his attachment to his party or to generous ideas, the moment of creation can only bring him back to the problems of his art, and to them alone. ("On Several Obsolete Notions" 1957, 37)

Robbe-Grillet does not for a moment doubt that literary forms are contingent on social conditions, but his estimation of the decline of art under the so-called Socialist Revolution persuades him that "the very notion of a work created *for* the expression of a social, political, economic, or moral content constitutes a lie" (38). The function of art, rather, "is never to illustrate a truth—or even an interrogation—known in advance, but to bring into the world

certain interrogations (and also, perhaps, in time, certain answers) not yet known as such to themselves" ("The Use of Theory" 14). This formulation bears remarkable consonance with Milan Kundera's meditations in *The Art of the Novel* (1986), another author, conventionally read as a postmodernist, who similarly reacts against the stranglehold of Communist ideology on cultural production. The novel, Kundera says, "is incompatible with the totalitarian universe… By which I mean: The world of one single Truth and the relatively ambiguous world of the novel are molded of entirely different substances. Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate what I would call *the spirit of the novel*" (14). Though poles apart in their fictions, Kundera and Robbe-Grillet converge in their theories on what Hutcheon takes to be a defining characteristic of postmodernism: "interrogative in its mode," it provides a methodological solution to the problem of a political reality heavily mediated, if not contrived, by orthodox ideologies (1989, 10)—in this case, state ideologies.

What needs stressed, however, is that this investigation does not figure for Kundera in any typical postmodernist sense—as, for example, a rejection of the "ideal of representation" (Gossman, qtd. in Hutcheon 1989, 16) or a Lyotardian disavowal of "grand narratives": on the contrary, as we shall see, what Kundera proposes is the return of the grandest narrative of all, enlightenment humanism. As such, it hardly distinguishes itself from Rideout's liberal humanism when he remarks that the function of literature is "to inquire relentlessly and unceasingly and on its own terms into the human condition" (291). "On its own terms," though a way of saying that art should not be subject to extrinsic propagandistic elements, is definitely not a way of saying that there should be no such thing as a political or even radical novel—that is, a novel whose very form presupposes some kind of fixed truth that this or that particular structure of society is better or worse. My point is that interrogation according to so-called postmodernist novelists

such as Robbe-Grillet and Kundera must be understood in a precisely un-postmodernist sense: they do not reject the idea of total systems of thought, they reject only one specific embracing system—Soviet Communism. Which is to say that in a political sense they have more rather than less in common with the era they are more typically considered to deviate from.

For Robbe-Grillet, the problem with mid-century Communism was that, in foreclosing on inquiry, it simultaneously foreclosed on artistic experimentation and innovation (40). Kundera puts this in more pressing terms:

> About half a century ago the history of the novel came to a halt in the empire of Russian Communism. That is an event of huge importance, given the greatness of the Russian novel from Gogol to Bely. Thus the death of the novel is not just a fanciful idea. It has already happened. And we now know how the novel dies: it's not that it disappears; its history stops: after that comes nothing but a period of repetition in which the novel keeps duplicating its form, emptied of its spirit. Its death occurs quietly, unnoticed, and no one is outraged. (14-15)

Kundera laments "the depreciated legacy of Cervantes" (20), whom he posits as a counter to that other emissary of the modern era, Descartes. The advance of the sciences, says Kundera, and the increasingly exclusive interest in the hard facts of existence, entailed a simultaneous loss of interest in "man's being." It is as a corrective to this lopsided inquiry that the European novel is to be understood as a parallel sequence of discoveries in "the conquest of being" (14). The "death of the novel" thesis[9] here alludes not only to the hindering of its inquisitive nature but to

[9] Frank Kermode, in 1965, summed up best the 'death of the novel' thesis when he said that "[t]he special fate of the novel, considered as a genre, is to be always dying" ("Life and Death of the Novel"). Broached at least as early as 1925 by José Ortega y Gassett (*The Decline of the Novel*), the idea is still regularly touted by artists and critics alike – most recently in Brock Clarke's *Virginia Quarterly* essay "The Novel is Dead, Long Live the Novel" (2006), Lucy Tang's *New Yorker* "Review Roundup: The Death of the Novel" (2010), and *Open Culture's* online review of remarks made in 2009 in "Philip Roth Predicts the Death of the Novel; Paul Auster Counters" (2011).

its incommensurability with a cold-war landscape where "social life is reduced to political struggle, and that in turn to the confrontation of just two great global powers" (17). The novel, as an instrument of enlightenment, is no longer in step with its times: as he says, "[t]he common spirit of the mass media, camouflaged by political diversity, is the spirit of our time. And this spirit seems to me contrary to the spirit of the novel" (18). For Kundera to go on to argue that now, more than ever, is the novelist needed, is tantamount to saying the novelist, again, must act as a corrective in the tradition of Cervantes. So on one hand, literary commitment asserts itself as a kind of anti-politics, pitting itself against absolutist conditions that limit the aesthetic as a mode of inquiry into human possibilities. On the other, Kundera's aesthetic figures as just one more of those deeply political apoliticisms, with the interventionist author rejecting one particular fate of mass society in the realm of one particular political solution: anti-capitalist Communism.

Kundera's understanding of the crisis of art, as such, shares much with Fredric Jameson's, in that the crisis is thought symptomatic of totalizing structures—for Kundera, the Communist state apparatus, for Jameson, global capitalism. But while Kundera takes it for granted that the pre-twentieth-century project of modernity, along with the "conquest of being" by means of a literary form indebted to a bourgeois revolution, is worth recuperating, Jameson makes it clear that the economic correlative of that modern conquest—capitalism, not communism—is precisely what has determined the present crisis for the committed writer: which has less to do with mustering the resolve to join the struggle and more to do with the increasing impossibility of finding a place from which to challenge a mechanism that systematically absorbs and reorients radical cries (*Archaeologies of the Future* 2005; *Postmodernism* 1991; *The Political Unconscious* 1981). The problem with Kundera, if Jameson makes sense for us, is that he attempts to recuperate the novel as both historical (it thrived on and faltered with the impulses

of particular eras) and trans-historical in form (it has been outmoded but we can re-assert it). But for Jameson, or any anti-humanist for that matter, this is to flog a dead horse, because the aesthetic conditions of actual life have altered so fundamentally under late capitalism—our sense of space altered by a new depthlessness, our sense of historicity weakened, our sense of the world obfuscated by new technologies—that political art must be made anew.

The task, rather, is to come up with a whole new "cognitive map," a metaphor suggesting that if the aesthetic problem was once a matter of choosing *what we should or should not* represent or disclose, it is now a question of *whether we even can* represent it. In other words, Jameson has worked hard to counter dominant characterizations of postmodernism (especially as laid out by Hutcheon). He still defines the crisis as one of being and knowing—of how we reference our reality—but the problem is no longer the writer's inability to make language describe the real; it is, rather, the real's capacity, in the context of a capitalist totality, to exceed our everyday cognition and, in doing so, conceal its mechanisms, while the logic of that totality permeates every dimension of our lived experience and so makes it seemingly impossible to gain critical detachment. This is what the idea of the cognitive map gets at—by Colin MacCabe's account, "the least articulated but also the most crucial of Jamesonian categories" (xiv). Drawing on the work of geographer Kevin Lynch (*The Image of the City* 1960), who "taught us that the alienated city is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves," Jameson finds in the cognitive map a means of thinking more expansively about the individual's relation not to the city but to the whole social system: cognitive mapping works "to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (*PM* 51). If Ian Buchanan is

right—that "[t]otality is a codeword in Jameson's work for 'class consciousness'" (107)—then Jameson's call for "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping" (*PM* 54), reinstating the structure of social life in the relation between the artist and her artwork, shows the debate on commitment to be at the forefront of postmodern theory: perhaps more abstract than ever before, but just as insistent in its description of the artist as potential interventionist in a world in crisis. What we have to fear is not the failure of the literary as such but the literary made to fail by the objective conditions of late capitalism. I take this to be the core concern for the late-twentieth-century American radical novel, especially when read as a characteristically postmodernist novel such as DeLillo's *Mao II*, a fiction in which the question of commitment interrogates the same legacies of communism and capitalism that have persistently informed the debate.

## The Death of the Author: DeLillo

In the same year Jameson published *Postmodernism* (seven years after the original title essay), in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Don DeLillo took up the subject of literary commitment in *Mao II*—a novel about a writer struggling with how to respond to political and cultural turmoil in an age when art and politics seem especially vulnerable to absorption and diffusion by mass culture. *Mao II* is of particular note for its strategic use of photographic plates capturing what we might call "critical masses," news-media shots of actual events (such as the Hillsborough disaster) revealing extremes of fanaticism in mass culture. The immediate problem for DeLillo's protagonist, author Bill Gray, is that his cultural capital has increased too much since withdrawing from the public domain and ceasing to publish, so that the *idea* of him as a writer has more currency than his actual writing, something his assistant wishes to capitalize on. "'Keep this book out of sight,'" says Scott of Gray's novel in progress:

> "Use it to define an idea, a principle… That the withheld work of art is the only eloquence left… Art floats by all the time, part of the common bloat. But if he withholds the book. If he keeps the book in typescript and lets it take on heat and light. This is how he renews his claim to wide attention. Book and writer are now inseparable." (67-8)

Though Gray's fame rests on having previously written, disconnection now prevails in Scott's thinking that Gray need no longer write to be read. In Sartre's terms, something is awry with democracy, the mutual exchange of freedoms between writer and reader, and the critical act of disclosure, dispensed with. In Kundera's terms, it signals a death for the novel, with all inquiry, all content, set aside, a consequence noxious for Gray, for whom writing is a humanizing activity—who claims that "[t]he language of my books has shaped me as a man" (48).

But of the numerous characters making demands on Gray the writer, none wants him for his writing. Whether Brita, whose mission is to photograph writers (and later terrorists), or his publisher, who wants to publicize his reading the work of a poet held hostage in Beirut, or the Lebanese terrorists, who anticipate the propaganda value of circulating photographs of Gray's corpse, Gray is in demand not as a novelist but as the marketable image of a novelist. DeLillo makes it clear that in this nexus of otherwise disparate interests—magazine journalism, human rights advocacy, revolutionary politics—none of which are necessarily damaging in their own rights, the same logic of the all-pervasive image prevails, where what is at stake is not just something of the writer but of the individual American dreamer and so, it follows, of democracy:

> "Do you know why I believe in the novel? It's a democratic shout. Anybody can write a great novel, one great novel, almost any amateur off the street. I believe this… Some nameless drudge, some desperado with barely a nurtured dream can sit down and find his voice and luck out and do it. Something so angelic it makes your jaw hang open. The

> spray of talent, the spray of ideas. One thing unlike another, one voice unlike the next." (159)

The novel form, as Gray theorizes it, has a democratic function, not only a point of cultural access for the "amateur," the "drudge," and the "desperado," but also exemplar of both individual expression and mass forum that need not sacrifice individual freedoms: what ultimately awes (what is "so *angelic* it makes your jaw hang open") is the sheer proliferation ("spray") of ideas. What Gray's predicament reveals, however, is the utter failure of this ideal. For he is expected to signify in the mass media in ways that have nothing to do with what *he* actually has to say: thus, the "pictures of Bill were glimpses of Brita thinking" (221). More to the point, the potential of the mass-produced image to saturate the cultural realm only secures a proliferation of *the same idea* over and over; secured, finally, is not a spray of ideas but, in Kundera's words, an inching toward a "world of one single Truth," a "totalitarian universe."

Against this backdrop we understand the radical function of the photographic plates marking the different sections of *Mao II*—the popular images of: the 1989 mass protest in Beijing's Tiananmen Square (iv-v); the 1976 mass Unification Church wedding led by Sun Myung Moon at Yankee Stadium (1); the 1989 Hillsborough (Sheffield Stadium) disaster (17); the 1989 mass funeral in Iran of the Ayatollah Khomeini (105); and boy soldiers in a bunker in, presumably, Beirut (225). For the most part, the moments indexed here figure in the story as passing news items on television screens, yielding contexts for thinking mass culture inimical to individual freedoms and, as such, a locus of terror: moments of fanaticism, authoritarianism, and fundamentalism meant to jar with the democratic values borne by Gray. At first glance, DeLillo seems caught up in the culture he critiques, as if we cannot understand the narrative without orienting ourselves by these coordinates supplied by popular media. But this would be to

overlook the strategic pacing of the photographs throughout the novel: for what begins as a fast succession of images (only 3 pages between the first and second, and 15 between the second and third) moves toward their desaturation (87 between the third and fourth, and 119 between the fourth and fifth). So *Mao II* formally inverts the image-language ratio as Gray experiences it: whereas the image of the writer in the story world thrives at the expense of actual literary content, here in the formal enclosure of the novel it is the image as phenomenon that falters in the language environment. To describe these images as "circumtextual" (Osteen 193) then—as if the images somehow enclosed the text—would be to mistake the fiction for the form and miss the point: that DeLillo suggests the novel as a form might recalibrate our sense of what Debord called the "society of the spectacle"—deterritorializing and resignifying the mass image, making it speak to a narrative whose function is to disclose such images as dangerous for democracy.

But while the presence of the image falters at the level of form, so does the author-character at the level of plot. When asked to raise awareness for the hostage in Beirut, Gray takes the opportunity to do more, meeting with a spokesman for the terrorists who propose to swap Gray for the hostage, an exchange likely to cost him his life. Here commitment, as thematic, comes openly to the surface, with his agreeing to meet the kidnappers in Beirut, a theme immediately complicated by our awareness that it is the terrorist and not the hostage with whom Gray identifies and by his random death en route to Beirut. So at the level of plot, the committed writer fails in his intervention and leaves his legacy ripe for exploitation, with Scott free to publish Brita's pictures and bury the unpublished novel, ensuring it "disappears into the image of the writer." At the level of structure, however, the inverse holds, in that *Mao II* continues for two chapters after Gray's death, forcing the writer to vanish into the book (a different author-book pairing, to be sure, but driving the idea home all the same). Notably, these last two chapters

resolve in our looking over the shoulder of another artist-figure, the photojournalist Brita, who now photographs terrorists rather than writers. As such, DeLillo tempers our experience of the metafiction, asking us to feel disoriented by the death of the author but to continue imaginatively, all the same, into the geo-political territory he had been leading us toward.

Brita's shifting subjects, of course, echo Gray's positing the novel as locus for democracy while strikingly likening the novelist to a terrorist in the ability to transform attitudes in the social. "There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists," confesses Gray early in the story when Brita photographs him in his hideaway. "Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated" (41). Gray's lament here for the declining influence of the novelist in the face of totalizing economic forces might well come across as a bourgeois-liberal complaint—if not for his characterizing the novelist as one who, traditionally, acts in the affect realm with the force of a "bomb-maker" or "gunman." Diametrically opposed to the sensibilities of Engels and Adorno, entertained here is a sense of art as not quite propaganda but just as obtrusive, if not more so. By no means should we interpret this terroristic hankering as a radical inclination—yet it does have radical implications to the extent that the figurative terrorist is mutually exclusive with the literal, whose presence is symptomatic of the mass and totalitarian culture critiqued throughout the novel. Which is to say, the idea of the novelist who makes raids on human consciousness suggests a wholly other cultural logic that does not have us "giving way to terror, to news of terror, to tape recorders and cameras, to radios, to bombs stashed in radios," in a climate in which "[n]ews of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative" (42).

What Gray defines, ultimately, is a crisis of forms, with the late-capitalist world overwriting the patterns of existence that once allowed the novel to thrive: as the kidnappers' liaison sums it up, "the more clearly we see terror, the less impact we feel from art" (157). So the problem, for the committed writer, is no longer one of simply reflecting a particular reality, taking sides in a struggle, or even rejecting the political for the sake of an ostensibly apolitical humanism. The problem, rather, has to do with the status of art itself and its aesthetic disarmament—in a world of aesthetic saturation—an idea lamented internally in DeLillo's story but utterly rejected formally by the novel as phenomenon. That is, *Mao II* thrives on the abjection of the novelist, and not for the sake of paradox but in the service of deliberate counter-argument: DeLillo would have us acknowledge that the novel as a form must act against the very forces he describes in his fiction as dismantling novelistic force, drawing attention to how the novel as a democratic possibility is undermined if those forces are not resisted.

## Conclusion

It would be easy to explain *Mao II* as a typically postmodernist novel: heavily self-reflective, reminding us at every turn of its own artifice, affirming the author role while purporting to dispense with it (and vice versa), suggesting that language and narrative might render less rather than more coherence in referencing the world, all undertaken playfully, if carefully, and all underscored with a sense that the novel as a form, like a well-used magician's cabinet, might just fall apart at any moment. But it is also important to acknowledge a certain continuity between the attitudes suggested here and those of previous eras. For the cognitive aesthetic on which the Marxists drew—Engels's theory of reflection that licensed art to function politically while protecting it from miscegenation with propaganda—always entailed a strategic withholding of

the author. This is, after all, just what the debate on commitment revolves around: the question of how much and in what ways the author can make his political presence overt in the artwork without jeopardizing consensus on its status as art.

Assuming our radical novelists (as per the Marxists of the 1930s) adhere to an aesthetic demanding the ostensible separation of art and propaganda, they contract to negotiate—and not to eradicate—the presence of the author's politics in the work of literature. Which is to say, a very particular and strategic withholding, as a matter of form, becomes a constant, as does what is withheld: something of the author as explicit interventionist. It is in this light that we must re-assess the upsurge of author fictions in the postmodern era, especially as figured in those novels bearing deliberate radical critiques of late-capitalist institutions and practices. That is, I insist we understand *Mao II* as one of several so-called postmodernist novels—like *The Armies of the Night*, *The Book of Daniel*, *Mumbo Jumbo*, *The Female Man*, *Democracy*, *Leviathan*, and *Eat the Document*—that do not depart from the traditional literature of political engagement so much as complicate its aesthetic. To pose the problem as a question would be to ask in what ways do novelists such as Mailer, Doctorow, and Didion insist that thinking through the March on the Pentagon, the trial of the Rosenbergs, or the expansion of the U.S. military-industrial empire establish problems for which the novelist seems especially suited to offer an intervention? Or, in what way does the arrogant meta-fictional novel seem especially suited to such an undertaking?

As DeLillo teaches us, one answer lies in the form of the novel itself. Briefly, what Mailer inaugurates in *Armies* is a reconfiguration of the didactic propagandist: as if, in compensation for the author-as-interventionist having been ousted from narrative and dialogue in the modernist era, the radical author emerges with a newfound belligerence as a character in the meta-fiction of the postmodern. Even the more extreme postmodern experiments in narrative of

*Mumbo Jumbo* and *The Female Man* force us to think critically of the status of the author as a strategist working against actual cultural and historical forces. To argue that Mailer puts more pressure on the relation of fiction to history than on the role of the writer as activist in response to actual crisis is to mistake as a turn away from the didactic what is in fact a new mode of didacticism—a mode intent on reinstating the artist as one who if he tests boundaries, does so in the service of an explicitly political interrogation of historical actuality. Gone is the old decorum that Frye, Rideout, and Howe demanded, gone the old sum of sublation that the 1930s Marxists worked for. What emerges, instead, is an obstreperous delight in lecturing us on exactly what's wrong with our world and our times, and all with the express purpose of taking sides.

What makes such fictions enduring is not the extent to which they embroil us in language games, alleged contradictions, or ontological paradoxes, but, rather, how they herald themselves as cognitive maps of a vast and intricate reality—they reveal the world crisis as a crisis of forms, of damaging patterns of movements, relations, and ratios, a crisis of embracing systems. Collectively, such fictions say that the Adornian ideal of the almost-invisible gesture, of the artwork formally and esoterically initiating us into the devastating order of things, is simply not enough. Indeed, for Barth, a significant element of the postmodernist novel is its popular and democratic appeal, something far more accessible than the modernists ever gave us, something far less dependent on a specialized caste of theorists to explicate. Which is to ask, if not for someone like Adorno would we really know to take Beckett as a *political* author? We might feel the symbolic force of recognizing our condition in his work, but does the work itself yield an idea that something *must* be done? Are we not more likely to come away from Beckett, or Kafka, with just the opposite sense, a reassurance that nothing in reality could be quite so absurd, quite so inescapably vexing as what they have play out in their fictions?

My point, finally, is that our postmodernist critics—Scholes, Barth, Waugh, McHale, and Hutcheon—have been right to understand the crisis in the late-capitalist novel as one of signification, though as far as a political theory of the novel goes they have chosen to focus on the wrong crisis and the wrong signification. For what is at stake, and what has always been at stake, is the matter of how the author gestures the way for us—how she discloses something of the world, and of ourselves, and how she leads us to interpret the ensuing relation in such a way that we are, or are not, compelled to feel responsible (response-able). Engels, in the realist spirit, wanted the writer to point out the world as it appears from an objective distance. Adorno, in the modernist spirit, wanted the writer to withdraw his obvious presence and let the form of the artwork itself point out the world, not as it appears but as it is. How obnoxious, then, must the postmodern metafiction seem, to arrive on the scene and make such a song and dance about pointing to itself. Yet it does so with no less intention of pointing out the world. For as *Mao II* makes perfectly clear, the author fiction points to itself in order to draw attention to its situatedness in a formal solution: *here* is an author, says DeLillo, amid a renegotiation of image and language, the one representing the totalizing logic of late capitalism, the other representing the essence of civil freedom, of democracy; and *here*, says this radical metafiction in the postmodern era, is an alternative patterning of existence, an alternative ratio of mindless and meaningful, passive and actively participatory, voices. To this extent, the radical novel proves itself, formally, to have force. Yet, as is obvious, the kind of commitment now prevailing has little in common with the revolutionary expectations of the earlier socialists, as if premised less on a future realm of freedom and more on a past—as if, in spite of a century of heated debate, it was never the novel that was in danger: it was always the politics.

**Works Cited**

Aaron, Jason (writer) and R.M. Guéra (artist). *Scalped*. New York: DC Comics (Vertigo), 2007-present. Print.

Abbey, Edward. *Confessions of a Barbarian: Selections from the Journals of Edward Abbey, 1951-1989*, edited by David Petersen. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994. Print.

Abbey, Edward. *Hayduke Lives!* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. Print.

Abbey, Edward. "Immigration and Liberal Taboos." *One Life at a Time, Please*. New York: Henry Holt, 1988. Print.

Abbey, Edward. 1975. *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. New York: Perennial Classics, 2000. Print.

Abbey, Edward. "Theory of Anarchy." *One Life at a Time, Please*. New York: Henry Holt, 1988. Print.

Adorno, Theodor. 1962. "Commitment." *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*, edited by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, 1996. Print.

Ahmed, Sara. "Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others." *Theory, Culture & Society* 21.25 (2004): 25-42. Print.

Alderman, Harry. "Abbey as Anarchist." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*, edited by Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1998. Print.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. Print.

Archuleta, Elizabeth. "Securing Our Nation's Roads and Borders or Re-circling the Wagons? Leslie Marmon Silko's Destabilization of 'Borders.'" *Wicazo Sa Review* 20.1 (2005): 113-137. Print.

Arnold, Ellen. *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981. Print.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* 3rd ed. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2009. Print.

Banks, Dennis and Richard Erdoes. *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005. Print.

Barth, John. 1980. "The Literature of Replenishment." *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*. London: The John Hopkins University, 1984. Print.

Becker, Michael. "Ontological Anarchism: The Philosophical Roots of Revolutionary Environmentalism." *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth*, edited by Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella, II. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006. Print.

Berlant, Lauren. "Critical Inquiry, Affirmative Culture." *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (2004): 445-51. Print.

Berlant, Lauren. "Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event." *American Literary History* 20.4 (2008): 845-60. Print.

Bessie, Alvah. *The Un-Americans*. London: John Calder, 1957. Print.

Best, Steven and Anthony J. Nocella, II (Eds.). *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth*. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006. Print.

Bird, Robert Montgomery. 1831. "Gladiator: A Tragedy in Five Acts." *The Life and Dramatic Works of Robert Montgomery Bird*. New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1919. Print.

Booker, M. Keith. *The Post-Utopian Imagination: American Culture in the Long 1950s*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002. Print.

Boyle, T. Coraghessan. *A Friend of the Earth*. New York: Viking, 2000. Print.

Brown, Lloyd L. 1951. *Iron City*. Leipzig: Panther (Paul List Edition), 1956. Print.

Brown, Wendy. "Resisting Left Melancholy." *Boundary 2* 26.3 (1999): 19-27. Print.

Buchanan, Ian. *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory*. New York: Continuum, 2006. Print.

Burke, Kenneth. 1945. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. Print.

Burton, Gabrielle. *Heartbreak Hotel*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.

Burton, Gabrielle. *I'm Running Away From Home, But I'm Not Allowed to Cross The Street: A Primer of Women's Liberation*. Pittsburgh: Know, 1972. Print.

Callenbach, Ernest. *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston.* New York: Bantam Books, 1975. Print.

Carmichael, Stokely and Charles Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1967. Print.

Cazdyn, Eric and Imre Szeman. *After Globalization.* West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Print.

Coltelli, Laura. "*Almanac of the De*ad: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko." *Native American Literatures Forum* 4-5 (1992-93): 65-80. Print.

Cooper, Duncan L. "Who Killed the Legend of Spartacus? Production, Censorship, and Reconstruction of Stanley Kubrick's Epic Film." *Spartacus: Film and History*, edited by Martin M. Winkler. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. Print.

Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness: or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1.1 (1996): 7-28. Print.

Delillo, Don. *Mau II*. New York: Viking. 1991. Print.

Douglass, Frederick. "The Heroic Slave." *Three Classic African-American Novels.* Ed. William L. Andrews. New York: Mentor, 1990. Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. Print.

Echols, Alice. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. Print.

Engels, Friedrich. "Engels to Margaret Harkness." *Marx and Engels On Literature and Art*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976. N. pag. *Marxists Internet Archive*. Web. 18 Aug 2012.

Engels, Friedrich. "Engels to Mina Kautsky." *Marx and Engels On Literature and Art*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976. N. pag. *Marxists Internet Archive*. Web. 18 Aug 2012.

Engels, Freidrich. 1878. *Anti-Dühring (Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science)*. New York: International Publishers, 1939. Print.

Eyerman, Ron. "How Social Movements Move: Emotions and Social Movements." *Emotions and Social Movements*, edited by Helena Flam and Debra King. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1963. Print.

Fast, Howard. *Being Red.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. Print.

Fast, Howard. *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A New England Legend.* New York: The Blue Heron Press, 1953. Print.

Fast, Howard. *Spartacus.* New York: Crown Publishers, 1964. Print.

Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex*. New York: Bantam Books, 1970. Print.

Flam, Helena. "Emotions' Map: A Research Agenda." *Emotions and Social Movements*. Eds. Helena Flam and Debra King. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Flam, Helena and Debra King. *Emotions and Social Movements*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Flesch, William. "Narrative and Noncausal Bargaining." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 45. 1 (2012): 6-9. Print.

Foley, Barbara. *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. Print.

Foreman, Dave and Bill Haywood (Eds.). *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*. 2nd edition. Tuscon: Ned Ludd Books, 1987. Print.

Foreman, Dave. *The Lobo Outback Funeral Home*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000. Print.

Forster, E.M. 1927. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1954. Print.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. Print.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980. Print.

Haynes, John Earl. *Red Scare or Red Menace?: American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996. Print.

Heidegger, Martin. 1964. "The Question Concerning Technology." *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1937) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, edited by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row, 1977. Print.

Heise, Ursula K. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Heller, Agnes. *A Theory of Feelings*. 2nd ed. Landham: Lexington Books, 2009. Print.

Herndon, Jerry A. "'Moderate Extremism': Edward Abbey and 'The Moon-Eyed Horse.'" *Western American Literature* 16.2 (1981): 97-103. Print.

Hiaasen, Carl. *Hoot!* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. Print.

Hobsbaum, Eric. 1952. "The Machine Breakers." *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964. Print.

Hoffman, Carl. "The Evolution of a Gladiator: History, Representation, and Revision in Spartacus." *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 23.1 (2000): 63-70.

Hogeland, Lisa Maria. *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998. Print.

Horvitz, Deborah. "Freud, Marx and Chiapas in Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 2.10.3 (1998): 47-64. Print.

Howe, Irving. 1957. *Politics and the Novel*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002. Print.

Hunt, Alex. "The Radical Geography of Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*." *Western American Literature* 39.3 (2004): 256-78. Print.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge. 1988. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. Print.

Johnson, Haynes. *The Age of Anxiety: McCarthyism to Terrorism*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2005. Print.

Jones, Jacob. *Spartacus, or, The Roman Gladiator.* London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1837. Print.

Koedt, Anne, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone. "Consciousness Raising." *Radical Feminism*, edited by Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone. New York: Quadrangle, 1973. Print.

Koestler, Arthur. *The Gladiators.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939. Print.

Kundera, Milan. *The Art of the Novel*. Trans. Linda Asher. New York: HarperPerennial, 2000. Print.

Lauret, Maria. *Liberating Literature.* New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Lenin, Vladimir. 1905. "Party Organisation and Party Literature." *V.I. Lenin Collected Works*. Vol. 10. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978. Print.

Leonardo, Zeus. "The Unhappy Marriage between Marxism and Race Critique." *Policy Futures in Education* 2.3-4 (2004): 483-93. Print.

Levine, Caroline. "Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies." Victorian Studies 48.4 (2006): 625-57. Print.

Lindholdt, Paul. "Rage Against the Machine: Edward Abbey and Neo-Luddite Thought." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*, edited by Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1998. Print.

Lindholm, Charles and José Pedro Zúquete. *Struggle for the World: Liberation Movements For the 21st Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. Print.

Love, Sam and David Obst (Eds.). *Ecotage!* New York: Pocket Books, 1972. Print.

Lukács, Georg. "Art and Objective Truth." *Writer and Critic, and Other Essays*. London: Merlin, 1970. Print.

Lynch, Deidre. *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Print.

MacCabe, Colin. "Preface" *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992. Print.

Mailer, Norman. 1951. *Barbary Shore*. New York: Vintage International, 1997. Print.

Malamud, Margaret. "Cold War Romans." *Arion* 14.3 (2007): 121-54. Print.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. Print.

Matthiessen, Peter. *Partisans.* New York: The Viking Press, 1955. Print.

Mazel, David. "Ecocriticism as Praxis." *Teaching North American Environmental Literature*, edited by Laird Christensen, Mark C. Long, and Fred Waage. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008. Print.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Methuen, 1987. Print.

McKeon, Michael (Ed). *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Print.

Melo, Richard. *Jokerman 8*. Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2004. Print.

Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Shape of the Signifier*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Print.

Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Trouble With Diversity*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006. Print.

Mitchell, James Leslie. 1933. *Spartacus*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press/ Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1990. Print.

Mogen, David. "Native American Visions of Apocalypse: Prophecy and Protest in the Fiction of Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor." *American Mythologies*, edited by William Blazek and Michael Glenday. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005. Print.

Mohanty, Satya. P. *Literary Theory and the Claims of History.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997. Print.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. London: Verso, 1987. Print.

Murphy, Patrick D. "The Varieties of Environmental Literature in North America." *Teaching North American Environmental Literature*, edited by Laird Christensen, Mark C. Long, and Fred Waage. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008. Print.

Nelson, Steve. *The 13th Juror*. Leipzig: Panther Books (Paul List Edition), 1956. Print.

Newton, Huey P. and Bobby Seale. "October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program." *The Black Panthers Speak*, edited by Philip S. Foner. New York: De Capo Press, 1995. Print.

Olster, Stacey. *Reminiscence and Re-creation in Contemporary American Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989. Print.

O'Meara, Bridget. "The Ecological Politics of Leslie Silko's 'Almanac of the Dead.'" *Wicazo Sa Review* 15.2 (2000): 63-73. Print.

Osborne, Peter. "The Politics of Time." *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present*, edited by Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks. New York: Pearson Education Limited, 1999. Print.

Osteen, Mark. *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue With Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000. Print.

Page, Myra. *With Sun in Our Blood*. New York: The Citadel Press, 1950. Print.

Perry, Donna. *BACKTALK: Women Writers Speak Out*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993. Print.

Plekhanov, Georgy. *Art and Social Life*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1953. Print.

Polonksy, Abraham. *A Season of Fear*. Berlin: Seven Seas Book, 1959. Print.

Quigley, Peter. "The Politics and Aesthetics of a Hopeful Anarchism." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*, edited by Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1998. Print.

Reed, T.V. "Toxic Colonialism, Environmental Justice, and Native Resistance in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*." *MELUS* 34.2 (2009): 25-42. Print.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol 1. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984. Print.

Rideout, Walter B. *The Radical Novel in the USA 1900-1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966. Print.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain. "On Several Obsolete Notions." *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1965. Print.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain. "The Use of Theory." *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1965. Print.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1947. *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. Print.

Saxton, Alexander. 1958. *Bright Web in the Darkness.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Print.

Schaub, Thomas Hill. *American Fiction in the Cold War*. Madison (WI): University of Wisconsin Press, 1991. Print.

Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949. Print.*Fabulation and Metafiction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1979. Print.

Silber, Joan. *The Art of Time in Fiction: As Long as It Takes*. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2009. Print.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Almanac of the Dead*. New York: Penguin, 1991. Print.

Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle.* New York: Penguin, 1986. Print.

Slovic, Scott. "Editor's Note," *ISLE* 11. 2 (2004): v-viii. Print.

Slovic, Scott. "'Rudolf the Red knows rain, dear': The Aestheticism of Edward Abbey." *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992. Print.

Somma, Mark. "Revolutionary Environmentalism." *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth*, edited by Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella, II. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006. Print.

Steiner, George. *Language and Silence*. New York: Atheneum, 1967. Print.

Stephenson, Neal. *Zodiac*. New York: Bantam Dell, 1988. Print.

Tenhouten, Warren D. *A General Theory of Emotions and Social Life*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Teuton, Sean Kicummah. *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Print.

Tillett, Rebecca. "Anamnesiac Mappings: National Histories and Transnational Healing in Leslie Maromn Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*." *Transatlantic Voices: Interpretations of Native North American Literatures*, edited by Elvira Pulitano. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Print.

Twining, Edward S. "Edward Abbey, American: Another Radical Conservative." *Denver Quarterly* 12.4 (1978): 3-15. Print.

Twining, Edward S. "The Roots of Abbey's Social Critique." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*, edited by Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1998. Print.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957. Print.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction.* New York: Methuen, 1984. Print.

Weyler, Rex. *Blood of the Land: The Government and Corporate War Against First Nations*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1992. Print.

Williams, John A. *Captain Blackman*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1972. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford (UK): Oxford Univ. Press, 1977. Print.

Woodcock, George (Ed.). *The Anarchist Reader*. Hassocks: Harvester Press/Humanities Press, 1977. Print.

Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print.