“Out there in that cabin in the middle of nowhere in Montana”

Narrating the Geographical and Mental Deviance of the Unabomber

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Abstract

In 1996, the mathematician-turned-terrorist Theodore J. Kaczynski, nicknamed the Unabomber, was arrested in his self-built cabin in the woods of Montana after having terrorized the nation for over 20 years. He had modeled his cabin after Henry David Thoreau's idealized *Walden* cabin. This article argues that the Unabomber's cabin in Montana, often considered a so-called flyover state, serves as the pivotal point for his geographical marginalization in the media coverage of the case. Its location in what is discursively constructed as a 'wilderness' makes it impossible to perceive his cabin through the perspective of the pastoral ideal — this imagined middle ground between nature and culture. The over-determination of this material form in its location apparently off the grid furthermore enables the othering and medicalization of Theodore J. Kaczynski. This article demonstrates that the media coverage of the Un- abomber case displays these three tendencies which come together in the nexus *cabinsanity*, i.e., the conflation of pseudo-geographical, cultural, and medical discourses. Projecting cabinsanity, in turn, enables the dismissal of the Unabomber's critique of technologized society as delineated in his manifesto.

Keywords

Unabomber, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, critical regionalism, pastoral ideal, ecophobia

Introduction[1]

When Theodore J. Kaczynski — nicknamed the Unabomber — died in prison on June 10, 2023, the news quickly spread across the globe with virtually every major news outlet giving a report on his death. Today, the Unabomber is as much part and parcel of the US-American cultural imaginary as in 1996 when he was caught — and maybe even more so. The last years have witnessed a proliferation of cultural productions focused on his life, his infamous manifesto, and particularly his crimes. The spectrum encompasses products from the cultural mainstream, such as the 2017 Netflix miniseries *Manhunt: Unabomber* and the accompanying 2020 Netflix docuseries *Un- abomber: In His Own Words*, independent productions, such as Tony Stone's 2021 fictional film *Ted K*, subcultural and underground references, such as the 1999 EP *Unabomber* by the death metal band Macabre, and avant-garde artefacts, such as James Benning's 2012 documentary *Stemple Pass*. The Unabomber has furthermore

[1] This article is critical of the media coverage of the Unabomber case, but this should not be misconstrued as being sympathetic toward him. I want to make clear that I wholesale reject and distance myself from his terrorist acts.

cemented his place in political discourse with his manifesto being the subject of and the inspiration for discussions, publications, and direct action campaigns in far-left, anarchist, and eco-extremist circles as well as among anti-tech radicals such as the Mexican terrorist group Individualistas Tendiendo a lo Salvaje (ITS), which translates to "Individualists Tending to the Wild" (Fleming; Barnett).

This article argues that the Unabomber's cabin in Montana, often called a flyover state, is crucial to the media coverage of the case as it serves as the pivotal point for his geographical marginalization. Its location in what is discursively constructed as a 'wilderness' preserves the pastoral ideal — this imagined middle ground between nature and culture — exactly by making impossible to perceive the Unabomber's cabin through this perspective. The over-determination of this material form in its location off the grid additionally enables the othering and medicalization of Theodore J. Kaczynski, which, in turn, supports the dismissal of the Unabomber's critique of technologized society. As will be demonstrated, the media coverage of the Unabomber case displays these three tendencies which come together in the nexus *cabinsanity*, i.e., the conflation of pseudo-geographical, cultural, and psychiatric discourses.

Before developing the conceptual framework of flyover fiction, critical regionalism, the pastoral ideal, as well as ecophobia and delving into the contemporaneous media coverage, let us briefly recapitulate the case of the Unabomber. In 1996, Theodore J. Kaczynski, a former professor of mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley — educated at Harvard and the University of Michigan — was arrested and brought to court for having injured 23 and killed three people with mail bombs between 1978 and 1995. Since he targeted mostly university and airport staff, he was nicknamed "Unabomber" — "university and airline bomber." Aimed at metaphorically and literally blowing up modern technologized society, the attacks were carried out while he was living in a self-built cabin without running water or electricity in Lincoln, Montana. In 1995, he blackmailed *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* in an anonymous letter to publish his manifesto *Industrial Society and Its Future* — a fundamental and uncompromising criticism of technologized society — or the killings would otherwise continue. In cooperation with federal agencies, *The Washington Post* eventually published the manifesto leading to the Unabomber's identification and subsequent capture in his cabin. The most expensive and longest manhunt in the history of the FBI had come to an end ("The Unabomber").

From the onset of his capture and subsequent trial, the Unabomber's cabin has been the central subject of media coverage and public interest. This fascination reached its climax when the actual cabin was removed from its location and transported to Sacramento for the Unabomber's trial. Mark Wigley explains:

> For the first time, a whole building is to be presented as evidence in a court case. Architecture is brought to trial. A seemingly innocent structure is accused of sheltering the ... infamous unabomber [sic] who had terrorized the nation for eighteen years. (123)

The cabin was prepared to be evidence in the Unabomber's lawyers' strategy to enter an insanity defense in order to spare him a death sentence, aiming to have him declared incompetent to stand trial (Higgins). Underlying this strategy is the assumption that someone's concrete living environment is suggestive of their mental state — in this case the actual decoration of a cabin's interior:

> The terrorist's lawyers wanted to exhibit the actual cabin to demonstrate his insanity. They rejected the prosecutor's conventional scale model, arguing that to be taken inside the brutally minimalist building was to be taken inside a deranged mind. (Wigley 124)

The Unabomber himself, however, rejected the cabin to be taken as evidence of his insanity in court because he wanted to demonstrate to the public that he was *not* insane in order not to discredit his anti-tech manifesto. The prosecutor, in turn, intended to show photographs of the cabin at the time of the Unabomber's arrest to argue that it was as tidy and "well organized as an all-too-sane calculating mind" (124). Eventually, a plea bargain was reached and the Unabomber received life in prison with no possibility of parole; he plead guilty in order to avoid the insanity defense his lawyers had pursued against his will, and so, after all, the cabin did not enter the courtroom to serve as major evidence.

As we can already see, discourses around the geographic and the mental are closely interwoven in the Unabomber case. The location of his cabin was no coincidence, as this article will suggest, neither for him in his acts of communicating his ideas to society — in both textual and terroristic ways — nor for this very society that received and replied to these acts of communication through media coverage and public discourse.

Self-Presentation of the Unabomber

The Unabomber is not only the object of the media coverage surrounding his case but also a subject co-creating his public image. In the short depiction of the Unabomber's lawyers' strategy delineated above, we have already come across one facet of the medial construction of the Unabomber's cabinsanity, namely the foregrounding of his cabin and his mental condition. This nexus is equally a product of his 'communication strategies' in word and deed. In 1971, the Unabomber moved into his selfbuilt cabin in Lincoln, Montana, where he lived intermittently for 25 years until 1996. Already in the 1970s, the very decade the bombing series began, he wrote a first short draft of what would later become his manifesto. Terrorizing from and writing in the periphery, the Unabomber would thus come to make Lincoln a place that matters because through the media coverage of the case, the location would receive a burst of attention from urban dwellers demonstrating that "[t]he cabin in the woods is actually at the center of the city. Far from disconnected, the terrorist ruthlessly exploited the ever-present intimate ties between isolated cell and dense urbanization" (Wigley 124).

Words and deeds, that is writing and killing, are inherently linked in the Unabomber case. In the manifesto itself, he writes in first person plural as FC, Freedom Club, and attempts to justify his terrorist acts: "In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression, we've had to kill people" (Kaczynski 65). Blackmail and murder are deemed necessary means to the end of spreading ideas. The reasoning goes that violence is an effective currency — if not an imperative — in the media ecology of late capitalism where the attention span appears to be continuously decreasing, sensationalism seems to be the dominant and inescapable discursive framework, and where people are constantly flooded with a surplus of information and news. As cynical and inhumane as this perspective is, by "linking blood and ink," as Jean-Marie Apostolides pinpoints, the Unabomber did create attention and a massive amount of media coverage (Haven; see also "Jean-Marie Apostolides on the Unabomber").

The Unabomber did win part of the public's appeal not only by linking blood and ink but also by activating the myth of the frontier. The (positive) reception of the manifesto, accordingly, is influenced by the fact that its radical theses became somehow authenticated by the author's simple form of life apparently on the edge of civilization. This framing of the Unabomber as a man of the wilderness finds its symbolic materialization paradoxically in the very moment he is caught and his appearance strikingly contrasts with the representatives of the state surrounding him: "For most of us, the Unabomber is frozen in the image that gripped America on April 3, 1996: an unkempt, bearded recluse from the Montana wilderness, a man who by all appearances could have been a backwoods yokel or a hermit-saint" (Haven; see also "Jean-Marie Apostolides on the Unabomber"). The cabin plays a central role for this reception as it materializes the conflation of life and work in a *log-cabin- existence*[2] that bestows some form of authenticity to the manifesto's content and actually makes the "cabin itself ... a manifesto, a puritanical polemic" (Wigley 123).

Theory Fourfold: Flyover Fictions, Critical Regionalism, the Pastoral Ideal, and Ecophobia

The age of Trump has seen a proliferation and politicization of discourses around the notion of flyover, a concept which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century and that signifies "complex connotations of being passed over or passing over, of being neglected or negligent" (Klecker and Pohlmann). In their take on flyover, Cornelia Klecker and Sascha Pohlmann delineate that the term initially often referred to the region of the US-American Midwest but soon came to signify *any* place between

[2] The self-fashioning conflating of life and (philosophical) work in a *log-cabin-existence* (*Hutten-Dasein*) is epitomized in Martin Heidegger's infamous rejection of the chair of philosophy in Berlin in 1934, at the time the most renowned appointment. He reasons in "Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?" why he preferred to stay in his cabin in Todtnauberg in the Black Forest (Sheehan 27–28).

the metropolitan areas on both the East and West Coasts. It is the geographical interchangeability of flyover that constitutes both its ideological and fictional essence although flyover fictions thrive on the insistence on and perpetuation of apparently given geographical realities. "[W]ithin its dis-placed meta-region" flyover country accordingly "may surely still refer to the Midwest but just as much to the South or the non-coastal West, or to New Jersey for that matter, and also to places nobody ever flies over on their way from coast to coast unless something has gone really wrong" (Klecker and Pohlmann). Contrary to what might appear to be the case, flyover country is not about a particular or fixed region but all about a simple yet widely shared conception that, according to Anthony Harkins's pioneering work on the subject, "envisions the country as divided geographically and culturally between only two regions: 'places that matter' and 'places that don't'" (97). This pseudo-geographical hierarchization which only pretends to be geographical but is in fact cultural thus epitomizes Stuart Hall's dictum of a "struggle over cultural hegemony" and recognition, which is waged on the "battlefield" of popular and mass culture (469). The struggle that flyover epitomizes is at its core about social, economic, and political power; it is, in turn, fictional insofar as it transcends the apparently objective rootedness in a particular territory to reveal its constructedness, its narrativity, its politics, and its symbolic as well as representational practices.

One crucial aspect of the fictional in flyover is its "double othering" that results in a triangular movement; the term is *not* primarily used by 'the elites on the coasts' apparently looking down upon the inhabitants of flyover country but by the ones feeling passed over and neglected themselves: "Flyover imagines others imagining us, and it constructs both us and them in the process — the purportedly ignored and those who purportedly do the ignoring" (Klecker and Pohlmann). As we will see in the following, the media coverage of the Unabomber case follows the same logic.

Flyover fictions draw attention to how the concept of regionality is constructed and deployed, and they thereby resonate with similar critical practices in recent years that also destabilize and deconstruct the notion of "region." In the course of the transnational and post-exceptionalist turn in American Studies, "place," "space," and "region" have become focal points and categories of analysis, adding to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability etc. Stemming from architectural theory, the paradigm of critical regionalism has been explored and developed by Cheryl Herr (1996) and Douglas Reichert Powell (2007). Heike Paul summarizes the concept as follows:

> Critical regionalism (re)turns scholarly attention to the region and interrogates the discursive "production" and the role of regions in larger geopolitical constellations — often under the conditions of colonialism/empire and/or modernism, neo-liberalism, and globalization. Thus, it critically reflects ... on a traditional paradigm of regionalism that was often invested in essentialist, at times romanticized and nostalgic notions of regional formations and identities. (398)

Critical regionalism thus aims at transcending the exceptional nation-state by laying bare how and why particular regions are tied to essentializing notions. The nation of the United States comprises many regions whose symbolic over-determination at times obfuscates the actual material conditions and environments on the ground. Take, for instance, the West or New England, both of which "have been so thoroughly allegorized that they 'appear to disappear' as specific locales and regions" (Paul 398). Following this, regions are socially, politically, economically, and culturally constructed and thus discursively co-produced, but they nonetheless have material substrates and literal groundings (398). This point distinguishes theorists of flyover from the critical regionalists: While the former construe that in flyover fictions the actual place is always a construct and thus a floating signifier, the latter conceive a factuality of "specific locales and regions" whose discursive co-constructedness can be laid bare. Both perspectives, however, are united in their interrogation of the 'com- monsensical' insistence on the irreducibility of place and region. Before we can turn to the analysis of the media coverage of the Unabomber case, we need to take a look at the particular region under scrutiny, i.e., the state of Montana in its discursive co- constructedness.

Gaining statehood as late as 1889, Montana is the fourth-largest state by area and the third-least densely populated state; its name goes back to the Latin word *mon- tanea*, which means "mountain" or "mountainous country" (Malone et al.). Consequently, Montana is mostly famous for two things: nature and space. In the US-American cultural imaginary, Montana is accordingly constructed as flyover country exactly by laying emphasis on wild nature and open space at the expense of culture and civilization. This imagination of natural and sublime beauty is perpetuated in films such as Robert Redford's 1992 drama *A River Runs Through It* based on Norman Maclean's 1976 novella of the same name. Set in Missoula, Montana, the film depicts the joys and struggles of two brothers coming of age in the first half of the twentieth century. One of the film's most iconic images — also featured on the official film poster — depicts a fly-fishing Brad Pitt, who appears to be almost absorbed in the harmonic landscape. Four years before the capture of the Unabomber, the critical and commercial success of *A River Runs Through It* perpetuated in the cultural imaginary the association of the region with the pastoral ideal, this romantic trope projecting an idyllic scenery and entailing the promise of the good and simple life.

In the US-American cultural imaginary, the pastoral ideal epitomizes a balancing center in what Roderick Frazier Nash conceptualizes as a "spectrum of conditions or environments ranging from the purely wild on the one end to the purely civilized on the other" (6). These conditions or environments, in turn, fuel cultural imaginations of nature that range from a glorification of an untouched habitat to the demonization of a threatening wilderness. Speaking of the pastoral ideal in the same vein as the "middle ground," Leo Marx identifies it as a defining feature of the American literary and cultural landscape. He argues that the pastoral ideal is rooted in "the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence 'closer to nature,' that is the psychic root of all pastoralism" (6) and distinguishes between two kinds of pas- toralism:

the first, sentimental kind, which expresses an immature desire for "a more 'natural' environment enter[ing] into the contemptuous attitude that many Americans adopt toward urban life ... Wherever people turn away from the hard social and technological realities this obscure sentiment is likely to be at work" (5). According to Marx, the sentimental kind of pastoralism is underlying modern mass culture and consequently employed and exploited, an assessment that holds true for the life and times of the Unabomber's capture in 1996 where the "social and technological realities" have only become all the more indispensable and inescapable. Marx finds expressed his second kind of pastoralism, namely ambivalent negotiations of "the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction" (29) in classical works of US-American literature. A prime example of the pastoral scenery can be found in "the scene in *Walden* where Thoreau is sitting rapt in a revery [in front of his log cabin] and then, penetrating his woods like the scream of a hawk, the whistle of the locomotive is heard ..." (15). Within the framework of the pastoral, Thoreau's cabin becomes an organic image comprised of both the forces of wilderness and civilization.

While Thoreau's cabin stands in for the pastoral ideal, the Unabomber's cabin — albeit located in a region which is perceived as primed for its materialization — becomes demonized as epitome of a threatening wilderness. Although fundamentally opposed, both cabin receptions hinge on discourses around the relation of wilderness and civilization. Marx describes the "urge to withdraw from civilization's growing power and complexity" (9) in terms of a movement towards the symbolic garden and away from the artificial machine — whose intrusion is inevitable. Propagating a naive flight into nature, pastoral sentimentalism thrives on the fear of losing agency and control in an increasingly technologized society; we can, however, also identify its inverted moment and movement, namely a fear of losing the capacity of acting and mastering in the face of nature, a perception which is at work in the media coverage of the Unabomber and his cabin. In his 2018 *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*, Simon Estok aims at complementing E. O. Wilson's idealistic notion of biophilia as the love of and for nature by developing the concept of ecophobia, which he defines as a

> uniquely human psychological condition that prompts antipathy toward nature ... The ecophobic condition exists on a spectrum and can embody fear, contempt, indifference, or lack of mindfulness (or some combination of these) toward the natural environment.(1)

Estok argues that natural environments are for the most part represented in and through images of terror since the end of the 20th century and that the concept of nature therefore again becomes something to be domesticated and subjugated: "Fear of the loss of agency and the loss of predictability are what form the core of ecophobia" (40).

Ecophobia as the fear of nature allows us — similar to a strange loop — to come back to the point we started from: flyover as "the feeling that culture is elsewhere"

(Klecker and Pohlmann). As delineated above, this elsewhere is intuitively understood in terms of an imagined hierarchy of cultures, as a perception that (high) culture is absent from the average everydayness of life in flyover country. Ecophobia, in turn, rejects the natural world out of the very same impulse, namely on the grounds of conceiving nature as the absence of culture and therefore as a danger. The various different yet intertwined constructions of the binary nature/culture afforded by our theoretical perspectives come now fully into view: The Marxian pastoral ideal harbors the sentimental movement into nature to flee technologized civilization, which is constructed as harmful. In contrast, the ecophobic countermovement shuns nature out of the very same — only inverted — reason as nature here is construed as threatening. As a meta-frame, which "can imagine culture being elsewhere" (Klecker and Pohl- mann), both sentimental pastoralism and ecophobic discourses as well as artefacts are flyover fictions as they construct an absence of culture which is either hailed and aimed at or shunned and avoided. Equipped with a broad theoretical perspective we will now turn to the public discussions around the Unabomber and his capture.

Analysis: Select Media Coverage of the Unabomber Case

How, then, was the Unabomber depicted in the national media upon his capture and subsequent trial and what role did his cabin and its location in Montana play in the coverage of the case? In the following, I will analyze representative samples from various print media within the fourfold theoretical frame to lay bare the ideological functions of narrating the Unabomber and his case.

The first general characteristic to be identified in the depiction of the nexus cabin-sanity is geographical marginalization. Montana, with its nature and space, is indeed neither geographically nor politically or culturally one of the centers of the United States as delineated above. The small town of Lincoln, in turn, is located in the southwest of Montana, had a population of 1,013 according to the 2010 census ("Lincoln CDP, Montana"), and "[a]t first glance, ... seemed caught in a time warp — a place of 1930s tourist cabins and Mom-and-Pop diners where one could get honest- to-goodness milk shakes, made in a blender with real ice cream" (Chase 102–03). Rather isolated and on the margins of a state which is itself rather remote and passed over, Lincoln lends itself to the flyover imaginary: "And being on the major route between Great Falls and Missoula, it isn't even as isolated as it once was, or as it still seems to visitors from New York or Los Angeles" (103). With its location on, or rather close by, a main highway, Lincoln is essentially a drive-by community in a flyover region.

This relative geographical marginalization becomes emphasized and functionalized in the flyover fiction of the Unabomber's media coverage. ABC News, for instance, featured an image of his cabin after his arrest with the caption: "The cabin of suspected

Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski, partially surrounded by white, plastic tape, sits at the end of a muddy, private road, hidden in a wooded setting about 300 yards from the nearest neighbor in Lincoln, Mont., April 6, 1996" (Shapiro). The article focuses on the perspectives of Steve Gomez and Brad Garrett, two FBI agents investigating the case:

> "The fact that he moved out into this desolate area — he wasn't on anybody's radar," said Gomez. A live bomb and a "wealth of bomb components" were found at the cabin, the FBI said, as well as "40,000 handwritten journal pages that included bomb-making experiments and descriptions of Unabomber crimes." Ted Kaczynski pleaded guilty in Jan. 1998 and was sent to a Colorado prison, the FBI said. The manifesto "was his undoing," said Gomez. Without that, Garrett added, "he may still be out there in that cabin in the middle of nowhere in Montana." (Shapiro)

Another example can be found in a *The New York Times* article from May 26, 1996 — a long psychologizing piece that begins almost poetically:

> It was just a dusty, cobwebbed cabin high in the Rockies, as remote as a cougar's lair. But it suited a man who had always been alone, this genius with gifts for solitude, perseverance, secrecy and meticulousness, for penetrating the mysteries of mathematics and the dangers of technology, but never love, never friendship. The furnishings were the fragments of his life: the books for companionship and the bunk for the lonely hours, the wood stove where night after night he watched dying embers flicker visions of a wretched humanity, the typewriter where, the authorities say, the justifications for murder had been crafted like numbered theorems ... Over the years since — nearly half his life — he found a kind of freedom as a backwoods hermit in Montana. (McFadden)

As these representative examples demonstrate, in the discursive production of Lincoln, the region is marked as geographically marginal, as "this desolate area." The flyover fiction of the media coverage thrives on a cultural hierarchy between the journalists writing about the Unabomber from an apparently objective position, and hence from "'places that matter'" (Harkins 102), vis-a-vis Lincoln, which is constructed as a non-place where "he wasn't on anybody's radar." A central feature in the medial construction of the Unabomber as being passed over is the particular depiction of his cabin "in the middle of nowhere in Montana" and "high in the Rockies, as remote as a cougar's lair" — a notion which can still be found almost 30 years later in the media coverage of the Unabomber's death in 2023 where the cabin's whereabouts are in a *The New York Times* obituary described as an "area ... so remote that during an 18-day stakeout, one agent saw a cougar kill a deer" (Traub). This architectural form

itself signifies an apparent outside or an underside "that precedes the arrival of culture" (Wigley 123) thus amplifying the particular flyover fiction of the cabin as doubly marginalized along the lines of Harkins's distinction between "'places that matter' and 'places that don't'" (97).

Narrating the Unabomber and his case mainly through the lens of geographical marginalization serves the ideological function to symbolically locate him out of time and space before the arrival of culture and with culture being elsewhere. The ecophobic affects mobilized in the process construct nature as potentially threatening and the Unabomber in his "dusty, cobwebbed cabin high in the Rockies" where "night after night he watched dying embers flicker visions of a wretched humanity" as being a part thereof.

The second general characteristic in the medial construction of the nexus cabinsanity demarcates and delineates the Unabomber's geographical marginalization from the pastoral ideal. One of the chief witnesses of Marx's account of the intrusion of technology into the apparently unimpeded pastoral scenery is Henry David Thoreau and his iconic cabin. In 1854, he published *Walden; or, Life in the Woods,* a reflection upon his two-year stay in a self-built cabin near Walden Pond, Massachu- setts.[3] *Walden* has not only become a canonized classic of US-American literature but also the blueprint for various ways of life related to back-to-nature and environmentalists movements, which took and continue to take inspiration from Thoreau's flight into 'wilderness' and its underlying critique of society. Take for example his characterization of the massive changes brought about by the new transportation technology of the locomotive:

> Far through unfrequented woods on the confines of towns, where once only the hunter penetrated by day, in the darkest night dart these bright saloons without the knowledge of their inhabitants; this moment stopping at some brilliant station-house in town or city, where a social crowd is gathered, the next in the Dismal Swamp, scaring the owl and fox. The starlings and arrivals of the cars are now the epochs in the village day. (Thoreau 117)

Not surprisingly, Walden Pond attracts a huge number of visitors who come to see the actual site as well as a replica of Thoreau's cabin and the "'Thoreau Cabin Kit' — a build-it-yourself replica of the original cabin — entered the market in the 1950s, selling for four thousand dollars" (Nightingale 114). Consequently, the actual place and the actual form have transformed into an icon, as if the trope of the pastoral ideal becomes epitomized in and through Thoreau's cabin which comes to satisfy the desire of what Marx terms the sentimental kind of pastoralism. Not least due to the fact that

[3] Klecker and Pohlmann reason that flyover fictions are characterized by hierarchies of mobility and a concomitant duality with some people remaining static and others just passing by. Correspondingly, "Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* is a piece of nineteenth-century flyover fiction when he comments on how the railroad literally passes over *people*, and that the mobility of some is paid for by the immobility of many others (98)" (Klecker and Pohlmann, original emphasis).

a "number of journalists speculated that Kaczynski was inspired by Thoreau and had copied his cabin," a link has been established between his persona and Thoreau in general and their respective cabins in particular (Ault 104).[4] James Benning's 2011 short documentary *Two Cabins* and the accompanying publication *(FC) Two Cabins by JB* meditates on this possible connection by visually and textually juxtaposing his replicas of the two dwellings as well as texts by and about Thoreau and the Unabomber. In the media coverage of the Unabomber case, however, there is a notable tendency to emphatically deny any relation between the two cabins and hence to disavow any exploration of a possible genealogy linking Thoreau's cultural critique to the Unabomber's critique of technologized society.

A representative example of this tendency can be found in William Glaberson's *The New York Times* article from December 7, 1997, which was published amidst the Unabomber's trial. The article begins by referring to the above-mentioned strategy of the Unabomber's lawyers to present the cabin in court so that it gives silent testimony to his mental illness and his concomitant inability to stand trial. The author then points to the fact that this strategy has been reported upon as a kind of "'Thoreau defense'" (Glaberson) — invoking the general suspicion of people who turn their back on society to seek a life in radical solitude. Having thus suggested a possible connection between the Unabomber and Thoreau, the article, however, quickly dismisses it as irrational: "Any parallel between one of the country's most important philosopherwriters and a man whose lawyers say he was a delusional paranoid schizophrenic would clearly be flawed." After detailing the Unabomber's belongings stored in his cabin, the author turns to one of the potential jurors in the case and her response to the judge's question about her remembrance of the media coverage around the Unabomber's capture: "'That's what stuck with me was this old cabin,' she said. 'I wondered how anybody could live like that'" (qtd. in Glaberson). The article closes by stressing the differences between Thoreau and the Unabomber. In contrast to the latter, Thoreau would not have been an "archetypal hermit"; he would have "kept his cabin bare and orderly"; he (quite obviously) did not have several items in his cabin like "triggers, pipes and chemicals used to make explosive devices and one unexploded bomb"; and while Thoreau's cabin was "10 feet by 15 feet[,] Mr. Kaczynski's was only 10 by 12" (Glaberson).

The article is aptly titled "Cabin Fever; Walden Was Never Like This," as its agenda is to refute any connection between the Unabomber and Thoreau — although it considers it in the first place and thereby constructs the analogy itself. For the purpose of negating the association, the article implicitly parallels the strategy of the Unabomber's lawyers to declare him mentally ill. By detailing the subtle — and not so subtle — differences between the two cabins, the article justifies the rejection of the Unabomber's critique of technologized society, a critique that has indeed been linked

[4] Ault refers to Chase's biography of the Unabomber but fails to mention that the latter points to the connection of Thoreau's and the Unabomber's cabins rather disapprovingly, as, according to the onedimensional media coverage, "[h]e was a back-to-nature nut who had built his shack as an 'exact replica' of the cabin Thoreau had constructed on Walden Pond in Massachusetts in 1845" (Chase 124).

to Thoreau's political agendas.[5] Furthermore, an apparent voice of the people is representatively brought into position to rhetorically wonder "how anybody could live like that" — and, one is tempted to add, "there" — while it was this very way of life and living that enabled Thoreau to write one of the most canonical works of US- American literature.

For Marx, the complex kind of pastoralism expresses the pastoral ideal as "middle ground" between the forces of 'civilization' and 'wilderness.' Thoreau, accordingly, describes his natural environment not as unspoiled 'wilderness' but as permeated and penetrated by technological forces which he neither outright condemns nor naively hails under the banner of progress. The Unabomber, in turn, was arguably all about the intrusion of technology into nature and human being's natural condition. For him, any kind of pastoral is thus irretrievably lost under the weight of accelerated technology and over-civilization as unambiguously expressed at the beginning of his manifesto: "The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race" (Kaczynski 38). The media coverage that links — or rather denies a connection between — the Unabomber and Thoreau, however, ignores the complexities of the issue at hand by indulging in both the sentimental kind of pastoralism and ecophobic tendencies. It romanticizes Thoreau and his cabin while simultaneously representing "this old cabin" of the Unabomber and its natural environment exclusively in and through images of terror.

The depiction of the nexus cabinsanity thrives on a third general tendency that has already been implicitly detected as part of painting an anti-pastoral ideal, namely the phenomena of *othering* and a concomitant medicalization, i.e., publicly patholo- gizing the Unabomber and his cabin. In his article "Ideology or Insanity? Media Portrayal of Ted Kaczynski and Tim McVeigh," Matthew P. Sheptoski comparatively analyzes the media coverages of the Unabomber and Timothy McVeigh, who bombed Oklahoma City's Murrah Federal Building killing 168 and injuring 500 people in April 1995. In order to work out the dominant framing of the respective media coverage, Sheptoski points to the pattern of medicalization as "the process whereby conditions, behaviors, and actions come to be attributed to various forms of illness." Accordingly, *The New York Times* and *Time* particularly depoliticized Kaczynski's behavior, acts, and political ideology by explaining them in the framework of psychological abnormality. Furthermore, "Kaczynski's rejection of the labels 'mentally ill' and 'schizophrenic' were taken as evidence of his illness" while both publications were more likely to ascribe a political motivation and ideology to McVeigh (Sheptoski). Very few articles painted a more complex picture by also pointing towards the content of his manifesto, but overall

[5] In a *The New York Times* editorial (albeit written before the Unabomber's identity was revealed), the renowned critic of technology Kirkpatrick Sale "acknowledged the legitimacy of Kaczynski's arguments, strongly noting their resonance with sectors of the public and connecting Kaczynski to a 'long political tradition,' including Dickens, Thoreau, Veblen, and Weber." He then goes on to speculate that the Un- abomber was "'evidently disturbed' and 'obviously measurably unbalanced'" (qtd. in Sheptoski).

the Unabomber was interpreted *not* as "a disciplined terrorist with a political aim," as stated on a 1996 *The New York Times* front page, "but a driven serial killer whose bombs fulfilled a psychological need" (Sheptoski). Some of the articles, also in other publications, brought up the issue of the Unabomber's hygiene as apparent evidence for his mental illness. A *Time* piece on April 15, 1996, calls the Unabomber "'the hermit on the hill'" and adds that "'you could smell him coming,'" *The New York Times* states on May 26, 1996, that he was "'usually unwashed,'" and *Newsweek* on April 15, 1996, proclaims him to have been "'pathologically reclusive'" before his capture (qtd. in Chase 124).

These depictions are tellingly inaccurate, however. Kaczynski was not "the hermit on the hill" as his cabin was located in the Canyon Creek bottom; according to friends and acquaintances, he was not "usually unwashed" and "pathologically reclusive"; and his dwelling was not in a desolate area in "the middle of nowhere in Montana" but, to quote Alston Chase, "[b]y Montana standards, Ted's place, far from being 'wilderness,' bordered on suburban" (Chase 125). Chase identifies the news coverage of Kaczynski's capture as "pack journalism," arguing that almost no journalist had gotten close to his cabin and only very few locals gave the same interview to multiple outlets, which led to media coverage resembling each other (124). He concludes:

> In this way, the media built a stereotype, and the stereotype soon became fixed: Kaczynski was an "eccentric" who lived in the "wilderness." The man smelled. He ate road- killed coyotes. He didn't have visitors, never went out, didn't own a watch, never had sex, and wasn't interested in money. He wouldn't drink coffee with the boys. He rode a bicycle in winter. And he didn't talk much. Not having seen the inside of his cabin, they described it as "a mess." ... [T]hese reporters from New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC, described Kaczynski's cabin — four miles from town and just off the Stemple Pass Road — as "wilderness." Not bothering to tell readers that in Montana, Kaczynski's lifestyle was hardly unusual, they painted it as bizarre. (123–24)

It is worth mentioning that Chase's evaluation of the media coverage operates within the framework of flyover as, by criticizing these "reporters from New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC," he reproduces the "complex triangular imagination of us imagining them imagining us" (Klecker and Pohlmann). And he has a point — even if not all of the reporters may have been from these places, they still construct the cabin and its whereabouts as a 'wilderness,' a flyover space where culture is absent despite its relative proximity to 'civilization.' This discursive construction, in turn, parallels the reception of Thoreau's cabin as well, where Walden Pond is stereotyped as 'wilderness' even though it is within a reasonable walking distance to Concord and next to the railroad.

Chase goes on to conclude that depicting the Unabomber as this "freak" serves the ideological function to create a distance between "us" and "him." This distance prevents

us from engaging with his critique of technologized society and veneration of nature to instead focus exclusively on his cabin and his alleged insanity (128). Sheptoski similarly evaluates the media coverage as "'the medicalization of Ted Kaczynski'" which

> served a social control function in that his ideology and actions were not held out to the public as examples of politically motivated behavior from which like-minded others could draw. Were his actions not medicalized his ideas could have served as a cognitive tool or resource for those desiring radical social transformation. Because he was defined as psychologically abnormal or ill, however, his comments were not worthy of serious consideration. If *Industrial Society and Its Future* were written by a madman then we need not pay attention. In applying the label, "mentally ill," or "schizophrenic," Ted Kaczynski's ideas and his serious and scholarly critique of industrial society were neutralized. Mass media and the medicalization of deviance merge in the case of Ted Kaczynski, serving as a mechanism of ideological social control. (Sheptoski)

Sheptoski's assessment of "his serious and scholarly critique of industrial society" is questionable given both the manifesto's misanthropic stance and its non-adherence to academic standards[6] as well as, most significantly, the Unabomber's killing in order to get published. I concur with Chase and Sheptoski, however, in their assessing the media coverage of the Unabomber, which follows the logic of flyover fiction construing a causal relation between his cabin and his crimes. In the dominant framing, the mathematical genius Kaczynski became mad and transformed into the Unabomber only due to his literal and metaphysical rootedness in the cabin. And the cabin, in turn, is given so much discursive power only given its location in what is constructed as a geographically marginalized space where culture is absent, and which, therefore, in the public perception could not be further away from Concord, Massachusetts — this other famous cabin place where culture par excellence in the form of *Walden* was literally conceived.

Conclusion

In the public discourse around the Unabomber case, the cabin and its location in Montana serve as focal point for, firstly, its and his geographical marginalization, secondly, the preservation of the pastoral ideal, and, thirdly, the othering and medicalization of Theodore J. Kaczynski. These three tendencies characterizing the respective depiction of the Unabomber essentially conflate in the nexus cabinsanity, i.e., the entanglement of pseudo-geographical, cultural, and medical discourses. When the

[6] For a discussion of the manifesto's content, intellectual sources, and political influence see Barnett and particularly Fleming.

public learned about the Unabomber's log-cabin-existence upon the capture in 1996, his whereabouts authenticated — retrospectively — his critique of technologized society in and for some far-left, anarchist, eco-extremist, and anti-tech circles. In the general media coverage, however, the particular location was overemphasized to paint the picture of somebody living in a place that doesn't matter "out there in that cabin in the middle of nowhere in Montana" (Shapiro). The respective coverage, i.e., the flyover fiction of the Unabomber's cabinsanity, constructs his shelter and its location diametrically opposed to Thoreau and his cabin and hence not as a place reconciling the forces of wilderness and civilization and satisfying the desire of sentimental pastoralism. On the contrary, his cabin comes to epitomize the dark and threatening underside of civilization, a horror cabinet of sorts. The concomitant med- icalization of Theodore J. Kaczynski depoliticizes his extremist words and terroristic deeds by depicting him as mentally ill and his becoming the Unabomber as a materialization of this very madness.

The Unabomber's critique of technologized society in both textual and terroristic ways was arguably prompted by technophobia, his fear of losing control and autonomy in the face of technological domination. At the same time, the media coverage of the Unabomber exhibits the very same affect, only in ecophobic terms, projecting the "[f]ear of the loss of agency and the loss of predictability" (Estok 40) onto the Unabomber and his cabin in the 'wilderness' of Lincoln. If Martin Heidegger is right and terror experienced as a trembling is the fundamental mood of our time,[7] then technophobia and ecophobia manifest as and through the frame of terror are two sides of the same coin in our contemporary being-in-the-world.

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[7] "Terror lets the human retreat before this, that the being *is*, while at first the being was just a being to him: that the being is and that this — beyng — has abandoned and withdrawn from all 'beings' and what appears as such" (qtd. in Mitchell 199, original emphasis).

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