Vol. 9, Issue 2
August, 2016

Pictorial Activism and the Rewilding of Rivers

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Keywords: Ecocriticism, Visual Arts, Dams

PICTORIAL ACTIVISM AND THE REWILDING OF RIVERS

Henry David Thoreau (1854/1961) famously wrote, "In wildness is the preservation of the world," a maxim that scholars sometimes misunderstand as *wilderness* instead of *wildness*. A comparable maxim of animal liberation and earth liberation activists is "Live wild or die," an injunction that intimates death is preferable to living without wilderness freedom. Uniting both of these concepts across the span of a century and a half is the concept of rewilding.

One common meaning of *rewilding* applies to conservation praxis, to the conscious application of ecological knowledge or skills. Earth First! cofounder Dave Foreman (2004) coined the term *rewilding*, he wrote a book on the subject, and he serves the Rewilding Institute as a Conservation Fellow today. Based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Institute integrates within its ambitious mission a plan to advance "continental-scale conservation" and to promote a "hopeful vision for the future of wild Nature and human civilization in North America" (para. 1). If rewilding advocates find continued success in the United States, their activism might set powerful precedents for other countries.

Caroline Fraser (2009, p. 356) cites Dave Foreman as having coined the term rewilding. In his TED Talk, George Monbiot defines terrestrial rewilding as “the mass restoration of ecosystems,” but he neglects to address its attendant restoration in primal human wildness. Any survey of rewilding must address the objections of third-world environmentalists and writers. Ramachandra Guha, for instance, has written, “What is unacceptable are the radical conclusions drawn by deep ecology, in particular, that intervention in nature should be guided primarily by the need to preserve biotic integrity rather than by the needs of humans” (74). First-world environmentalists and writers speak from positions of privilege and power that are impracticable, as yet, for those from developing nations.

Rewilding gained scientific authority after conservation biologists Michael Soulé and Reed Noss (1998) codified it as a methodology and praxis. Their breakthrough article, in the journal *Wild Earth,* promoted the “restoration and protection of big wilderness and wide-ranging, large animals – particularly carnivores” (p. 2). Noss and Soulé espoused a threefold combination of largely protected core reserves, connectivity between those reserves, and support for keystone species to maintain an ecological balance. They espoused, in short, the three C’s of terrestrial rewilding: cores, corridors, and carnivores. (Soulé is a professor emeritus who now serves as a Science Fellow on the board of the Rewilding Institute, while Noss continues as a professor at the University of Central Florida.) A second meaning of *rewilding*, being used connotatively here, following cues from its broader context in activism, points to engagements in struggles that aim toward the twin targets of restoring endangered species or ecosystems and augmenting human health. It is this second meaning, engagement in struggles for ecosystems, for other species, and for the wellbeing of activists themselves, that so many so-called radical environmentalists have seized upon and adopted as a maxim.

Some definitions are in order here before I go on. *Radical* as it is popularly used is a misnomer, as is the term *ecoterrorist*; one person’s radicalism is another’s moral imperative. In seminal books by Manes (1990) and Scarce (1990) on the topic, radicals deviated in their willingness to break the law. Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King broke laws for just causes, just as advocates for gay rights later did. By the 1980s the Earth First! cofounders adopted the “radical” label willingly, but within recent years activists have reconsidered the appellation, referring to their praxis as “ecological resistance.” Therefore *activist environmentalists* will be swapped in for the bad locution *radical environmentalists*. What makes *activist environmentalist* apt is the recent spread of formerly radical tactics and forms of resistance from a comparatively few “extremists” to the mainstream. Whereas conventional environmentalists work within legal and political systems, even wear suits and lobby lawmakers, activists act up. Activist environmentalists work outside of legal systems, that is; they take risks. When so-called activism finds refuge inside a system, it rarely continues to be radical or activist anymore.

Language is power, and therefore a rejection of the term *ecoterrorist* also must come into play. As radical or activist environmentalists never have done, terrorists hurt and kill people, with the aim of bringing severe anxiety (i.e., terror) to societies. Words scrawled on a dam face would fall under no standard definition of terrorism. Such an act would qualify as trespass, yes, but people do not suffer severe anxiety from workplace trespass. *Terrorist* is misapplied in cases that entail no physical harm. Industry, business, and law enforcement have circumscribed the language of

activism for too long. Unwary activists have allowed establishment terms to be mainstreamed – we have accepted them without a query or a fight.

Today, it is commonplace for people from all walks of life to participate in resistance activities that used to be the province of only the most committed movement participants. People whose primary identities are not “environmentalist” now regularly commit acts of civil disobedience to arrest or delay destructive governmental and corporate forces. And in this confrontation with what is euphemistically termed “development,” mainstream North American society has simultaneously confronted the loss of the wildness that is at the heart of modern society’s most cherished value: freedom.

The Fluvial Excursion

Henry David Thoreau’s saying, “In wildness is the preservation of the world,” originated within his essay “Walking.” There, he was speaking of the spiritual side of wildness, an immanent state of intensity that links us with other beings. A primal urge stirred Thoreau near Walden Pond in a memorable moment when he “caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented.” Thoreau’s language, buried deep within the “Higher Laws” chapter of *Walden*, balances civilized propriety with impulsive savagery. He was responding not to a base or pedestrian inclination, as disciples and readers today might take it. He was teetering on a fulcrum to balance his need to heed “higher” laws. He was complementing his earnest spiritual mandates, those deriving from domestic civilization and all its expectations, with a claim to articulate his savage and embryonic transcendental yearning. That impulse toward savagery was akin to the impulse that some hunters claim they satisfy when they partake in the wildness of their prey by matching wits against it and emerging as the victor.
Arguably our first environmentalist, Thoreau sought to rewild himself by a variety of means. One of those he named the “fluvial walk” in his journals, a riverside hike that led to full absorption: “Divesting yourself of all clothing but your shirt and hat, which are to protect your exposed parts from the sun, you are prepared for the fluvial excursion” (p. 94). For polyglots like Thoreau, the word *fluvial*, hailing from Latin by way of Middle English, denoted a flowing river. *Excursion* in turn signified a brief trip or an outing. Having shucked most of his clothes, Thoreau was ready for a full-immersion adventure, a wild baptismal. He entered the river and relinquished himself to its *fluvia* or current. Drifting downstream feet-first, liberated by his near-nudity, he yielded to the river’s flow. He placed his chapeau atop his sex parts whenever he happened to pass other citizens who were recreating on the shore.

In the winter the river served Thoreau as a medium for rewilding as well. Across its frozen surface he skated with greater abandon than anyone else in Concord, performing “dithyrambic dances and Bacchic leaps,” or so noted Nathaniel Hawthorne’s daughter, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop (Bloom, 2007, p. 4). Thoreau danced on the ice in zany and gyrating displays. He articulated his inner wildness with his bodily articulation. Thoreau was an artist of rewilding. When he leapt on the ice in winter, when he opened himself to the stream’s brisk current and the sun, he rewilded his urbane self and gained a balance that proved incompatible with the civilized side of life. Rivers were places of impulsivity and artistic liberation for Thoreau.

The *fluvia* of his excursions proved vital for his rewilding. One of the most striking characteristics of the environmental movement has been freeing us and freeing all things to evolve. The current swept Thoreau away for *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, the title of his first book, published in 1849. Canoeing those rivers with his brother, Thoreau experienced the flux of the water as it drove toward the sea. He was responding to the force of gravity, to the tug that intimated humankind's oceanic geneses. In this recognition there exists an important parallel with Charles Darwin. In 1845, on the second voyage of the HMS *Beagle*, Darwin had begun already to understand the ocean as a shared primordial broth from which all speciation arose, though it would take him more than a decade before he found the courage and confidence to print his findings in *The Origin of Species*. Without the harmonizing flow of rivers that Thoreau found ways to yield to, the elemental wildness incipient within first-world peoples might peter out and allow undue refinement to gain the upper hand.

Wildness and the river's burly current are spousal units. Once we humans turned technology to the task of yoking rivers, that couple suffered a divorce. The healthy force of the currents changed, as did opportunities for fluvial excursions. Those great repositories of hydraulic wildness, rivers, grew tame. Such opportunities were not to be lost forever, though. No human artifice could forever sever those elemental forces nature had conjoined. What technology had separated, technology and the patience of time could once again reunify.

Thinking Like a River

Thoreau's experiences and writings of wildness open the way to rivers and changing American attitudes toward them. What used to seem a consensus on the need to dam and control our streams is yielding to deeper reappraisals every year. Those reappraisals began with the environmental movement's ascension in the 1960s, and they found an adverse focus within Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River when it opened for business in 1963. Even before that momentous event, some sensitive sectors of the public had already begun to feel fed up with corporate-agency collusion. Dams built by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec) were stifling wild water—snuffing fish, flooding canyons, erasing Native artifacts, and diminishing human opportunities to couple with the wild.

BuRec efforts to reclaim the West in particular, by building hundreds of big dams, smacked of anthropocentric entitlement. Embedded in the nomenclature of the Bureau of Reclamation was the notion of reclaiming lands perceived as abandoned, neglected, or usurped. To presume the right to reclaim arid landscapes, though, suggested Euroamericans had been afforded birthrights to seize land from earlier inhabitants—from birds, fish, humans, and nonhuman mammals, from rock and water. In the point of view of activist environmentalists, corporations were colluding in the modern age with municipalities, counties, states and the federal government to overwhelm the wild. Such a critique finds parallels in dozens of literary explorations of injustice and inequality. Consider the displaced Muley Graves who refuses to abandon his home in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1996) by John Steinbeck. Lurking ghostlike after his neighbors have gone, Muley yearns to strike the cops and tractors toppling Okie shacks. Uprooted from his home-site, suffering from a disordered state of mind, Muley imagines he can thwart the invisible suits behind the tractors that are reclaiming their bad debts; he hopes to disable the bankers repossessing played-out farms (p. 264). Muley and his ilk were entitled to nothing, after corporations began to run the Dust Bowl show. In much the same

way today, traditional cultures and native species have little recourse against the agencies and utilities that are erecting massive dams. By 2006, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River in China had displaced 1.3 million rural people, along with "13 cities, 140 towns, and more than 1,600 villages . . ." (Lubin and Schafer, 2010, para. 3).

In the 1960s, mainstream environmentalists struck back at the BuRec and kindred agencies by legislative means. They lobbied for the authoring of new laws to safeguard at-risk ecosystems. Never has such a succession of legislative changes fallen into place so swiftly as it did back then. In 1968, the Sierra Club routed BuRec plans for dams at Marble Gorge and Bridge Canyons that would have turned the Grand Canyon into a reservoir. Within three years of the first Earth Day in 1970, Congress had enacted the Wild and Scenic Rivers system, the National Environmental Policy Act, the EPA, and the Clean Air, the Clean Water, and the Endangered Species Acts. But the 1980s brought a notorious reaction to environmental protection and preservation. With the election of Ronald Reagan, anti-environmental extremism became mainstream. Serious proposals were made to sell off massive tracts of public lands in the American west. Environmental laws were met with antipathy and enforced with carelessness. Environmentalism, mainstreamed in the 1960s and '70s, became exiled. Interest groups like the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, the National Wildlife Federation, and others proved toothless and friendless when confronting Reagan appointees like Interior Secretary James Watt and EPA administrator Anne Gorsuch.

When the pace of environmental advocacy came to be stymied, when laws went unenforced and consequently did no good, some activist environmentalists opted for extralegal means. One of the first things they did was advocate for the rewilding of those rivers calmed by technocratic control. Devices for rewilding rivers have included a gamut of protests, writings, and (most pertinently here) the visual arts. The 2014 film *DamNation* takes anti-dam advocacy as its subject.

The first face to be displayed in that 2014 documentary is a graffiti artist, Mikal Jakubal. He lives now in California and works as an EMT and documentary filmmaker.

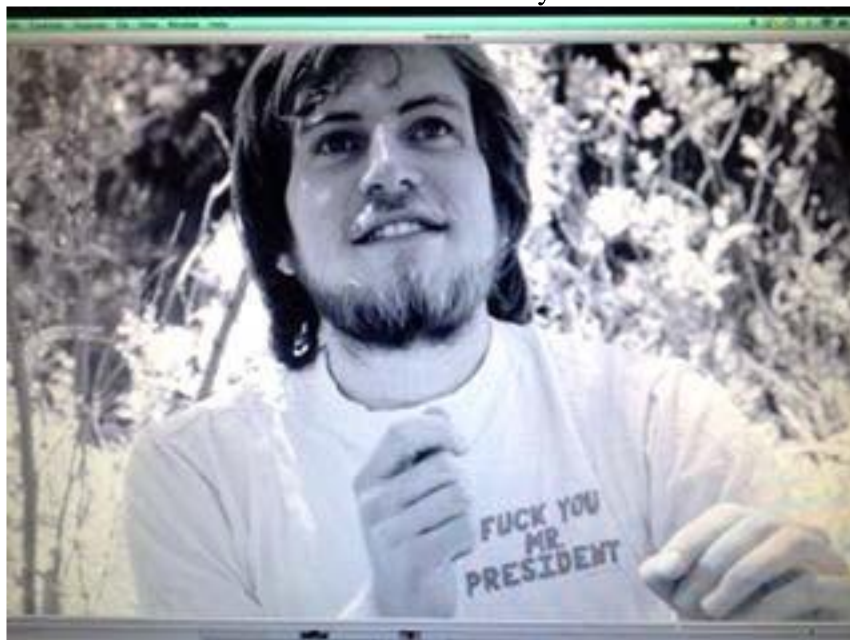

Figure 1: Mikal Jakubal, 1987. Reproduction courtesy of Mikal Jakubal.

When we met in 1980s Bellingham, Washington, he was performing ecological sabotage (ecotage). "Performing" is used deliberately, because his work took the form of covert performance art. In much the same way that taggers today are artists—as one may see by looking hard at the graffiti sprayed on freight trains—Jakubal's art bore no signature. Angry and playful alike, his artistic talent claimed as its canvas bulldozers, posters in student unions, newspaper ads, and private homes. He doctored billboards, crafted flyers, fomented activism and mayhem. He compiled a memorable iconography as a lasting legacy. He added to the growing tide of opinion that has favored the once-unthinkable: the toppling of the Elwha River Dam and the Glines Canyon dams, both on the Elwha River in Washington State.

Public blowback against the dams, grassroots efforts to rewild the Elwha and other rivers, captured the interest of *DamNation*'s directors. Jakubal is the rightful protagonist of this film, which is "Dedicated to those who work passionately and tirelessly to protect our rivers." Funding to make the film came from Patagonia, the outdoor clothing company. Its founder Yvon Chouinard makes a cameo appearance. A fly fisherman, Chouinard has a passion for salmon, which have been reduced in the Columbia River drainage today to between 9% and 18% of their former numbers (Scholz). Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior under President Bill Clinton from 1993 to 2001, calculates in the film that some 75,000 dams have been built in the U.S. "That's more than one every day since Thomas Jefferson was in office," Babbitt says, with evident heat. Built with the understanding they would deliver affordable power, flood control, and irrigation water, the largest of those dams undercut Native American economies and destroyed the totemic Northwest fish runs.

Mikal Jakubal defended western rivers by using the faces of concrete dams as easels. He defended the rivers to rewild them, to restore wildness in big fish, big water, and himself. He performed his art for a cause that has helped to cultivate a creative insurgency in others for decades. Interviewed in the film, he squirms with glee when asked to recount how he pulled off the one big stunt to which he is legally able to confess. He is able to confess to that daring performance, which took place in 1987, because by the time the film was made the dam already had come down by federal decree and using federal money. Statutes of limitations regarding his minor crime also probably had elapsed by that time.

One dam worker with a memory of the night Jakubal spent painting the Glines Canyon Dam crack tells the story. "We got wind that Earth First! was going to do something that night, so we put an extra ranger on duty," the worker remembers. Jakubal evaded security and committed his caper without detection, painting a crack down the dam face with the words "Elwha Be Free."

Figure 2: “Elwha Be Free” and painted crack. 1987. Photo courtesy Mikal Jakubal.

Jakubal’s handiwork gained the dam operator’s admiration. “It was a beautiful crack,” the man says. “The guy was an artist. There was no question of it. And he did that all in one night. It was an amazing feat.” Interviewed 27 years after the fact, Jakubal hoped his feat of fluvial vandalism would not be his most momentous legacy. The employee had another take: “I think that kind of woke up people to the fact that something had to be done.” With that single act of ecotage, Jakubal snapped the suspenders of the private owners of the dam and made them look into the future. It also raised the consciousness of those who best knew the dam and its tragic legacy. His bold act translates well to screens around the nation, to classrooms, and to community gatherings. The film features an animated sequence of some ten seconds that recreates the 1987 action.

Ben Knight, the film narrator and one of its directors, declares he has a lot to learn from someone like Jakubal “who would rappel down a 200-foot dam face in the middle of the night with a paint bucket just to make a statement.” Knight asks Jakubal, “Any words of inspiration for aspiring young artists who have a big dam canvas to paint?” Jakubal responds by urging others to get more ambitious, to originate bigger and better media events. He does not go on record about any other ecotage that Earth First!ers undertook during the 1980s. But those of us in the college town of Bellingham during that decade can confirm Jakubal’s radical bravado. His radical and imaginative monkeywrenching complemented the clever flyers he made. One of those flyers, reproduced here, shows an ancient forest on top and a chainsaw beneath it, ready to cut. Those artworks are captioned simply “Beauty. And the Beast.”

Figure 3: Beauty. And the Beast

The kicker for the cognoscenti was that the image bears a faux attribution, “A Public Service of the U.S.D.A. Forest Service and your State Foresters.” Lifted from mainstream propaganda, it points up the rank subservience of government to industry in that decade.

That same year, Jakubal’s signature also could be seen in the glorious desecration of the face of the O’Shaughnessy Dam in Yosemite. John Muir grieved that dam as one of his greatest defeats. Having working as a shepherd in the Hetch Hetchy Valley that was flooded when the dam went in, Muir railed in print beginning in 1908 against San Francisco’s plans to construct a dam there. He lost that fight, and the dam was built in 1913. Jakubal’s 40-foot crack on the 312-foot-high edifice accompanied the words “Free the Rivers! –J. Muir.” The Bay Area Water Agency had the crack and slogan painted over the next day, but it survives in a t-shirt for sale, a design that “pays homage to the activist art on the Hetch Hetchy dam in 1987” (Wild & Free). *DamNation*’s directors

also say that Jakubal originated tree-sitting, the perilous feat of occupying a tree, slated for the saw, to thwart its felling ("DamNation").

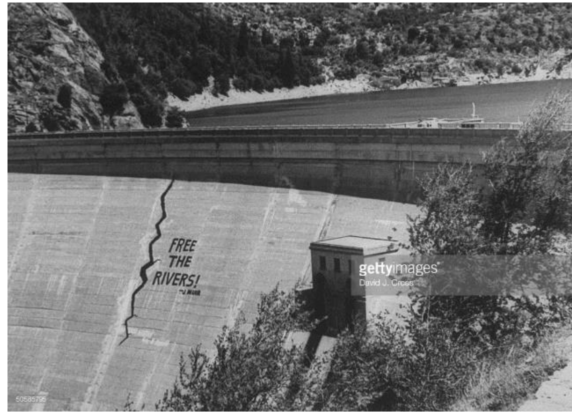

Figure 4: David J. Cross. Reproduced courtesy of LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images

An earlier flourish of activist art inspired Jakubal's graffiti. On March 21, 1981, a 300-foot fissure appeared on the concrete face of Glen Canyon Dam in Arizona. That crack was in fact a tapering ribbon of black plastic. That sheet of plastic, both a wish fulfillment and a tacit threat, cleverly counterfeited a crack in the concrete edifice. Activists unfurled it down the dam face and held an impromptu press conference on the spot. Those activists—aka ecoteurs, provocateurs, vandals, artists, or what have you—were never arrested. In the view of agencies and law enforcement, the PR the activists would get if they were arrested would offset the efficacy of the arrest and send copycats out for attention. His starring role in *DamNation* has inspired Jakubal anew to get involved in river restoration today. The cycle of art begetting activism and activism begetting art appears to be perpetually reciprocal.

Henry David Thoreau, from all indications, would have approved of such audacious provocations. Thoreau, we remember, was the man who spent a night in jail in 1846 for refusing to pay a poll tax that was being assessed to fund the Mexican-American War, a war that ended by annexing Texas into the United States. A direct line of inheritance connects Thoreau and contemporary activists who were resisting wars waged on environment and humankind alike. Thoreau originated civil disobedience—aka "CD" today, among those who choose to act up on behalf of animals and Earth. In his essay initially titled "Resistance to Civil Government," changed to its more familiar title "Civil Disobedience" four years after his death, Thoreau detailed his key philosophical rationale for disobeying civil authorities and laws. Activists such as Jakubal, Martin Luther King in the 1960s, and Mahatma Ghandi in the 1920s learned a great deal about CD from the life and writings of Thoreau, who also spoke and wrote in opposition to antebellum slavery. The sole difference is that some of his latter-day heirs choose to vandalize or ecotage implements of industrial ruin. Had Henry David Thoreau performed any sabotage, he and his biographers would never have left mention of it in the records, although it would have been coherent with his character. Mike Jakubal probably was too young to have lent a hand to the Glen Canyon Dam caper in 1981. Later, though, his forays into visual arts helped rewild multiple U.S. rivers. Those forays make mainstream environmentalists today seem conventional and conformist by contrast.

Defensive Splendor

A broad palette of arts has come into play for activist environmentalists over time. Regarded collectively, such efforts to protect, restore, and rewild rivers in Washington State and throughout the American West have been collaborative. People working in concert have willingly avoided the spotlight so that their actions sound louder than their mouths. It is as if nature itself had a voice, contrasting the culture of celebrity that news outlets promulgate.

One of the oddest fusions of river partisanship and the arts took place in June of 1941, when the Bonneville Power Administration hired Woody Guthrie to write songs to memorialize the glories of its bureaucratic projects. The BPA is the federal agency created to operate Bonneville, the first of the great western dams. Guthrie convinced himself he could serve the government and workingmen and -women alike by glorifying the great dams that had stripped the Columbia River of its wildness. Some of those dams, work-relief projects to help the nation through the Great Depression, satisfied him that proletarian interests were being justly served. Guthrie himself was radical enough that his guitar sported a succession of decals that read, “This machine kills fascists.” The BPA public-relations stunt exploited Woody Guthrie’s populist appeal to neutralize its Northwest dams against the outcries of those who cast doubts on the appropriateness of the government’s role in public-power production. Those bureaucrats must have believed that cheap energy for consumers and ready irrigation for sodbusters would offset near-mortal blows to the salmon and Indians. Today the Columbia River dams continue to kill salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon. The river is stilled for most of its run and its chilly current heated by miles of slackwater reservoirs.

The public-relations ploy involving Woody Guthrie functioned well enough that the BuRec thirty years later would hire popular artists such as Norman Rockwell to glorify its big dam projects around the West. Using oils, tempera and watercolors beginning in 1969, those artists strove to make high dams (and their so-called reclaimed landscapes) appear appealing to the human eye. Much like Woody Guthrie did, those artists were used to greenwash the ecological damage done by the agency that hired them. A decade later, Greenpeace and Earth First! learned in turn to co-opt the visual arts to their own ends. While Guthrie adopted the musical arts, and Jakubal the visual arts, other activists would act out in ways that assured print and televisual coverage as effective albeit ephemeral arts.

When freedom of speech failed, when anger became unsustainable, speech acts took pictorial form. Such pictures, like the “image events” that communication professors John Delicath (2003) and Kevin Michael DeLuca (2003) have identified as key to public protests, gained long lives in the public consciousness. Instead of aiming primarily for televisual media, instead of exploiting dynamic moments or photo-ops to generate the proverbial fifteen minutes of fame, those image events originated by activists demonstrate greater staying power. In books, videos, magazines, postcards, and promotional materials for advocacy groups, media events like those at Glen Canyon, Hetch Hetchy, and Glines Canyon outlasted their moments and their creators’ lives to inspire other activists over time. In books, magazines, flyers, and posters—displayed in head shops, co-ops, and health-food stores—such images were duplicated and traded, viewed by thousands passing through. (Many such events nowadays take as their preferred medium the Internet, which is free of charge and neutral in content, although conflicts still are playing out

about matters of net neutrality.) Water-worthy "kayaktivists" in Portland and Seattle are innovating within the tradition (Brait, 2014).

Dam removal has also inspired editorial cartoonists. In 2009 PacifiCorp, the Oregon utility that owns four dams on the Klamath River, agreed to remove its dams by 2020. That news has become a cause célèbre and vindication among Northwest environmentalists. Cartoonist Rex Babin, drawing for the *Sacramento Bee* in 2009, depicted a litter of dead and dying fish on a dry stream alongside disgusted gulls. One of the gulls says in cartoonish sotto voce, "Dams on the Klamath are coming down! Pass it on." Nothing radical imbues the cartoon, but it does highlight ways in which dam breaching and dam removal have gained a favored spot in the public consciousness, partly through activist efforts. Oregon cartoonist Jesse Springer, also in 2009, pictured a grinning fish leaping from concrete pool to concrete pool and ultimately into a deep impoundment dubbed "Klamath Dam Removal." Dam removal, formerly a radical idea never accorded serious consideration, by the first decade of this millennium had gone mainstream. That watershed moment in American culture offers yet another reason why the locution "radical environmentalist" has become passé today.

The most memorable and accomplished of comic commentaries is a 2014 piece by Milt Priggee. He makes his home on Whidbey Island, in Washington State, near where the Elwha and Glines Canyon dams stood, until radical notions about rewilding U.S. rivers became commonplace. Priggee's work has appeared around the nation. In many states, including Washington, newspapers no longer keep editorial cartoonists like him on staff. His 2014 cartoon here personifies the Elwha River as a curvy and gleeful female who is breaking the chains that attach her wrists to the restraining dams. Channeling the language of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., she proclaims, "Free at last! Free at last!" If the echoes of King's "I Have a Dream" speech offend some viewers, Priggee's elevation of nature's rights to a level similar to human rights affirms the rewilding ideal that activist environmentalists so long have advocated.

Figure 5: Milt Priggee cartoon, Aug. 14, 2014. Reprint courtesy of the cartoonist.

In a welcome inversion of environmental history, the personified river is thanking the federal government for her fresh liberty. That same government paid for the teardown, raised cash to recompense the private owners of the dam, and built a hatchery and a water treatment plant in place of the dam for the nearby city of Port Angeles. That complicated process took more than two decades to unfold, to gain congressional approval and funding. Priggee's Elwha River shares attributes with a healthy and seductive mermaid. The wildness of the original river is implicit in her delighted demeanor and body language.

The visual arts came into play for both sets of forces in these ecological culture clashes—the government and the people. Bigger and better media events are sure to follow as technology increases the sophistication of partisanship. Guerilla theatre, a common tactic co-opted from anti-war protesters, will also follow. Many private dams today are being toppled by popular demand, engineering smarts, and congressional appropriations.

In the only event he will discuss, Jakubal had to practice his craft as stealthy as a cat—first to design and then to paint a massive crack on the face of the Glines Canyon Dam in 1987. He had to haul ropes, carabiners, paint rollers, buckets, and other gear by bicycle from his car a mile downhill. He had to do *Nachtwerk*—Edward Abbey's clever phrase for ecotage accomplished under cover of darkness, a pun on Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. Art on behalf of environmental causes has often intersected with activism. Jakubal proved that fact memorably. His art inflicted no harm to humans, but it sent a major message all the same. By combining sentiments, words, and pictures in original ways, Jakubal emboldened others—activists, lawmakers, filmmakers, paddlers, anglers, and entrepreneurs like Yvon Chouinard. "I didn't bring those dams

down," Jakubal said. "We were just one little bitty pinprick in the side of the system, trying to make this idea go forward" (qtd. in Barcott, 2014, para. 6). Jakubal made what is known as protest or activist art. Dams have been inspiring art for almost a century now.

Politicking Bioregionally

The ultimate dismantling that followed Jakubal's pinprick cost the American public a lot, but it was far less costly than letting the signature salmon runs on the Olympic Peninsula die out. Those Chinook salmon, the largest in the state, had grown as large as 45kg during their years at sea. "June hogs," the white settlers on the peninsula called them. The fish are returning to the river and the upstream ecosystem in healthy numbers now. To restore the Elwha River fully will cost some $324.7 million; the two dams and hydroelectric plants had to be purchased from the owner, two water treatment plants and other facilities needed to be constructed to protect water users, as well as "flood protection facilities, a fish hatchery and a greenhouse to propagate native plants for revegetation" (Olympic, 2014, para. 15). Actuaries can project such restoration costs in dollars and cents, but no number-cruncher can capably assess either the recompense that accrues in terms of wildness to the human spirit, or the ecological value of restoring streams that have been dammed dormant for almost a century. The Elwha and Glines Canyon dams blocked the river in 1914 and 1927 respectively. Sited across from Seattle on Puget Sound, those dams operated in tandem with a nascent logging industry to power pulp and paper mills in the rainforests of the Olympic Peninsula. The cultures that surround those dams form a core of the historical novel *West of Here* (2011) whose author Jonathan Evison, like Derrick Jensen, demonstrates some of the ways affective writing might help to rewild U.S. rivers as the visual arts have done. Like editorial cartoonists, these writers disappear behind a screen of relative anonymity and allow the voices of their characters and personae to advocate on behalf of our regional rivers.

West of Here is a roman à clef whose details line up historically with the divisive dams. The central figure is an entrepreneur who devises a plan in 1889 to plug the river, yoke its kilowatts, and power the town of Port Bonita. The entrepreneur, Ethan Thornburgh, is the thinly veiled real estate developer Thomas Aldwell; Aldwell gave his name to the silted reservoir behind the Elwha Dam. The town of Port Bonita is a barely camouflaged Port Angeles—the burg nearest the site of the Elwha and Glines Canyon dams. Those dams would set a precedent for the later concrete monoliths to be built in the Pacific Northwest, climaxing in the Grand Coulee Dam in 1942. Evison's character Thornburgh devises his dam-building plan to prove to his pregnant lover Eva Lambert (whom he has pursues from Chicago) that he has enough ambition and capitalist savvy that she should wed him. If that strand of Evison's plot sounds unpromising as literary art, it might nonetheless explain why entrepreneur Aldwell spent 25 years pursuing his dream to plug the Elwha River to could profit from it. The motives pooling behind Aldwell's dream remain something of a regional mystery, not only for his persistence but also for his ability to evade the laws that mandated fish ladders a century ago. Ladders would have assured the passage of the massive native salmon. Evison bifurcates the intricate plot of this grand novel by setting its second strand on the eve of those dams' removal in 2006. Such a dateline balances Ethan Thornburgh's greed with the despair of one of his descendants that is now employed, ironically enough, as the foreman of a fish cannery.

The Elwha fish hatchery, built in 2012 as a condition of dam removal, remains an ecological controversy today. Hatchery maintenance rests in the hands of the local Native Americans, the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, signers of an 1855 treaty. In the long term, wild and hatchery fish will crossbreed and dilute the genes of wild fish—a problem that entails a knotty paradox. Even as the river itself is rewilding, even as current is returning to a stream idled for almost a century, the vestigial fish are being dewilded, to coin a phrase. Those fish quite literally butted their heads against the concrete dam edifice, unable to reach ancestral spawning grounds for several human generations. Finally free to migrate upstream, they find themselves in heavy competition with hatchery stock, their gene pool diluted. A river is much more than the *fluvia* or flow of water within it. It is a complex web of ecological relations, a network of key components mutually reliant on one another. If its native fish become less wild due to feral fish from hatchery strains, can a river be said to be wilder?

Mike Jakubal's caper, if viewed as a species of vandalism, pales by contrast with the damage done to the tribes. Indian ecology relied on the salmon, on wild fish that the dams reduced to fractions of their historic numbers. The devastation of the rivers by governments and corporations, the trashing of tribal livelihoods: those were arguably the most egregious forms of vandalism in Washington State history, even though most people would not think of their losses as a consequence of government licensing and sanction. The tribes came to be civilized, dewilded, reliant on government-issued foodstuffs. One of the tribal women profiled in *DamNation* says removing the Elwha dams was "an answer to our ancestors' prayers." In that scene her spiritual sympathies and hopes are evident.

At 210 feet high, the Glines Canyon Dam was the tallest dam ever removed. The NGO American Rivers reports (2014) that 50 other dams came down in 2013 alone. Indeed, dam removal has gained so much momentum that the University of California at Riverside and California State University at San Bernardino have come together on a project they name the Clearinghouse for Dam Removal Information, an online repository to assist activists and bureaucrats in the challenging process of collaboration, the messy process of working toward a common goal.

Cultural Dissonance

Glen Canyon Dam, since its completion in 1963, has become the granddaddy of all lost causes for river activists. A candidate for decommissioning for half a century now, it has been roundly reviled for its gargantuan excess. In the environmental culture war, it has become a battle as famous as Bull Run, the first major battle of the Civil War. Its detractors revile it for water loss to evaporation from its massive surface area, for increased seepage into the porous stone that it covered when it rose, for its detrimental effects on water quality and riparian habitat. Floyd Dominy, who was BuRec Commissioner at the time, went to expensive and arduous lengths to combat his detractors and defend his vision of the dam. He authorized a costly program that commissioned almost 400 objects of public art. He produced a book that touted the glories of Lake Powell, the reservoir that rose behind Glen Canyon Dam. He commissioned a video, scored with stirring music, that depicts the recreation opportunities Lake Powell affords. Tax rolls were tapped to pay for those PR instruments, those paltry projects of government-sponsored arts. U.S. ratepayers became at once the funding source and the audience for efforts to greenwash or consecrate the federal agency and its projects.

Before Glen Canyon Dam came online, the BuRec knew full well it had become a lightning rod for criticism. On its payroll as "artistic director," John DeWitt was advising it on the aesthetics of its big dam projects. In an effort to lower public voltage, DeWitt enlisted the famous Norman Rockwell as keystone painter in the art collection begun in 1969. Rockwell was to aestheticize that most infamous of BuRec dams. One way to read Rockwell's canvas, reproduced by agency courtesy here, is it suggests that tribes, horses, hawks, and dams can coexist—a kind of latter-day *Peaceable Kingdom*, the painting Edward Hicks made in 1926 to depict Eden before the fall. Alternatively, one may read the Rockwell canvas as a beloved artist's forceful sortie into pictorial activism.

Figure 6: Norman Rockwell. *Glen Canyon Dam*. Oil on canvas. 1969. Glen Canyon Dam, Arizona. Reproduced courtesy of Gloria Mestas and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

If the latter interpretation were to dominate, we may imagine that Rockwell positioned the Navajo (or Diné) family as if encountering the dam for the first time, as if they had come some distance to see it, or as if they were facing it as an unexpected and annoying hurdle on an allegorical journey toward civilization. In this interpretation the family is surprised, stunned really. The stark contrast between the family dynamic and the massive technology, between the traditional ways and the colossal modernism, creates a tension unprecedented in Norman Rockwell's work.

The film *DamNation* tells stories besides those that Norman Rockwell and Mikal Jakubal foreground. David James Duncan (2001)also shows his passion for rewilding U.S. rivers and reads from *My Story as Told by Water*, his book that practices an effective literary activism in its advocacy for fish. Likewise the late Elmer Crow, a Nez Perce elder featured in the film, can barely contain his sadness and anger over the suppression of the formerly free-flowing Columbia and Snake Rivers, the loss of its iconic salmon. Folksinger Katie Lee, 94, shares film footage and photos of the Colorado River before Glen Canyon Dam. Some of those canyon photos depict her recreating nude there, a la Thoreau's fluvial excursions. On the pro-dam side, the directors strive

to give equal time. Washington legislator Doc Hastings and Northwest Power and Conservation Council member Jim Yost explode with anger that salmon should take precedent over human needs. Hastings now has retired as a legislator and NPCC member. Yost, who owned an Idaho dairy distributorship for years, still serves the Council. Some reviewers complained that coverage of the issues in *DamNation* is unfair and imbalanced. But fewer people today are willing to speak on behalf of such ruinous dams.

The two filmmakers attempt to paddle by kayak through a set of locks at a lower Snake River dam—they had read online they were legally allowed to do so—but two policemen and a security officer force them to reverse course. The river has become so tame, so dewilded, that officials have banned travel by paddleboat. The confrontation makes for some cultural dissonance and cinematic tension. Even though the paddlers are approaching public facilities constructed by public tax dollars, the port officials accuse them of activities the government equates with "terrorism." The "T" word punctuates the scene and makes the confrontation stressful and irrational. It all becomes absurd when those officials readily reconstitute documentary filmmaking as ecoterrorism. If tourists approaching the dams by motorboat are allowed to pass, then the double standard begs a crucial question: would terrorists bent on blowing up a dam be more apt to transport explosive devices by muscle power or by motor? Using the ready alibi of thwarting terrorism, bureaucrats choose to dewild rivers for security's sake, disregarding the spiritual need for wildness that throbs in the many people who live along the rivers, who traverse them, fish them, recreate on them.

How may we define ecotage or vandalism in the context of salmon, rivers, Indians, paddlers, and dams? Decommissioning dams that have been in place for almost a century is legal. It is a form of withdrawal that activist environmentalists never took upon themselves. Had they blown up a dam, as members of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) hoped to do with a houseboat, the environmental movement might never have recovered. Destroying bad dams now, defunct or destructive dams, comes about because such destruction makes economic sense. Legislators, taxpayers, and engineers come together to undo ancestral goofs. University of Washington geology professor David Montgomery observes in the film that, even though exchanges about removing dams 50 years ago would have been "unthinkable, conversations change." In future decades, conversations might change about activists or artists like Mikal Jakubal. He and his kindred might be perceived no longer as dangerous lunatics, as fanatics, but instead as progressives on the order of abolitionists and later advocates for gay rights.

One of the final images in *DamNation*, a still, shows Katie Lee holding a bundle of dynamite in one hand, a monkey wrench in the other, her arms crossed. She is not an actor. She is an activist and a folk singer, one of the few people left alive who rafted and explored Glen Canyon before it was dammed and flooded, its Native artifacts destroyed forever. Her wildness has remained alive into a ripe old age. Today the form that Katie Lee's wildness takes is resistance to dams and other mandates that would tame or dewild North American streams. Hers, in other words, is another voice in the growing chorus to rewild U.S. rivers.

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