

the organic machine richard white

The Organic Machine Richard White: Exploring the Intersection of Nature and Technology

the organic machine richard white is a phrase that might initially sound like a contradiction. How can something be both organic and mechanical at the same time? This intriguing concept is at the heart of Richard White's work, especially in his book titled **The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River**. White, a renowned environmental historian, explores how natural systems and human technology intertwine, challenging traditional views that separate nature from culture or technology. In this article, we will delve into the core ideas behind the organic machine, unpack Richard White's unique perspective, and explore the broader implications for environmental history and sustainability.

Who Is Richard White?

Richard White is an influential historian known for his work on the American West and environmental history. His scholarship often focuses on how humans interact with landscapes and ecosystems, blending cultural, economic, and environmental narratives. White's writing stands out for its ability to weave together complex systems—natural and man-made—into compelling stories that help readers see the environment in new ways.

In **The Organic Machine**, White examines the Columbia River, a massive and historically significant waterway in the Pacific Northwest. Through this lens, he reveals the intricate relationship between the river's ecology and the human communities that depend on it, as well as the technology developed to harness its power.

The Concept of the Organic Machine

At the core of Richard White's **The Organic Machine** is the idea that the Columbia River functions as a complex, integrated system where natural processes and human interventions are deeply intertwined. Rather than viewing the river as simply a natural resource to be exploited or a wilderness to be preserved untouched, White frames it as an "organic machine" – a dynamic network of biological, geological, and technological components working together.

Understanding the Columbia River as an Ecosystem and a Technology

The Columbia River is not just water flowing through a landscape. It is the lifeblood of a region, supporting fish populations like salmon, shaping the fertile lands around it, and providing energy through hydroelectric dams. White highlights how indigenous peoples, early settlers, engineers, and environmentalists each interacted with the river differently, but all contributed to the evolving organic machine.

For example, salmon runs are a natural feature that have sustained communities for millennia. However, the construction of dams aimed at producing electricity and controlling floods changed the river's flow and disrupted fish migration patterns. White's narrative shows that these human-built structures are part of the organic machine's fabric, altering but not entirely severing the river's ecological functions.

Bridging Technology and Nature

By labeling the Columbia River an organic machine, Richard White invites us to reconsider the rigid boundaries between technology and nature. Instead of seeing technology as something external imposed on the environment, White's framework suggests that technological systems become part of ecological networks. This approach encourages us to think about sustainability differently, recognizing

that human innovation and natural processes can co-evolve.

The Impact of the Organic Machine on Environmental History

Richard White's work has had a significant influence on the field of environmental history, pushing scholars and readers alike to think more holistically about human-environment relationships.

Redefining Environmental Narratives

Before **The Organic Machine**, many environmental histories tended to focus either on the destruction caused by industrialization or on the pristine qualities of wilderness. White's approach challenges this binary by showing that landscapes like the Columbia River are products of ongoing interactions between humans and nature.

This perspective helps explain why environmental problems are often complex and cannot be solved by simply returning to an imagined "natural" state. White's organic machine concept highlights the need for adaptive management that respects both ecological realities and human needs.

Incorporating Indigenous Perspectives

One of the strengths of White's analysis is his acknowledgment of indigenous knowledge and practices. Indigenous peoples along the Columbia River had long-standing relationships with the river's ecology, using fishing techniques that were sustainable and deeply connected to the rhythms of the ecosystem.

By integrating these perspectives, White enriches the story of the organic machine, reminding us that human technology includes traditional ecological knowledge, not just industrial machinery or modern

engineering.

Lessons from the Organic Machine for Today's Environmental Challenges

The insights from Richard White's **The Organic Machine** are more relevant than ever as we face global environmental challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion.

Thinking in Systems

One takeaway is the importance of systems thinking. The organic machine concept encourages us to look at ecosystems as complex, interconnected networks where changes in one part affect many others. This holistic view is crucial when designing policies or technologies aimed at environmental sustainability.

Balancing Human Use and Ecological Health

White's work also underscores the delicate balance between human use of natural resources and maintaining ecological integrity. The Columbia River's dams provide electricity and economic benefits but also pose threats to fish populations and river health. Navigating these trade-offs requires nuanced understanding and collaborative management.

Innovation Rooted in Ecology

Finally, the organic machine metaphor inspires innovation that is informed by ecological principles.

Rather than opposing technology and nature, we can develop technologies that work with natural systems—such as fish-friendly turbines, river restoration projects, and renewable energy solutions that minimize environmental impact.

Exploring the Broader Influence of Richard White's Work

Beyond **The Organic Machine**, Richard White's scholarship has opened doors for interdisciplinary research, combining history, ecology, anthropology, and engineering. His work has sparked discussions about how we write environmental history and approach environmental policy.

Environmental History as a Bridge Discipline

White's approach exemplifies how environmental history can serve as a bridge discipline, connecting scientific understanding with social and cultural narratives. This integration helps inform more effective and equitable environmental decision-making.

Inspiring Future Research and Education

The Organic Machine has become a key text in university courses on environmental history, American history, and environmental studies. It inspires students and researchers to think creatively about human-environment entanglements and to consider the histories behind current ecological challenges.

In exploring the organic machine, Richard White not only sheds light on the Columbia River's unique story but also provides a powerful framework for understanding the complex dance between humans

and the natural world. His work invites us to see nature not as a static backdrop but as a dynamic entity shaped by and shaping human culture and technology. This perspective enriches how we think about environmental stewardship and the future of our planet.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Richard White, the author of 'The Organic Machine'?

Richard White is an American historian known for his works on environmental history and the American West, including his book 'The Organic Machine.'

What is the main theme of 'The Organic Machine' by Richard White?

'The Organic Machine' explores the environmental history of the Columbia River, focusing on the relationship between humans and nature as a complex, interconnected system.

When was 'The Organic Machine' by Richard White published?

'The Organic Machine' was first published in 1995.

Why is 'The Organic Machine' significant in environmental history?

The book is significant because it offers a nuanced view of ecological change, emphasizing the dynamic interactions between technology, economy, and the natural environment.

What geographical area does 'The Organic Machine' focus on?

The book focuses on the Columbia River and its surrounding regions in the Pacific Northwest of the United States.

How does Richard White describe the Columbia River in 'The Organic Machine'?

White describes the Columbia River as an 'organic machine,' a living system shaped by both natural processes and human interventions such as dams and industrial use.

What disciplines does 'The Organic Machine' combine in its analysis?

'The Organic Machine' combines environmental history, ecology, economics, and technology studies to analyze the Columbia River's transformation.

Has 'The Organic Machine' influenced environmental policy or thought?

While primarily a historical work, 'The Organic Machine' has influenced environmental thought by encouraging a holistic understanding of human-environment interactions.

Are there any notable reviews or critiques of 'The Organic Machine'?

The book has been widely praised for its detailed research and innovative approach to environmental history, though some critiques note its dense academic style.

Is 'The Organic Machine' suitable for general readers or mainly academic audiences?

'The Organic Machine' is primarily aimed at academic audiences and readers interested in environmental history, though it can also appeal to informed general readers interested in ecology and regional history.

Additional Resources

The Organic Machine Richard White: Unveiling the Intersection of Nature and Industry

the organic machine richard white is a compelling exploration of the complex relationship between natural ecosystems and industrial development. Richard White, a distinguished historian, delves into the intricate dynamics that shape the environmental history of the American West, particularly through the lens of the Columbia River's hydropower system. This work stands out as a critical investigation into how industrialization and environmental forces interact in ways that redefine both landscapes and societies.

Understanding The Organic Machine by Richard White

Richard White's *The Organic Machine* offers a nuanced perspective on environmental history by focusing on the Columbia River, a vast and powerful water system that has long been integral to the Pacific Northwest's ecology and economy. The book argues that the river functions as an "organic machine," a living system shaped by both natural processes and human engineering. White's scholarly approach blends environmental science with historical analysis, providing readers with a detailed account of how the river's ecosystem has been transformed by industrial activities such as dam construction and hydropower generation.

Unlike traditional environmental histories that often separate nature and human impact, White's thesis emphasizes an interconnectedness where technology and ecology are mutually constitutive. The organic machine metaphor captures this duality, illustrating how the Columbia River's natural rhythms are integrated with human-designed infrastructures that harness its power. This concept challenges simplistic dichotomies between the natural and the artificial, prompting a reevaluation of how societies conceive environmental stewardship.

Key Themes and Arguments

One of the central themes in *The Organic Machine* is the tension between ecological preservation and economic development. White presents the Columbia River not merely as a resource to be exploited but as a dynamic entity whose health reflects broader environmental and social changes. The

construction of dams, while facilitating economic growth through hydropower and irrigation, also disrupts fish migration patterns, alters sediment flows, and impacts indigenous communities reliant on the river's bounty.

White meticulously documents the historical context of these developments, revealing the political and cultural forces that drove dam-building projects in the early to mid-20th century. He highlights the role of government agencies, engineers, and local stakeholders, showing how competing interests shaped the river's transformation. This approach uncovers the multifaceted nature of environmental change, where ecological consequences are inseparable from human ambitions and technological advancements.

Analyzing the Impact of Industrialization on the Columbia River Ecosystem

The industrialization of the Columbia River basin, as detailed in *The Organic Machine* by Richard White, serves as a case study for understanding larger environmental challenges faced worldwide. The region's hydropower infrastructure, consisting of over 400 dams, represents one of the most extensive human interventions in a natural river system. These structures generate significant electricity, powering millions of homes and industries, yet their environmental toll remains a subject of ongoing debate.

Hydropower and Environmental Trade-offs

The benefits of hydropower are undeniable: renewable energy generation, flood control, and water supply for agriculture. However, White's analysis reveals that the ecological costs are equally significant. Fish populations, particularly salmon, have suffered dramatic declines due to disrupted spawning routes. The alteration of natural flow regimes has also impacted the river's sediment transport, affecting downstream habitats and estuaries.

Moreover, the social implications extend to indigenous tribes whose cultural and subsistence practices are intertwined with the river. White's work sheds light on how industrial projects marginalized these communities, often sidelining their voices in decision-making processes. This historical insight invites reflection on current environmental policy frameworks and the need for more inclusive, ecosystem-based management approaches.

Richard White's Methodology and Narrative Style

Richard White's writing in *The Organic Machine* is characterized by rigorous research combined with accessible prose. His interdisciplinary methodology draws from history, ecology, and engineering, allowing for a comprehensive portrayal of the Columbia River's transformation. White's narrative weaves technical details—such as dam engineering and hydrological data—with human stories, enriching the historical account with personal and cultural dimensions.

White also employs a chronological structure that traces the river's evolution from pre-industrial times through the peak of dam construction and into contemporary environmental debates. This temporal framework helps readers grasp the long-term consequences of industrialization and the shifting attitudes toward nature and technology.

Strengths and Limitations

- **Strengths:** *The Organic Machine* excels in presenting a balanced, multifaceted analysis that integrates environmental science with historical context. White's ability to humanize technical subjects makes the book accessible to a broad audience beyond academic circles. His focus on the Columbia River as a living system offers a valuable model for environmental history studies.
- **Limitations:** Some readers may find the detailed technical discussions on hydrology and engineering challenging without prior background knowledge. Additionally, while White highlights

indigenous perspectives, critics argue that the representation could be expanded to more deeply engage with native epistemologies and resistance movements.

Relevance of The Organic Machine Richard White in Contemporary Environmental Discussions

In an era marked by climate change and ecological crises, Richard White's *The Organic Machine* remains profoundly relevant. The book's exploration of the Columbia River's industrialization offers lessons on managing natural resources sustainably while balancing economic and social needs. It underscores the importance of viewing ecosystems as integrated wholes, where human and natural components are inseparably linked.

Contemporary environmental debates increasingly emphasize ecosystem services, adaptive management, and restoration ecology—concepts that resonate with White's portrayal of the Columbia River. His work encourages policymakers, scientists, and the public to acknowledge the complex feedback loops between technology and nature. Furthermore, the book's attention to indigenous rights and knowledge highlights the necessity of inclusive governance in environmental stewardship.

Comparisons with Other Environmental Histories

Compared to other seminal works in environmental history, such as William Cronon's "Nature's Metropolis" or Donald Worster's "Rivers of Empire," *The Organic Machine* distinguishes itself through its emphasis on technology as an organic extension of nature rather than an external force. While Cronon focuses on urban-industrial transformations and Worster on agrarian empires, White zeroes in on the interplay of hydrology and engineering within a single ecosystem.

This perspective offers a unique framework for understanding environmental change, one that has influenced subsequent scholarship and debates around sustainable development. The book's interdisciplinary approach also serves as a model for integrating diverse fields to tackle complex environmental issues.

The Organic Machine by Richard White invites readers to reconsider the boundaries between the natural world and human industry. Through its detailed examination of the Columbia River, the work reveals the multifaceted consequences of industrialization on ecosystems and communities alike. This investigation not only enriches our understanding of environmental history but also informs contemporary efforts to harmonize technological progress with ecological integrity.

The Organic Machine Richard White

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the organic machine richard white: *The Organic Machine* Richard White, 2011-04-01 The Hill and Wang Critical Issues Series: concise, affordable works on pivotal topics in American history, society, and politics. In this pioneering study, White explores the relationship between the natural history of the Columbia River and the human history of the Pacific Northwest for both whites and Native Americans. He concentrates on what brings humans and the river together: not only the physical space of the region but also, and primarily, energy and work. For working with the river has been central to Pacific Northwesterners' competing ways of life. It is in this way that White comes to view the Columbia River as an organic machine--with conflicting human and natural claims--and to show that whatever separation exists between humans and nature exists to be crossed.

the organic machine richard white: *The Organic Machine* Richard White, 1995

the organic machine richard white: The Organic Machine Richard White, 1996-01-31 In *The Organic Machine*, Richard White, a distinguished historian and leading scholar of the American West, explores the intimate relationship between nature and mankind along the Columbia River. Working on the cutting edge of environmental and social history, White demonstrates how, over the centuries, both native peoples and settlers have continually remade the river, treating it as a machine designed to churn out energy and sustenance. He assesses the impact on the Northwest ecology of enterprises that have marked the river's history, from salmon fishing to the Hanford Energy Works nuclear plant, and eloquently reveals the insights and illusions of those who work with the river.

the organic machine richard white: ,

the organic machine richard white: *Justice, Power and the Political Landscape* Kenneth Olwig, Donald Mitchell, 2019-07-09 Landscape is now on the agenda in a new way. The increasing

interest in justice, power and the political landscape expresses a sea change occurring in the meaning of landscape itself, from landscape as scenery to landscape as polity and place. As Lionella Scazzosi argues The meaning of the term 'landscape' has become broader than that of a view or panorama, which characterized many national protection laws and policies until the middle of the 20th century, and that of environment or nature, to which it has often been limited during the recent years of environmentalist battles. This is reflected in the new European Landscape Convention, for which: 'Landscape' means an area, as perceived by people. The tide thus has turned towards J. B. Jackson's view of landscape as not a scenic or ecological entity but as a political or cultural entity, changing in the course of history. It is in this socio-political context that it becomes necessary to consider the role of power, and the importance of justice, in the shaping of the landscape as an area of practice and performance with both cultural and environmental implications. This book was previously published as two special issues of Landscape Research.

the organic machine richard white: Montreal, City of Water Michèle Dagenais, 2017-11-15 Built within an exceptional watershed, Montreal is intertwined with the waterways that ring its island and flow beneath it in underground networks. Even as the city has pushed its suburbs deeper into the interior of the island and onto the mainland, the daily lives and leisure activities of its inhabitants remain closely bound to water. Montreal, City of Water focuses on water not only as a physical element of the landscape – both shaping and shaped by urban development – but also as a sociocultural component of the life of the city. In exploring the dynamics governing the relationship between Montrealers and their environment, this unique study considers the role of water in the production and transformation of urban space over two centuries. It traces the history of urbanization and shines a light on current concerns about water pollution, river rehabilitation, and renewed public access to the riverfront – and the power relations involved in addressing those concerns.

the organic machine richard white: **Human-Built World** Thomas P. Hughes, 2004-07-19 To most people, technology has been reduced to computers, consumer goods, and military weapons; we speak of technological progress in terms of RAM and CD-ROMs and the flatness of our television screens. In Human-Built World, thankfully, Thomas Hughes restores to technology the conceptual richness and depth it deserves by chronicling the ideas about technology expressed by influential Western thinkers who not only understood its multifaceted character but who also explored its creative potential. Hughes draws on an enormous range of literature, art, and architecture to explore what technology has brought to society and culture, and to explain how we might begin to develop an ecotechnology that works with, not against, ecological systems. From the Creator model of development of the sixteenth century to the big science of the 1940s and 1950s to the architecture of Frank Gehry, Hughes nimbly charts the myriad ways that technology has been woven into the social and cultural fabric of different eras and the promises and problems it has offered. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, optimistically hoped that technology could be combined with nature to create an Edenic environment; Lewis Mumford, two centuries later, warned of the increasing mechanization of American life. Such divergent views, Hughes shows, have existed side by side, demonstrating the fundamental idea that in its variety, technology is full of contradictions, laden with human folly, saved by occasional benign deeds, and rich with unintended consequences. In Human-Built World, he offers the highly engaging history of these contradictions, follies, and consequences, a history that resurrects technology, rightfully, as more than gadgetry; it is in fact no less than an embodiment of human values.

the organic machine richard white: *Environment, Modernization and Development in East Asia* Ts'ui-jung Liu, James Beattie, 2016-04-08 Environment, Modernization and Development in East Asia critically examines modernization's long-term environmental history. It suggests new frameworks for understanding as inter-related processes environmental, social, and economic change across China and Japan.

the organic machine richard white: **Monsoon as Method** Lindsay Bremner, Beth Cullen, Christina Leigh Geros, Harshavardhan Bhat, Anthony Powis, 2022-05-25 An edited volume by

Monsoon Assemblages, a European Research Council funded research project. The book presents the methods that Monsoon Assemblages has evolved for engaging the monsoon, a globally connected weather system, as a coproducer of urban life and space in South and Southeast Asian cities. It challenges views of climate as an inert backdrop to urban life, instead suggesting that it is materially and spatially active in shaping urban politics, ecologies, infrastructures, buildings and bodies. It combines critical texts with cartography, photography and ethnography to present the project's methodology and its outcomes and invites urban practitioners to think differently about space, time, representation and human and non-human agency. It offers intra-disciplinary, intra-active methods for rethinking human and non-human relations with weather in ways that meet the challenges of climate change and the Anthropocene.

the organic machine richard white: The Tragedy of the Commodity Stefano B. Longo, Rebecca Clausen, Brett Clark, 2015-06-25 Winner of the 2017 Paul Sweezy Marxist Sociology Book Award from the American Sociological Association Although humans have long depended on oceans and aquatic ecosystems for sustenance and trade, only recently has human influence on these resources dramatically increased, transforming and undermining oceanic environments throughout the world. Marine ecosystems are in a crisis that is global in scope, rapid in pace, and colossal in scale. In *The Tragedy of the Commodity*, sociologists Stefano B. Longo, Rebecca Clausen, and Brett Clark explore the role human influence plays in this crisis, highlighting the social and economic forces that are at the heart of this looming ecological problem. In a critique of the classic theory "the tragedy of the commons" by ecologist Garrett Hardin, the authors move beyond simplistic explanations—such as unrestrained self-interest or population growth—to argue that it is the commodification of aquatic resources that leads to the depletion of fisheries and the development of environmentally suspect means of aquaculture. To illustrate this argument, the book features two fascinating case studies—the thousand-year history of the bluefin tuna fishery in the Mediterranean and the massive Pacific salmon fishery. Longo, Clausen, and Clark describe how new fishing technologies, transformations in ships and storage capacities, and the expansion of seafood markets combined to alter radically and permanently these crucial ecosystems. In doing so, the authors underscore how the particular organization of social production contributes to ecological degradation and an increase in the pressures placed upon the ocean. The authors highlight the historical, political, economic, and cultural forces that shape how we interact with the larger biophysical world. A path-breaking analysis of overfishing, *The Tragedy of the Commodity* yields insight into issues such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change.

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the organic machine richard white: Beyond the Lab and the Field Eike-Christian Heine, Martin Meiske, 2022-04-19 *Beyond the Lab and the Field* analyzes infrastructures as intense sites of knowledge production in the Americas, Europe, and Asia since the late nineteenth century. Moving beyond classical places known for yielding scientific knowledge, chapters in this volume explore how the construction and maintenance of canals, highways, dams, irrigation schemes, the oil industry, and logistic networks intersected with the creation of know-how and expertise. Referred to by the authors as "scientific bonanzas," such intersections reveal opportunities for great wealth, but also distress and misfortune. This volume explores how innovative technologies provided research opportunities for scientists and engineers, as they relied on expertise to operate, which resulted in enormous profits for some. But, like the history of any gold rush, the history of infrastructure also reveals how technologies of modernity transformed nature, disrupting communities and destroying the local environment. Focusing not on the victory march of science and technology but on ambivalent change, contributors consider the role of infrastructures for ecology, geology, archaeology, soil science, engineering, ethnography, heritage, and polar exploration. Together, they also examine largely overlooked perspectives on modernity: the reliance of infrastructure on

knowledge, and infrastructures as places and occasions that inspired a greater understanding of the natural world and the technologically made environment.

the organic machine richard white: *Hunger for the Wild* Michael L. Johnson, 2007 Americans have had an enduring yet ambivalent obsession with the West as both a place and a state of mind. Michael L. Johnson considers how that obsession originated, how it has determined attitudes toward and activities in the West, and how it has changed over the centuries.

the organic machine richard white: *Fixing Niagara Falls* Daniel Macfarlane, 2020-09-01 Since the late nineteenth century, Niagara Falls has been heavily engineered to generate energy behind a flowing façade designed to appeal to tourists. *Fixing Niagara Falls* reveals the technological feats and cross-border politics that facilitated the transformation of one of the most important natural sites in North America. Daniel Macfarlane details how engineers, bureaucrats, and politicians conspired to manipulate the world's most famous waterfall. Essentially, they turned this natural wonder into a tap: huge tunnels divert the waters of the Niagara River around the Falls, which ebb and flow according to the tourism calendar. To hide the visual impact of diverting the majority of the water, the United States and Canada cooperated to install massive control works while reshaping and shrinking the Horseshoe Falls. This book offers a unique interdisciplinary perspective on how the Niagara landscape ultimately embodies both the power of technology and the power of nature.

the organic machine richard white: *A Companion to the American West* William Deverell, 2008-04-15 *A Companion to the American West* is a rigorous, illuminating introduction to the history of the American West. Twenty-five essays by expert scholars synthesize the best and most provocative work in the field and provide a comprehensive overview of themes and historiography. Covers the culture, politics, and environment of the American West through periods of migration, settlement, and modernization Discusses Native Americans and their conflicts and integration with American settlers

the organic machine richard white: *Japan at Nature's Edge* Ian Jared Miller, Julia Adeney Thomas, Brett L. Walker, 2013-07-01 *Japan at Nature's Edge* is a timely collection of essays that explores the relationship between Japan's history, culture, and physical environment. It greatly expands the focus of previous work on Japanese modernization by examining Japan's role in global environmental transformation and how Japanese ideas have shaped bodies and landscapes over the centuries. The immediacy of Earth's environmental crisis, a predicament highlighted by Japan's March 2011 disaster, brings a sense of urgency to the study of Japan and its global connections. The work is an environmental history in the broadest sense of the term because it contains writing by environmental anthropologists, a legendary Japanese economist, and scholars of Japanese literature and culture. The editors have brought together an unparalleled assemblage of some of the finest scholars in the field who, rather than treat it in isolation or as a unique cultural community, seek to connect Japan to global environmental currents such as whaling, world fisheries, mountaineering and science, mining and industrial pollution, and relations with nonhuman animals. The contributors assert the importance of the environment in understanding Japan's history and propose a new balance between nature and culture, one weighted much more heavily on the side of natural legacies. This approach does not discount culture. Instead, it suggests that the Japanese experience of nature, like that of all human beings, is a complex and intimate negotiation between the physical and cultural worlds. Contributors: Daniel P. Aldrich, Jakobina Arch, Andrew Bernstein, Philip C. Brown, Timothy S. George, Jeffrey E. Hanes, David L. Howell, Federico Marcon, Christine L. Marran, Ian Jared Miller, Micah Muscolino, Ken'ichi Miyamoto, Sara B. Pritchard, Julia Adeney Thomas, Karen Thornber, William M. Tsutsui, Brett L. Walker, Takehiro Watanabe.

the organic machine richard white: *The Place with No Edge* Adam Mandelman, 2020-04-08 In *The Place with No Edge*, Adam Mandelman follows three centuries of human efforts to inhabit and control the lower Mississippi River delta, the vast watery flatlands spreading across much of southern Louisiana. He finds that people's use of technology to tame unruly nature in the region has produced interdependence with—rather than independence from—the environment. Created over

millennia by deposits of silt and sand, the Mississippi River delta is one of the most dynamic landscapes in North America. From the eighteenth-century establishment of the first French fort below New Orleans to the creation of Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan in the 2000s, people have attempted to harness and master this landscape through technology. Mandelman examines six specific interventions employed in the delta over time: levees, rice flumes, pullboats, geophysical surveys, dredgers, and petroleum cracking. He demonstrates that even as people seemed to gain control over the environment, they grew more deeply intertwined with—and vulnerable to—it. The greatest folly, Mandelman argues, is to believe that technology affords mastery. Environmental catastrophes of coastal land loss and petrochemical pollution may appear to be disconnected, but both emerged from the same fantasy of harnessing nature to technology. Similarly, the levee system's failures and the subsequent deluge after Hurricane Katrina owe as much to centuries of human entanglement with the delta as to global warming's rising seas and strengthening storms. *The Place with No Edge* advocates for a deeper understanding of humans' relationship with nature. It provides compelling evidence that altering the environment—whether to make it habitable, profitable, or navigable—inevitably brings a response, sometimes with unanticipated consequences. Mandelman encourages a mindfulness of the ways that our inventions engage with nature and a willingness to intervene in responsible, respectful ways.

the organic machine richard white: *America's West* David M. Wrobel, 2017-10-12 This book examines the regional history of the American West in relation to the rest of the United States, emphasizing cultural and political history.

the organic machine richard white: *Rewilding the Urban Frontier* Greg Gordon,

the organic machine richard white: *The Illusory Boundary* Martin Reuss, Stephen H. Cutcliffe, 2010-09-20 The view of nature and technology inhabiting totally different, even opposite, spheres persists across time and cultures. Most people would consider an English countryside or a Louisiana bayou to be natural, though each is to an extent the product of technology. Pollution, widely thought to be a purely man-made phenomenon, results partly from natural processes. All around us, things from the natural world are brought into the human world. At what point do we consider them part of culture rather than nature? And does such a distinction illuminate our world or obscure its workings? This compelling new book challenges the view that a clear and unwavering boundary exists between nature and technology. Rejecting this dichotomy, the contributors show how the history of each can be united in a constantly shifting panorama where definitions of nature and technology alter and overlap. In addition to recognizing the artificial divide between these two concepts, the essays in this book demonstrate how such thinking may affect societies' ability to survive and prosper. The answers and ideas are as numerous as the landscapes they consider, for there is no single path toward a more harmonious vision of technology and nature. Technologies that work in one place may not in another. Nature that is preserved in one community might become the raw material of technological progress somewhere else. Add to this the fact that the natural world and technology are not passive players, but are profoundly involved in cultural construction. Understanding such dynamics not only reveals a new historical complexity; it prepares us for coping with many of the most difficult and pressing social issues facing us today. Contributors Peter Coates * Craig E. Colten * Stephen H. Cutcliffe * Hugh S. Gorman * Betsy Mendelsohn * Joy Parr * Peter C. Perdue * Sara B. Pritchard * Martin Reuss * William D. Rowley * Edmund Russell * Joel A. Tarr * Ann Vileisis * James C. Williams * Thomas Zeller

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