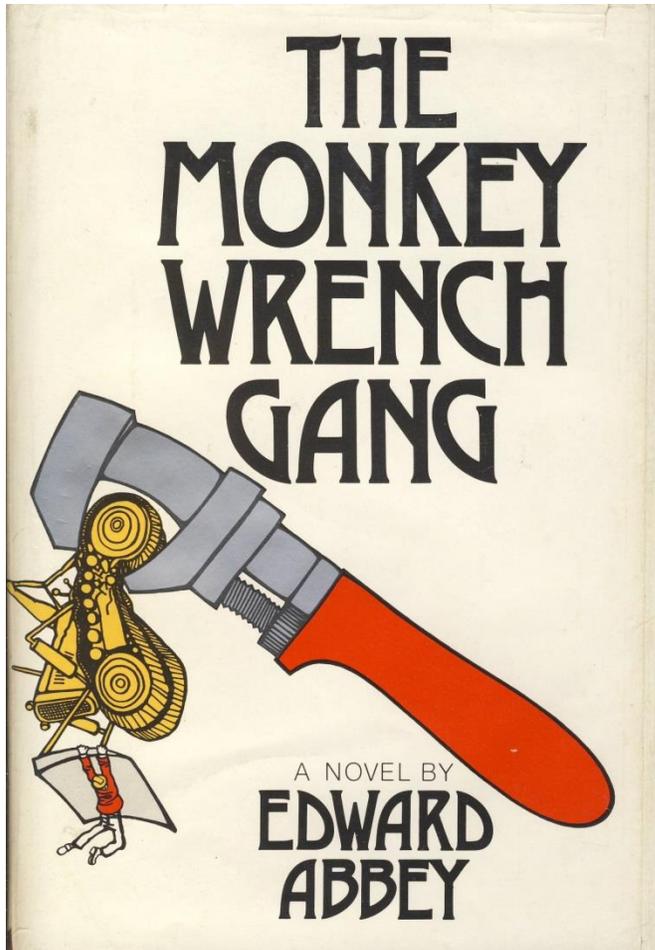


Technology and Being in Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

By Joey Chavez

Growing up in the gorgeous hidden valley that is Alpine, Texas, I have been fortunate enough to know what clean and resourceful water really is and how important it has become to the oil boom invading Texas. Not only is our water at risk from fracking, but so is the beautiful scenery that Alpine is known for. Technology has become a tool, but it was not always intended to be that way. Society boomed at a rate that was too incredible to match, so the only solution was to create dams, bridges, power lines, power plants, and pipelines to sustain everyone. Edward Abbey sarcastically addresses the issues of global deterioration in his novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Abbey is concerned with the continuous industrialization that is tearing into the earth, and he uses his characters to tell the cold hard truth, which is, that we are destroying our earth to preserve too many people. Alpine is a prime example of how technology can be used as a tool to destroy a beautiful land, a place of sanctuary to some, and my home. One day when everyone is erased from the earth, the statues and pillars that we put so much money into will populate the world for the sake of humans that no longer exist. These issues are in fact destructive and deserve some attention, because slowly but surely our resources and land are deteriorating. I fear we have forgotten the land that raised us, the human connection that we share, and how we should treat the earth.



The Trans-Pecos Pipeline is designed to run through the northeast side of town, and that land was sold to a private corporation. With that said, this makes it almost impossible for people concerned with pollution in the air, the contamination of the water, and the infestation of the big work trucks plowing through the small town to make any difference at all. In one of

his many rants, Dr. Sarvis, a character in the novel, states: "The plastic dome follows the plague of runaway industrialism, prefigures technological tyranny and reveals the true quality of our lives" (Abbey 80). The truth is dams and oilrigs are worshipped as gods these days, due to the fortune they are essentially spitting out, but they are never considered evil or worthless. Essentially, they are considered the true quality of our lives.

First, I would like to talk about how technology is creating a global dependence over the population. Today, the world cannot function without the use of technology. While science is skyrocketing at an unprecedented speed, our minds are slowly deteriorating. The irony in technology and humans lies within

the creators and the users. The creators of newer technology are using new and improved hypotheses to create more attractive products, while the users are becoming more and more zombified by the screen they are drooling over. This idea is simple, but effective, especially for the producers. The law of the land is supply and demand, so other organizations almost have to give in to the status quo just so they can compete.

Although smartphones and laptops are not plunging into the earth, they and other technological devices are creating a global dependence that eventually could lead to a worldwide shutdown. A power plant can be used to power entire regions with electricity, while a bridge can reduce a day's trip down to a couple of hours. How can both of these man-made structures be so harmful to the earth or the people living there?

The answer is the dependence it puts on the people within that region. Before the bridges and dams, even before electricity, people found a way to get things done. They found a way to understand the situation they were facing and the solution that was needed. Now, since things are easier, we tend to avoid the hardest way of doing things, thus making us that much lazier. Dependence destroys our individual thinking. Before we relied so heavily on computers, we counted on the land that raised us. Mother Nature's beauty cannot be captured via technology; it was made for our five senses to embrace.

Abbey compares the world and the government corruption to the chaotic giant squid, the Kraken, to showcase how enormous the situation is and how the destruction is not coming from just one place:

the whole conglomerated cartel spread out upon half the planet Earth like a global kraken, pantentacled, wall-eyed and parrot-beaked, its brain a bank of computer data centers, its blood the flow of money, its heart a radioactive dynamo, its language the technetronic monologue of number imprinted on magnetic tape. (Abbey 152)

The blood resembles the flow of money, which highlights the irony of blood money. When various governments around the world occupy a situation, people tend to lose hope. They tend to just turn a blind eye and ignore the bigger picture, because they probably will not live to see the day it gets destroyed. What Abbey speaks is the truth: technology has come to us like a thief in the night and stolen all of our insight and individual thinking. It has changed the human perception of beauty.

Unfortunately, this is just the beginning of the Digital Wasteland. Technology is the digital superior ruling over us in this wasteland of technology-hungry beings. It is easy to say that, of course, without technology all we would have is each other, thus forcing us to interact, but that is not the case. The fact is with more and more attractions being built the destruction of the earth is dramatically overlooked. These facilities are being built to suit individual needs and wants, when we should actually be spending time with one another rather than idolizing false gods who can never acknowledge us.

Is it not insane to think that we put so much of our humanity into these structures just to prove to someone later on that we as a species were worth something? These structures will be on the earth way past our time with no one to benefit. How can we ignore the fact that we are destroying our very own world for the temporary happiness of humans who probably will not even notice the

land and how beautiful it used to be? Marc Reisner, author of *Cadillac Desert*, writes about the corruption and deception behind the water crisis of the West. In regards to the building of dams, “It was regarded, as ‘a grandiose project of no more usefulness than the pyramids of Egypt.’ To Roosevelt, that remark was as good a reason as any to build it. And it was built on a foundation of deception” (Reisner 156). The ever-lasting competition between governments to outrank everyone else obsessed the political leaders. This idea that we have to do the best, because someone could end up doing better, manipulated so many people into building more and more.

Technology has become this tool that is perceived as evil, but the truth is the only evil within technology is the evil we put into it. For example, if a producer makes a new product solely to put another person out of business, then he is in fact using his knowledge and technology to cast someone out. Technology has a way of sneaking into our lives, and the most common way is social media. In a small barbershop, where most people used to go just to talk, no one speaks anymore; instead they are all glued to their smartphones. Or, whenever classmates meet for the first time via college, instead of actually speaking, they look each other up on social media first, as if past posts will present who they are. There is no more human connection. Abbey describes very beautifully how his characters notice one another, and through the story they become as close as family.

Hayduke, a foul, authentic, brute of a man, explains how he sees the world. Although he attacks the Indians, he compares them to the “white folk” as

well. Since he is white he allows us to see that even though there is so much separation between the two races, humans are still humans: “The real trouble is that the Indians are just as stupid and greedy and cowardly and dull as us white folks” (Abbey 31). Abbey emphasizes these controversial ideas throughout his novel to showcase the fact that back in the day, people did not have to hide behind a screen to criticize someone; if someone had something to say, he said it. Technology has stripped courage from us and replaced it with cowardice.

Abbey’s novel captures the true essence of human behavior in the setting of what you could call home territory. The four main characters team up together because they share the same goal and end up creating a bond that lasts forever. Most of the bond is created by the setting and situations they find themselves in, but it goes without saying that nature and experience ultimately ties them all together. At moments in the novel, the characters cannot help but adore the nature around them simply because they all share the same love for it. “They savored the moment. The intrinsic virtues of free and worthy enterprise” (Abbey 50). After all, they are working together to destroy the false gods, and they are savoring each one of their victories.

Abbey does a great job of creating a visual book that captures the beauty of the Four Corners region. His literature captures the scenery, and his sarcasm captures the stupidity and manipulation that goes on in America even today. He also points out the architecture that has invaded his land, like aliens invade a planet when they are scavenging for resources. “Must be a hundred ten in the shade down there...Hell of a place to lose a cow. Hell of a place to lose your

heart. Hell of a place, thought Seldom Seen, to lose. Period” (Abbey 262). The picture Abbey paints for us, describes an incredibly hot and scenic area --one that seems mystical and fantastical. How ironic that a single setting such as this appears to be extraordinary, but in reality the weather and nature are everlastingly beautiful; we just never take the time to notice. Perhaps it is the oversized machinery or the skyscraping power plants diffusing the air with gasses that block our view of what could have been an incredibly wondrous sight.

The bitter irony behind the entire story is that these characters are not criminals--at least they do not see themselves that way--but rather they are heroes committing crimes to preserve their land. Once again, the true evil does not lie within the buildings and the dams but within the people orchestrating the destruction. “Doc agreed. ‘We’re not dealing with human beings. We’re up against the megamachine. A megalomaniacal megamachine’” (Abbey 149). Everyone is told, “This is going to be for the greater good,” but what actually is the greater good? Is it the fact that a dam will grant thousands of people accessible water, or is it the fact that eventually we will run out of water, but in the meantime this will make me some money? The boss can easily manipulate a worker by offering him a job that will surely support him and his family. How can someone deny that offer? So, with a blind-eye the worker happily takes the job without knowing the long-term effects. He might think about it once or twice, but he is going to keep working so that his family never goes hungry or thirsty.

This idea is horrid. Being a part of something that you do not want to be a part of is called by Martin Heidegger a “standing reserve” in his essay, “The Question Concerning Technology”: “The word expresses something more, and, essential, than mere ‘stock.’ The word ‘standing-reserve’ assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric.” This shows how some people do not particularly want to be involved; yet they are essentially, on a smaller scale. “The forester...is ordered by the industry that produces commercial woods, whether he knows it or not” (Heidegger 322-23).



I am a perfect example of a standing-reserve to technology. So, in a sense I am basically a hypocrite, right? I guess that is true, but that does not change my knowledge of what is happening to our beloved earth. Some people cannot even fathom the idea of the earth decaying to the point of no return. Wars are waged over the oil in the ground just so that governments can monitor the use of it and

essentially control it like an older sibling with the television remote. Here is a newsflash: one day there is not going to be any more oil, and the earth is going to look like one huge crater field without any water. If you thought the wars waged over oil were bad enough now, just wait until only a certain number of countries have oil left.

Heidegger says that technology is human, but that “the essence of technology, as a destining of revealing, is the danger” (33). When he mentions danger, he is referring to the corruption within humanity, and the revealing is reference to an idea revealed to the world from a single perspective. Once the audience gets ahold of the new idea, newer ideas emerge. Since technology is really a part of all of us, and we all use it to communicate with one another, then how can there be any evil behind it? What is the corruption? Simple, it is the everlasting competition that we are born with. Whenever a great product comes out on the market, it sells, so it only makes sense to make something matching it or surpassing it in order to compete. This is where the true evil lies. It lies within our ideas to surpass one another instead of trying to help one another.

Man’s belongingness suggests causality which ultimately results in dire creation of something valuable that is able to represent him as a person when he is gone. “Thus where enframing reigns, there is danger in the highest sense,” writes Heidegger (33). The quest for money and fame is the path many of us take in order to achieve what we believe is right, but in most cases that is not the solution. Perhaps the solution is seeking out a product to help improve the

preservation of our land, one that can connect us all in peace and harmony rather than in greed and revenge.

With technology on the rise, it is hard to say where our world will be in the next ten years. One thing is for sure though; if we cannot acknowledge how incredibly lucky we are to have access to such a haven, then one day it will be gone just like Alpine is soon to be destroyed by this madness. That is a day that I do not wish to see. We must not let machines and technology control us; just because a situation seems unchangeable due to its own severity, that does not mean that change is impossible. Something as simple as walking to work, using less water and electricity, going a day without technology, and so on, can be just as fulfilling. We should challenge ourselves to monitor our use of technology and the effect it has on our environment. Instead we should dedicate time to giving back to the earth and giving back to one another. After all, we are this world's last hope for survival. If we keep selling out, we are going to run out of everything we are taking for granted.

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