Winter 12-18-2020

Railspace: A Geocritical Study of the Railroad through American Literature and Culture

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Recommended Citation

RAILSPACE:

A GEOCRITICAL STUDY OF THE RAILROAD

THROUGH AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Michael A. Smith

December 2020

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ABSTRACT

RAILSPACE: A GEOCRITICAL STUDY OF THE RAILROAD

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Dissertation supervised by Linda A. Kinnahan

This dissertation uses geocriticism to argue that the American railroad is best understood as a set of discursively constructed railspaces formed through a variety of viewpoints, a polysensorial awareness of space, and stratified social relationships and power struggles. This study takes up four railspaces, the constituent texts of which demonstrate how intertextual discourse shapes and is shaped by the railroad. The observation car, charted through California Zephyr advertisements and Muriel Rukeyser's "Campaign," is an apparatus that produces perpetual spectacle. Three novels—*Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser, *Double Indemnity* by James M. Cain, and *Strangers on a Train* by Patricia Highsmith—and their filmic adaptations work together to form the passenger car as a contested railspace of fear and unease. The mobile Hell on Wheels that stations itself at the terminus of construction in the American West along the transcontinental railroad becomes a profanatory and deterritorializing railspace through Zane

Grey's *The U.P. Trail*. The photography of Andrew J. Russell and the poetry of C.S. Giscombe in *Ohio Railroads* and *Prairie Style* develop a deep map of the railroad right-of-way in the style of William Least Heat-Moon's *PraryErth: A Deep Map*. This map uncovers marginalized racial memory and locality along the tracks. This project concludes with an echo of the introduction, geocritically exploring Penn Station in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and how to move toward a geopraxis of public humanities work.

DEDICATION

For Jamie

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Introduction

Wood Street Station and Pittsburgh's Cultural District

In downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sixth Avenue meets the city's Cultural District at a 45-degree angle. As it enters the District, the street doglegs around Wood Street Station, crosses over Liberty Avenue and becomes Seventh Street, the location of the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts and Theater Square. Seventh Street becomes the Andy Warhol Bridge, leading directly to the artist's eponymous Museum on the North Side. When permitted by a pair of green lights, cars bend around Wood Street Station as if it has a gravitational pull into the District. Pedestrians and cyclists fork around the station, either heading right, toward SPACE and a McDonald's,[1] or left toward Seventh Street and, further west, Point State Park. Subterraneously, the city's light rail system follows Sixth Street north toward the District as well, stopping at Wood Street Station before continuing left along Liberty on its way to the North Side. Regardless of the form of transportation, the Station informs travelers' trajectories into and out of the Cultural District. As a central location of the former Monongahela National Bank triangularly situated at a well-traveled intersection ("The Azen Family"), the site is identified by the Port Authority of Allegheny County as the "epicenter of downtown Pittsburgh" (Rompala). By the early 1990s, use of the building expanded, with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust—an organization that curates the District's development, both artistically and economically— entering into an agreement with the Port Authority to launch two galleries in the building's upper floors (Lubove 199). As of 2020, these "Wood Street Galleries" continue to feature international

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[1] SPACE is a large gallery along Liberty Avenue that exhibits multidisciplinary artwork. In the mid-1970s, it was the hub of the city's red-light district, housing a prophylaxis novelty shop and an adult video store (Davis, "People Were Afraid…").

"new media" artists and a semi-permanent LED-art installation by Austrian-born artist Erwin Redl ("Wood Street Galleries").

Art and transportation have intertwined since the inception of Pittsburgh's Cultural District. The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra performed at the opening of Wood Street Station on July 3, 1985. Classical music at the Station reverberates in 2020, as the Port Authority uses it on its platforms and at its bus stop to "calm tensions" of riders and loiterers (Blazina). And each downtown rail station contains its own public art installation. In addition to Redl's *FLOW* installed on the building's façade, Wood Street Station also features mezzanine-level large-scale artworks that span the Station's elevator bank. The installation, *Thirteen Geometric Figures*, by Sol LeWitt, incorporates a series of geometric patterns generated by transfer punches used by rail attendants and conductors to mark the boarding location of each rider. The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust united these efforts in an attempt to shape the site as a boundary marker of the city's arts-centered Cultural District.

The history, geography, and cultural makeup of Wood Street Station weighed into the argument for and decision to accept the Cultural District—bureaucratically delimited as the "Pittsburgh Central Downtown Historic District"—into the National Register of Historic Places. The District's 2013 application for expansion calls out the building for its atypical triangularity and its Classical Revival architecture, its current role as an arts gallery and transportation hub, and its history as a bank and a center of commerce" (Section 7, page 4; section 8, page 3). Thus the railspace of Wood Street Station, like all railspace, is understood most completely through its spatiality. The station's space is comprised of a multiplicity of perspectives and sensory stimuli. It is an archive of the historical contest of its territory. And it is the site of an intertextual process where mimetic art and discourse manifest in the real world. This dissertation takes up these

geocritical processes in an investigation of various railspaces that comprise the American railroad at-large.

This geocritical project follows in the wake of the "Spatial Turn" in the humanities, a movement that calls for renewed attention to the spatial—rather than historical—parameters of reading and culture, particularly following the societal fracturing resulting from World War II. The Spatial Turn, according to Brown University historian Jo Guldi, is where "We remember that every discipline in the humanities and social sciences has been stamped with the imprint of spatial questions about nations and their boundaries, states and surveillance, private property, and the perception of landscape, all of which fell into contestation during the nineteenth century."[2] The nineteenth century opened these spaces for contestation, though it would take World War II to catalyze a movement through which they could be interpreted, namely postmodernism, which causes "the abandonment of the image of history as a progressive movement toward ever greater freedom and enlightenment" (Tally 3, 12). Instead of teleological metanarratives, the postmodern world is fractured with localized meaning and movements. Though space is an ever-present factor in the world, "this postmodern reality here is somehow *more* spatial than everything else" (Jameson 365, author's emphasis).

The Spatial Turn pivots from the decline of historicism to establish new trajectories of cultural production and criticism. Michel Foucault's extended spatial analysis of the world through its utopic and heterotopic spaces in *Of Other Spaces* and Mikhail Bakhtin's organization of genre by chronotopes are early arguments for the importance of recognizing cultural spaces.

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[2] Denis Cosgrove first coins the phrase, fashioning the Spatial Turn as a movement that "corresponds to post-structuralist agnosticism about both naturalistic and universal explanations and about single-voiced historical narratives, and to the concomitant recognition that position and context are centrally and inescapably implicated in all constructions of knowledge" (7).

Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* and Kevin Lynch's *The Image and the City* influence Frederic Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping and the investigation of the spatial current through which capital flows in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Here, according to Mariya Shymchyshyn, "postmodern spatiality produced by the processes of globalization is defined through collapsed spatial barriers" (24). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari develop an entire system of thinking around the territory and its composition, extending Foucault's concepts of cultural archeology beyond metaphorical genealogy and into geological de- and re-territorialization (Mitchell 73). Others center spatiality on particular locations, deriving new conceptual frameworks from places such as Los Angeles, in Edward Soja's *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, or the Parisian arcades in Walter Benjamin's extensive yet unfinished *Arcades* project.[3]

The study of space holds value for the literary scholar due to its multivalent role as container, cause, and constitutive component. Barney Warf and Santa Arias state that "Geography matters, not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because *where* things happen is crucial to knowing *how* and *why* they happen" (1, authors' emphasis). These editors begin their collection of essays on the Spatial Turn across disciplines with this simple yet convincing declaration. Space and place shape all "things" in question—people, places, power, relationships, events. But just as spatiality informs the object, so too does the object shape its space. "(*Social) space is a (social) product*," Lefebvre posits, thus "every society… produces a space, its own space" (26, 31, author's emphasis). Considering the societal production of space, geography can be said to contain its own version of the Observer Effect in physics, wherein a phenomenon is altered simply by observation. The same

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[3] For a survey of these critics' texts and how they prepare a space for geocriticism, see Shymchyshyn 26-30.

applies for the literature and discourse that relates to a space. As Bertrand Westphal explains, "fiction does not reproduce the real, but actualizes new virtualities that had remained unformulated, and that then go on to interact with the real... fiction detects possibilities buried in the folds of the real, knowing that these folds have not been temporalized" (171, emphasis in original). Every space simultaneously contains and is created by these archived, and occasionally suppressed, discursive records, of which literature is a part. These records comprise literary cartographies that, when layered on top of one another, create the territory itself.[4] The Spatial Turn of critical theory, literature, and culture is critically and practically essential for revealing how discourse replicates, alters, re-imagines, and re-creates the geography of a place (and vice versa).

The American railroad provides a hitherto under-explored zone wherein discursive spatiality undertakes these efforts across a field of various spaces and places that ultimately demonstrate how American space shapes and is shaped by microsites of spectacle, contestation, profanation, and racial memory. This refocused critical attention onto matters of space and place helps us move beyond examining the railroad as an historical artifact of the nineteenth century, whose popularity waxes and wanes with politico-financial backing and the invention of the automobile, and instead reveals the American railroad as a network of contested power that is culturally constructed as much as it is materially with iron and steel and wood. The investigation of these American railspaces demands a method that is equally multiform and one that delimits space by using all the tools at its disposal.

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[4] For Westphal, as informed by Deleuze and Guattari, and adopted in this study, the territory desires "representational stability" and is "a system of spatial reference that would like to be homogeneous and that is not homogeneous" (Westphal 46, 51).

Geocriticism

This project examines various spaces that constitute the American railroad using the geocritical method as conceptualized by French theorist Bertrand Westphal in his 2007 book, *La Géocritique. Réel, Fiction, Espace* and translated to English in 2011 by Robert Tally as *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Through a geocritical investigation, I will catalogue the constitutive elements, both actual and discursive, that comprise four core spaces of the American railroad and delimit its influence as a spectacular, mobile, and destabilizing force of contestation across the country. This contestation resides within the spectacle produced by the touring observation car and its use as a stage for political Whistle Stop Tours, within the negotiation between riders within the passenger car, within the de/re-territorialization of the temporary construction camps that are erected at the transitory terminus of the transcontinental railroad, and within the microsites of racial locality and memory that lie covered along the railroad tracks of the American Midwest.

According to Westphal, geocriticism rests upon three ideas: spatiotemporality, transgressivity, and referentiality. The post-World War II "spatiotemporal revolution" upended the primacy of time over space and raised the latter to equal footing, as demonstrated in postmodernist literature and art (Westphal 13). Spatiotemporality is, as the name suggests, a "compression" of space and time that catalyzes a "crisis of intelligibility" for the person or the place (Westphal 29). Geocriticism undertakes a postmortem of the place of the crisis, wherein its actors locate intelligibility within its ostensibly paradoxical permanent dynamism. Transgressivity acknowledges the capacity for mobility and movement, not just as experienced by a subject moving place to place, but also as a characteristic of space itself. In reference to Deleuze and Guattari, Westphal notes that a state of transgressivity follows the "permanent

transgression" of spatial norms as a territory is perpetually deterritorialized and reterritorialized, thus rendering it "incessantly mobile" (Westphal 51-52). In this way, transgressivity "presents itself as the only constant in an environment of transgression, digression, proliferation, dispersion, and heterogeneity" (Westphal 46). It is as Heraclitus says: the only constant in life is change. As a method established upon transgressivity, geocriticism "embraces space in its mobile heterogeneity" (Westphal 73). Referentiality, the third concept of geocriticism, extends the mobility of space and its representation across the threshold between the fictional and the real. In literature and in other "mimetic arts" (Westphal 5), "the description of the place does not *reproduce* a referent," states Westphal, "it is discourse that *establishes* a space" (80, author's emphasis). This space moves between the real and the imaginary, capturing discursive and manifest representations along the way to establishment. Westphal hypothesizes that "the representation of the referential world (and of so-called real spaces) in fiction engages in a process of interactivity between instances of heterogeneous nature brought together in the same world through an interface. The interface is also the means of connection between the elements of this world" (Westphal 99).[5] From this tripartite foundation arises a method that can be undertaken with four core practices: *multifocalism*, *polysensoriality*, *stratigraphy*, and *intertextuality*.

Multifocalism* is the practice of assembling a variety of viewpoints in order to most fully perceive the shape of a particular place or space. As represented geocritically, the space "emerges from a spectrum of individual representations as rich and varied as possible" and results "from a reciprocal creation, not simply a one-way activity of a gaze looking from one

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[5] The practice of intertextual analysis will more fully develop this "interface" as it pertains to the relationship between the manifest railspaces and their discursive components discussed in the chapters to come.

point to another, without considering other reciprocating gazes" (Westphal 113). As the "chief

characteristic of geocriticism" (Westphal 122), multifocalism is the tenet to which this

dissertation most closely adheres. Each chapter assembles a multiplicity of perspectives on the

same space in an attempt to destabilize the centrality of the literary text and instead discuss them

in terms of their orbital perceptions (and discursive creations) of a re-centered space. Since

"multifocalization implies not only concentration on different representations of a space, but also

on their intersections, as they give the possibility to figure out conflicting and concurring zones"

(Shymchyshyn 31), I have likewise selected the texts of each chapter based on the ways their

intersections inform the spaces in question.

Westphal also describes space as "polyphonic" (113), and just as he moves from one

sensory metaphor (optical) to another (aural), so too does the geocritical method include all of

the senses in the investigation of the creation of a place. This practice, called *polysensoriality*,

increases the awareness of the role that the non-optical senses play in place-making. Though

Westphal writes in detail about the "synesthetic landscape" created when practicing an

intentional awareness of all of the senses, particularly in "complex and saturated" spaces like the

metropolis (134, 135), polysensoriality also opens up the ability to perceive space through less-

common senses. In the railcar, this takes the form of the vestibular sense that the locomotion of

the train upsets. Along the tracks, polysensoriality allows us to critically investigate what C.S.

Giscombe calls "railroad sense," which a person experiences when sensing the sudden passing of

a train (*Ohio Railroads*).[6] Perhaps even more than sight, this railroad sense is Giscombe's

dominant method of poetic perception, just as the rider primarily experiences the train

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[6] "Railroad sense" and Giscombe's poetry will be taken up more completely when considering the railspace of the right-of-way in chapter four.

vestibularly. Geocriticism activates a polysensorial sensitivity that investigates the vestibular and railroad senses as of particular importance to the discursive creation of railspace.

With multifocalism and polysensoriality, Westphal seeks to open the space up to wider sets of perception—from one voice to many; from one sense to all. Similarly, using *stratigraphy*, the geocritic opens space to time—from one moment to a history. Stratigraphy is based on the fact that "space is located at the intersection of the moment and duration; its apparent surface rests on the strata of compacted time arranged over an extended duration and reactivated any time"; as such, stratigraphy can be said to be an investigation of "the impact of time on the perception of space" (Westphal 137). Stratigraphic reading derives from the aforementioned geocritical foundation of transgressivity, where change is constant. "Ultimately, places respond to the criteria of constant deterritorialization, which gives them a paradoxical continuity by rendering them labile," notes Westphal (143), and stratigraphy excavates the labile territory in an attempt to trace the sedimentary build-up of de-/reterritorialized efforts throughout time.

In a geocritical analysis, *intertextuality* acknowledges the transcendence of the relationship between text and space beyond the separation of "world and library, reality and fiction, the reference and representation" (168). An intertextual reading allows that "the city, that paradigmatically human space, can be 'read' like a novel" and space in general "can be 'read' like a text" (168). Thus, building upon the foundation of referentiality, if space is textual, then space and literature (and other "mimetic arts") talk to one another—and in fact transform one another—intertextually. Westphal invokes Paris as the paradigm of intertextuality and leverages the place to develop conclusions with wider ramifications. He purports that the "Paris" literarily described by Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco contains "the Paris of Balzac, of Dumas,

and of Utrillo" and that "Geocriticism can reconstruct the intertextual trajectory that leads to this representation of space" (153). Westphal concludes that "The highest degree of relationship between referent and text remains the one that involves a genuine interaction between the two. …The border between fiction and reality is permeable, and fiction can contribute to the development of the real" (153). To continue the comparative through-line from earlier: if multifocalism expands reading from one view to many and polysensoriality expands one sense to all and stratigraphy moves one moment to its duration, intertextuality moves reading from one static relationship—place as a referent, art as referee—to a dynamic reciprocity where space and text become co-referential.

The American railroad is a particularly fertile space for a geocritical investigation. Or rather, the American railroad is composed of several railspaces that, as geocritically revealed through its constituent literature, cultural artifacts, and mimetic arts, discursively shape spatial formations unique to the country. The intertextual cultural discourse of America includes a wide field of genres, forms, and media from which to trace shapes of railspace that are otherwise hidden. Documentary poetics and popular advertisements collaborate to construct a spectacular stage upon which the rider lies prone to the gaze of the onlooker. Film *noir* and the crime novel discursively shape a passenger car that grants freedom to transgressive riders and instill fear in others. And though it does not have the sedimented history of a territory like England or Rome, the American continent has been a zone of contestation for long enough to have buried narratives, voices, and bodies beneath current cultural monoliths. Sites like Mount Vernon, the White House, and most applicable to this study, the rights-of-way for a number of American railroads still in operation were built by enslaved African Americans, a fact that has largely been forgotten or pushed to the margins. In fact, the relative youth of America may make it easier to

undertake the stratigraphic excavation required for a geocritical analysis. Finally America's voices and viewpoints are disparate enough to allow me to bring together literature, advertisements, music, myth, and film in an attempt to create a truly multifocal analysis.

I have teased the term "railspace" above but have not yet defined it. Its definition resides within the critical distinction between space and place, which will be briefly taken up here first. In differentiating between space and place, Westphal posits that space is "an area of freedom and mobility, while place would be an enclosed and humanized space" (5). This intentionally alludes to a comparison between the two terms by Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Tuan hypothesizes that "If we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (6). Put very reductively, space is a concept and place is the manifestation of the concept. A known space that humans endow with particular value becomes a place (Tuan 6). Though Westphal does say later that the idea of "human space" conflates the two (Westphal 6). This idea of a space that sits between space and place finds purchase in Edward Soja's "third space," which mediates between the real and imaginary. For my purposes, "railspace" falls within Soja's categorization. In this study, particular places (Benton, Wyoming) and wider conceptual networks (the inland right-of-way) are read simultaneously as real and imaginary "railspaces" that interface with laborers, readers, and riders in a myriad of ways. What I call "railspace" then is the multivalent collection of spaces and places that comprise the American railroad as both imagined and manifest, from the individual railcars that comprise its trains to its network of tracks and stations that develop through the right-of-way legally granted by the federal government.

This dissertation follows a scatterplot of literary critics and historians who cite tangential influences and advance the railroad as a field of inquiry, albeit one where the railroad usually is explored as a symbol rather than a space worthy of its own inquiry. For Henry David Thoreau, the railroad's sounds become incorporated into the natural scene at Walden Pond. At the same time, it is also an "iron horse" that rides upon its laborers and cuts through his time at Walden Pond (106).[7] Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden* reads Thoreau's experience as the locomotive's invasion of the pastoral landscape, commenting on the inherently impossible duality of industrial progress and the retreat into nature. Marx's text is the first to trace the railroad as a material trope through American literary culture and thus the first to esteem this symbol as worthy of inquiry. After Marx, a number of writers follow who write about railroads and railspace in disparate ways, effusive in their citations of Marx but irregularly building upon other scholarship in the field. German sociologist Wolfgang Schivelbusch, perhaps the most often cited railroad scholar after Marx, hones in on the railroad as the hub of industrial consciousness in the nineteenth century. Schivelbusch's description of railroad-produced perception and affect is akin to the idea of polysensoriality; he discusses physical trauma, sight, smell, and sounds along the rail and how the railroad trains the rider to experience the world as an industrial operator. Alan Trachtenberg agrees with Schivelbusch and builds on the differences that the latter defines between the European and American "mechanization of transport," namely that the former holds that this mechanization is a source of destruction, whereas in America it is seen as a boon to access previously worthless (read: inaccessible)

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[7] For a study on Thoreau's oscillating feelings about the railroad, see Druce, "'The Iron Horses of Steam': Dickens, Thoreau, Zola, and the Steam Locomotive." Druce suggests that Thoreau's language about the railroad "swerve[s] between myth and animism and…the pragmatic," and Thoreau believes the railroad to be "a more serious threat to society; one which the horse/dragon metaphor palters with, and may effectively conceal" (721). Chapter four will discuss one of Thoreau's images of the railroad in more detail, particularly with regard to its exploitation of its own laborers (who, in Thoreau's experience, are largely of Irish decent).

land. This newly incorporated space is suspended between the polarities of creation and destruction (56), the duality of which Leo Marx first hints at in his reading of Thoreau's meditation on the rail.   Meanwhile, Trachtenberg reveals that the American railroad created "new spaces, new regions of comprehension and economic value, and finally…incorporate[d] a prehistoric geological terrain into historical time" (59). Ultimately, he furthers the conversation about American railspace that Schivelbusch starts; Schivelbusch examines the consequences of railspace on the imagination, and Trachtenberg reveals how these spaces are materially created. This study departs from Trachtenberg and explores, through geocriticism, how these spaces are *discursively* created and follows the dialogue that results between the American imagination and the culturally constructed railspace.

Other writers of the railroad more directly acknowledge its spatiality. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, explores how the individual can quite literally navigate through systems of power, and uses the railroad as an example of a system in which passengers are docile, controlled voyeurs. John Lennon acknowledges that the limited space within the train car increases the docility of the railroad passenger, and instead asks, what small victories can the passenger claim over his/her limited railspace? How does s/he use the mobility of the train itself as a method of contestation? Additionally, Lennon writes about hoboes as having their own "spatiality of subcultural power" when they literally insert themselves into the machinery of the railroad car ("Ridin' the Rails"). When they decouple themselves from the railcar, these hoboes seek refuge away from the train, in hobo "jungles" just beyond sight from the tracks (Lennon, *Boxcar Politics* 28). Even here, they could not fully escape the train's right of way, the sub/urban version of which John R. Stilgoe calls his titular *Metropolitan Corridor*. As the foremost contemporary explorer of the landscape created by railspace, Stilgoe surveys the

multifarious ways in which the railroad intentionally and unintentionally creates urban, suburban, and industrial space. In *Metropolitan Corridor*, Stilgoe examines the built environment of peripheral railspaces like the depot and railroad crossing within literature, art, and the natural landscape and describes it as the predominant way of connecting the rural and suburban to the metropolis, both literally and symbolically. Stilgoe frames his text between 1880 and 1935, when the railroad already assumed its position as a romantic institution at the height of its influence on the American landscape (3). In his follow-up text, *Train Time*, Stilgoe wades through the weeds of the "re-wildered" built environment—the land that was cleared for the rail and subsequently neglected back into wilderness (28)—to survey the residual effects of the historical railroad on twenty-first century space and time. In both texts, Stilgoe discusses the railroad's waxing and waning power on its surrounding landscape. This project inverts Stilgoe's, in that the landscape and its literary, cultural, and industrial power will be shown to influence railspace itself.

The railroad in Great Britain and continental Europe, though outside the scope of this study, nevertheless inspires two works of particular note. Remo Ceserani summarizes the impact of the train on the modern European literary imagination.[8] In the titular essay, he explains his view that the railroad supplies to modern literature not only themes and metaphors (e.g., Leo Marx's "machine in the garden") but also provides "a new pattern of narrative construction, a model for a serial and sequenced ordering (a 'montage') of narrative situations and events" (5).[9]

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[8] Mark Storey takes on a similar project for the American railroad. He devotes the first chapter of *Rural Fictions, Urban Realities* to the railroad, one of the urban symbols of modernity, which are the "absent presences" in rural fiction (2). Storey treats the railroad as the "synecdochal counterpart" of the theme of transport in order to ultimately examine "how the modernization of transport networks altered the period's geographical imagination" (21-22).

[9] Incidentally, Ceserani's title helped me conceptualize the distinction between my dissertation and many of the critical works contained in this section. While Ceserani encapsulates the hitherto scattered effects of railspace on imagination, this dissertation inverts his study by examining the imagination's construction of the rail through a geocritical and socio-historical reconstruction of specific railspaces.

British historians Jeffrey Richards and John MacKenzie comprehensively diagram the former (primarily in Great Britain) with a social history of texts in *The Railway Station*. As the closest approximation of a geocritical study on a specific railspace I have found, *The Railway Station* brings together texts from various disciplines—from architecture to economics to the modern war history—to show how the station is a microcosm of Victorian and post-Victorian society. Though I deviate from their ultimately too-neat conception of the historical split between station-as-stage and station-as-symbol (316), I do find their strategy of stitching together pan-disciplinary social texts useful in the shaping of railspace. In fact, if *The Railway Station* is a social history of one railspace, then this dissertation is similar to a social history of the network of railspaces.[10]

Railspaces

As constructed through mimetic texts and likeminded cultural manifestations, the railspace of the observation car encourages the rider to view the landscape as a spectacle *and* makes a spectacle of itself to an audience of onlookers. To itemize and evaluate these processes, chapter one organizes the discourse comprising the observation car into two categories: "seeing,"

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[10] Though unpublished as individual articles or as revised monographs, a few doctoral candidates have written dissertations on the railroad, though all revolve around some iteration of the railroad-as-symbol theme. In 1968, Patricia Porcello wrote "The Railroad in American Literature: Poetry, Folk Song, and the Novel," a dissertation that helped to expand the canon of railroad studies to include popular novels such as Zane Grey's The U.P. Trail, which itself assumes a prominent position in my own dissertation. Bes Stark Spangler's dissertation, "Emblem of Motion and Power: The Railroad in Modern Southern Fiction," examines the railroad's power as a symbol of nostalgia. She explains that the railroad "evoked memories of the past for modern protagonists searching for an authentic existence in a secularized, urban society" (10). Writing within the Penn State Department of Geography, Henry Rademacher categorizes networks of transportation by corporate ownership and control in his dissertation, "The Spatiality of the Corporate Landscape: Railroads and Patterns of Power." Rademacher asserts that corporate interests took a life of their own beyond the initial intentions of the railroad ownership groups, ultimately dictating the uneven expansion and contraction of railspace. Perhaps the most geocritical and spatially oriented doctoral study belongs not to the realm of geography nor to the genres of prose or poetry but to the theater. Kyle Gillette, who later published a book-form of his dissertation, entitled *Railway Travel in Modern Theatre: Transforming the Space and Time of the Stage*, argues that the railroad's effect on nineteenth century time and space—and what he calls the "theatrical nature" of the railroad's debut (Introduction)—led to new, avant-garde imaginative invention in the theater. Though I will not be considering the theater in my study, Gillette's work accompanies my own in its path following the Spatial Turn in the humanities.

which concentrates on the vantage point of the rider who looks out from the railcar onto the passing landscape, and "being seen," which explores the concept of the rider and railcar as being exposed to the gaze of an audience. After laying out the discursive cornerstones that establish the railspace as one that encourages a spectacular view of the landscape, the chapter traces the hints of the converse relationship through advertisements and the use of the railcar in political Whistle Stop campaigning. With *One Life*, a poetic biography of presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, Muriel Rukeyser creates a polysensorial documentary poem of the experience of the spectacular railcar. The chapter reserves its remaining space dedicated to a subsection of the text, entitled "Campaign," and its effect of re-imagining the railspace as an apparatus of perpetual spectacle.

Chapter two explores the passenger car—i.e., the railcar that forces the most intimate encounters between riders by placing them side by side—using as a map the relationship between strategies of power and tactics of resistance conceptualized by Michel de Certeau. With an intertextual reading of two pairs of *noir*-based texts—James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* and its film adaptation by Billy Wilder and Patricia Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*, adapted to the screen by Alfred Hitchcock—the railspace is revealed through its riders' tactics of resistance to be, at its core, metonymic. That is, it is a space that forces its riders and readers to be sensitive to and dependent upon shortcuts, elisions, "contiguity" (Cohan 29), and economical navigation. In order to solidify the manifest nature of tactical resistance with textual production and the mimetic arts, this chapter locates a resonance of intertextual referentiality within Garret Ziegler's conceptualization of "discursive tactics" (289). Ultimately the passenger car's railspace is one of contestation between riders jockeying for privacy, authority, and control.

The last two chapters of this study depart the train to investigate the territories it establishes at the end of the line and underneath its wheels. Chapter three stratigraphically digs into the railspace created at the temporary campsites and towns erected at the end of construction of the transcontinental railroad as it cuts across the West from Omaha through Wyoming and Utah toward the west coast. This transient and mobile town, dubbed the "Hell on Wheels" (Bowles 56), is the locus of much of the discourse about the "Wild West" and will thus be explored primarily through one of the earliest and most popular Westerns, Zane Grey's *The U.P. Trail*. Through this text and alongside a reading of profanatory behaviors by Giorgio Agamben, the Hell on Wheels will be understood as a railspace that deterritorializes the railroad terminus away from a site that perpetuates the grand narrative of Manifest Destiny.

The final chapter of this dissertation stratigraphically explores how C.S. Giscombe's poetic deep maps in *Prairie Style* and *Ohio Railroads* unearth buried memory of African Americans' labor and locality along the inland railroad tracks of the American Midwest. The Union Pacific photography of Andrew J. Russell depicts racial marginality along the tracks, while the ur-textual deep map of William Least Heat-Moon (*PrairyErth: A Deep Map*) establishes the stratum of racial locality that Giscombe will unearth in the Midwest of Illinois and Ohio. With this framework in place, I will explore how Giscombe creates a poetic deep map of railspace, particularly of the tracks and the right-of-way. The deep map is a particularly helpful mechanism through which to read Giscombe's poetry. As defined by Trevor Harris, the deep map is place-based, and it digs into specific locations. The deep map moves beyond the "surficiality" of the standard, "thin" map, which displays the surface of a territory (29-33).[11] The

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[11] By invoking his concept of "surficiality," I aim to move away from the negative connotations of labeling a map "superficial" and re-engage with the idea that literary cartography is generally one comprised of surfaces, while the deep map explores the strata of a space.

place in question—what for Giscombe would be the right-of-way as it moves through Ohio and across the prairie—is understood through its strata of history, labor, and geography. For Giscombe, the exposure of these layers through the deep map is an effort to reterritorialize and recognize the tracks and the right-of-way/rail corridor as a network of railspace that delimits, contains, and occasionally symbolizes racial memory and locality. Giscombe develops this project across *Prairie Style* (2008), his essays collected in *Border Towns* (2014), and *Ohio Railroads* (2014) "contexturally" (Frank 62), a term that alludes to the aforementioned efforts of intertextuality and referentiality that are vital to a geocritical project.

This project concentrates on investigating four railspaces, two railcars and two along the right-of-way, but they are not the only ones worth inquiry. As mentioned above, Richards and MacKenzie undertake a quasi-geocritical "social history" of the British railway station. The locomotive engine of the train could be geocritically examined through readings by Thoreau and Leo Marx. An intertextual reading of the boom town (e.g., Omaha, Oklahoma City, San Antonio) would offer a productive counterpoint to this study's chapter on the Hell on Wheels. Where the four railspaces discussed herein set themselves apart is their ability to demonstrate how the railroad itself is created intertextuality in part through a dialogue between its multivalent railspaces. Riders move effortlessly from the passenger car to the observation deck; the observation deck creates a spectacle of both the train and landscape, which riders and readers consume, informing the eventual dystopian spectacle of the Hell on Wheels. The stratigraphic territory of the Hell on Wheels encourages a likeminded discursive archeology of the right-of-way. The tracks themselves welcome transgressive riders to disembark from the passenger car or jump from the back of the observation deck to escape. In their transgressive navigation through the passenger car, the adept rider shares a tactical map with the reterritorializing agents

of the Hell on Wheels and with C.S. Giscombe himself, as he re-charts the territory of the tracks through his own (and others') racial locality and memory. These four railspaces are shaped by the mimetic arts and the cultural discourse that surrounds them, but they are also shaped by each other. Starting within the train and ending on its margins, railspace will be geocritically revealed as inherently multifocal, polysensorial, stratigraphic, and above all, intertextual.

Chapter One

Upon Observation:

Spectacle in the California Zephyr, the Whistle Stop Tour, and Muriel Rukeyser's "Campaign"

Let us start our exploration of railspace from the back of the train, upon the observation car, where riders gaze out upon the landscape that the train leaves in its wake. This chapter examines varied texts—first person accounts of the observation car (which themselves span from nineteenth century travelogues to twenty-first century social media), mid-twentieth century advertisements, and the discourse around Whistle Stop Tour campaigning —as they lay out the stratified history and cultural understanding of the observation car. Ultimately, this chapter examines Muriel Rukeyser's long-form documentary poetry of the Whistle Stop Tour in *One Life*, which reassembles these layers in an effort to de/reterritorialize the observation car's railspace into an apparatus that perpetually produces spectacle.

In an effort to document the strata of this railcar and how Rukeyser employs them, this chapter is organized by dividing the railspace into two possibilities for its riders: "seeing" and "being seen." "Seeing" will employ first-person testimonials of the late-nineteenth century, including the travelogue of English tourist William Hardman and letters between railroad presidents Charles Elliot Perkins and John Murray Forbes. These writings establish the railcar's characteristic ability to afford its riders the opportunity to see. "Seeing" culminates with an extended analysis of how this ability manifests in advertisements of the California Zephyr's Vista-Dome railcar, predominantly and popularly used for transcontinental rail travel in the mid-twentieth century.

Efforts to market the panoramic landscape and the opportunity to see it in an observation car resonate in the twenty-first century within social media accounts generated by Amtrak and its riders. These efforts make apparent the second characteristic of the observation car—"being seen." For modern riders with established digital footprints, being seen on the train is equally as important as seeing the landscape itself. These posts encourage us to delve into the genesis of "being seen" on the train—the political Whistle Stop Tour of the early twentieth century. Using these two features of the railcar, the chapter settles into a reading of Rukeyser's poetic biography of 1940 presidential candidate Wendell Willkie—and particularly its extended chapter on the "Campaign"—to illustrate how the railspace operates and is constituted discursively by the literary text. Through Rukeyser, the observation car becomes a railspace that frames the rider, reader, and onlooker as always caught within spectacle, either as audience or actor. Just as the Zephyr's advertisements created a dual spectacle of the train and the landscape with images that promote the singularity of both the railcar and the landscape, so too does Rukeyser's documentary poetry and sensory-rich verse delimit the observation car as a perpetual spectacle. Furthermore, the interplay of senses that is characteristic of Rukeyser's poetry is the perfect means through which we can investigate the railspace through the geocritical tenet of polysensoriality, which argues that space can only be understood by engaging all the senses (Tally 142). Finally, I will lay out the brief hints of secrecy within the observation car as a beacon for a more fully realized discussion of privacy and its role in railspace in chapter two. This process will address the question of where spectacle germinates within the observation car. How does spectacle dually operate as the riders' focal point of the landscape and as the riders themselves? How does

Rukeyser's text chart and inform the trajectory of the rider as they navigate this spectacular railspace? How is the railspace itself shaped by these navigations? And, when departing from the observation car, to where do we turn?

This chapter will use multifocalism and the three remaining tenets of geocritical theory, namely, polysensoriality, stratigraphy, and intertextuality, to reconstruct the observation car through several texts across different media and genres. The geocritical premise of multifocalism mandates that in order to understand how a space is constructed, one must recognize that space as a site built by a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints. As such, the texts considered in this chapter are relatively disparate in genre, form, and medium, and each will be contextualized within these classifications and, where appropriate, within overarching discussions of their authors' oeuvres. Under the mantle of a multifocal reading, the reconstructed railspace of the observation car takes a dual form—as a space that both provides the opportunity for passengers to witness a spectacular panoramic landscape and situates itself as a spectacle in its own right. Following this discussion of the spectacle exposed and produced by the observation car, we will encounter the concepts of privacy and secrecy. In chapter two, I will investigate the animating power of privacy within railspace; first, within the observation car, it will be enough to catalogue the traces of privacy as we encounter them and briefly consider its role in amidst the spectacle.

I use "observation car," observation platform/deck," and "platform" interchangeably, though the argument could be made that each has its own nuances. Indeed, the term "observation car" is used almost exclusively by commercial passenger trains, whereas "observation deck" is most often reserved for Whistle Stop-touring politicians. Arguably there is a physical distinction as well. The "deck" is the rear platform on any final train car, while the

"car" is just that—the entire rail unit within which passengers can view the landscape, often with the advantage of large windows and more open space. As typically conceived, the observation car was located at the rear of the train, as the open backend of the last car provided a wider view of the landscape. In both cases, sight is the dominant sense through which the passenger or onlooker experiences and constructs the railspace of the observation car.[1] This shared trait is enough to effectively join the deck and car together as a single railspace to geocritically investigate. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the train's railspace that concerns itself with "observation," whether of the landscape or the train's riders, will be considered as part of the observation car.

The definition of spectacle will carry an equally heavy burden within this study. While the Oxford English Dictionary defines spectacle as "A specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature (esp. one on a large scale), forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment for those viewing it," Guy Debord presents an extended noteworthy investigation on the term in *The Society of the Spectacle*, his Marxist/Situationist critical take on how the spectacle operates within a capitalist society. Debord develops his theory on the society of the spectacle through 221 theses in the eponymous text. I will refer to Debord's definitions occasionally throughout this chapter as a counterpoint or segue from what I am exploring between railspace and spectacle. For example, in one thesis, Debord writes that "The spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image" (34, emphasis in original). In this reading, the observation deck and its pivotal role in electioneering is less of a natural evolution from the theater and more a gluttonous accumulation of capital generated by the need

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[1] This is not always the case in all railspaces. Smell, sound, feeling, or even an extrasensory perception—what C.S. Giscombe names the "railroad sense" in *Ohio Railroads*—can play a predominant role in railspace construction, depending on its location in the train, on the rails, or along the right-of-way.

for more efficient forms of labor. Thus, the democratic system is perhaps implicated in the perpetuation of capitalism. This hypothesis and its conclusions exceed the limit of a geocritical study of railspace, and as such, it is helpful to limit our discussion of the spectacle to the OED definition and judiciously include Debord's theses when there is a pertinent intersection.

By multifocally re-constructing the observation car with advertisements, political culture, and social media, and by concentrating on polysensorial close readings of railroad literature, we can more clearly see the correlation between surveillance and spectacle that occurs while riding within its confines and stumping on its platform. This correlation will lead to the conclusion that the observation car is a railspace that produces spectacle by alternatively objectifying the rider, audience, and spectacle. That is to say, as the observation car opens space for the production of a spectacle, it simultaneously, as a by-product, creates the opportunity for secrecy, obscurity, and concealment. Debord argues that this is not an opportunity but rather a necessary "unity of misery" that hides underneath the spectacle (thesis 63). The "misery" felt by those surrounding the spectacle is not reflected wholly in the readings discussed herein, though it is touched upon by Muriel Rukeyser, as explained below.[2] Not only that, it creates the opportunity for the spectacle (and/or its producers) to see its audience in full, with the house lights up. Intertextually, this means that literary and cultural texts construct the observation car as a machine that produces spectacle, while the observation car itself simultaneously informs American culture by providing it with a malleable trope and machine of spectacle to be deployed across politics, pulp culture, and tourism.

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[2] For an investigation into how capitalism or greed would motivate crime in railspace, see chapter two and John Allyn: "Billy Wilder's Double Indemnity: A Policy That Paid Off."

In their contrast, the genres discussed herein afford some unique tools with which we can reconstruct the observation car's railspace. The magazine advertisement's central purpose is to promote and market a product to the public. It highlights or less charitably, exaggerates, the most attractive characteristics of a product. Print advertisements are (or were) seen widely, so they are a good barometer of contemporary public perception. The advertisements for the Western Pacific, California Zephyr, and Vista-Dome observation cars afford us the opportunity to see the facets of the observation car that were the most highly esteemed, which coincides with the railcar's most glaring features. As a genre, documentary poetry—especially as undertaken by Muriel Rukeyser—shares a commonality with print advertising in its materialism; the form "find[s] its feet outside… art galleries and instead locate[s] itself...on factory floors, in union halls, at political rallies" (Nowak). Documentary poetics uniquely situate the poem in created space, and they in turn interrogate that same space to discover how it has been shaped and by whom. Furthermore, as a genre "fundamentally concerned with cultivating historicity" (Metres 10), documentary poetry complements the primary source documents I have also discussed here (e.g., first-hand rail travel accounts, advertisements, Whistle Stop Tour speeches). In the genre's neck-deep immersion in material culture, it converses easily with the advertisements discussed below, which underscore the railcar's celebrated ability to lay the landscape bare to the gaze of the passenger.

Seeing – Selling the Landscape through Advertisements

The texts in this section first describe the observation car as a space from which its riders can see out to the landscape. Residing within these descriptions however are clues that begin to shape the railspace as one designed as a spectacle itself and one that nevertheless contains the potential for privacy. Early iterations of the observation car, discovered in epistolary

correspondence between Charles Elliott Perkins and John Murray Forbes and in a travelogue by William Hardman, hint at these traits. Inventions touted in *Scientific American* and twenty-first century digital media by Amtrak retain a similar strategy of advertising irrespective of the time period, namely that the opportunity to observe is foregrounded, but the space within which to do so is part of a unique, remarkable opportunity. Several advertisements for the Vista-Dome railcar—a space totally designed to observe—present these efforts visually and verbally, with the railcar and the landscape assuming equal attention as spectacles that need to be seen. The campaign strategy of the Whistle Stop Tour will mobilize these components of the observation car into an apparatus of pure spectacle. Rukeyser discursively takes up this re-constituted railcar and shapes it into a railspace that reveals the power that spectacle has to objectify of the rider.

Passengers ride in the observation car in order to observe. So then, the foremost purpose for the observation car/platform is to provide a railspace from which to best observe the panoramic landscape. Across its multiform layouts, several characteristics unite this railspace, all of which indicate how sight is the dominant sense of the space. Observation cars typically have fewer seats, which are more comfortable and often intentionally left unsold so as to give as many passengers as possible the opportunity to enjoy the railcar. These seats are either angled or face directly outward toward the windows. The windows are larger, and in the case of the dome cars described below, expand upwards as part of the ceiling. Most observation cars are located at the rear of the train and feature an open-air platform from which to view the receding landscape, thus affording a panoramic view of more than 270 degrees out from the rear and sides of the train (White 367-371, Stilgoe 257).[3] But just as these spatial layouts and arrangements encourage

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[3] Stilgoe states that the Observation Car affords "a nearly 360-degree view" from the rear platform of the train (*Metropolitan Corridor* 257). Since it would be impossible to look ahead to the oncoming landscape, I opt to say "more than 270 degrees." This point isn't semantic quibbling; a railspace that enables a panoramic view of the

riders to look out to the landscape, so too do they provide opportunities for privacy—fewer, angled seats in the railcar means that there is less of a chance that riders encounter one another, and riders are not interrupted by others passing through, since the railcar is often at the end of the train. Furthermore, the observation car's unique design and its platform to the public paradoxically aggregate attention and draw a crowd—either as readers or an in-person audience—to the railcar. This paradox exists throughout the re-construction of the observation car, starting with some of its earliest iterations, continuing through contemporary sightseer lounges, and culminating in the railspace that Rukeyser discursively constructs in "Campaign."

Early forebearers of the observation car contained the germ of spectacle and privacy. In 1941, Richard C. Overton unearthed one of the earliest forebearers of the observation car, located in a throwaway line in a letter between railroad executives in 1882. In it, Charles Elliott Perkins, the president of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad, laments that his "bird-cage car"—which Overton deduces as a "special car adapted for sightseeing"—cannot fit under the tunnels and snow sheds of the Southern Pacific line to California (200). Notably, John Murray Forbes, Perkins' uncle and former CB&Q president, requested the railcar for a trip to the West Coast (200). Thus the first recorded mention of the proto-observation car threads fame into a railspace designed for panoramic sight. Perhaps the best example of the observation car acting as both a hideaway and aggregator of spectacle occurs in 1883 when Englishman William Hardman and his family undertook a train tour from New York to Yellowstone National Park under the guidance of Rufus Hatch, an early financier of the Northern Pacific Railroad and

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landscape but that does not allow for the rider to see what lies ahead is a useful metaphor for politics, as demonstrated below by Muriel Rukeyser in her poetic biography of presidential candidate Wendell Willkie.

promoter of tourism to the West. Mr. Hardman's travelogue describes an encounter with several

Gros Ventres Native Americans, whom he describes as

> a very shabby looking party of Indians standing on the platform hoping for a lift
>
> on their road west. ...Mr. Rufus Hatch, kind-hearted as usual, offered them a seat
>
> on the observation platform of the last car as far as Little Missouri, about fifty-
>
> three miles further on. We all crowded to look at them, and some of the ladies of
>
> our party bought bracelets, bags, and pincushions, while an energetic French
>
> schoolmaster bartered knives with them for a tomahawk-head and a red clay pipe
>
> decorated with feathers. (130-31)

By shuffling these Gros Ventres travelers toward the back of the train, Mr. Hatch attempts to

hide them from view. He segregates the Gros Ventres riders to prevent them from engaging with

other passengers. But the composition of this railspace encourages engagement, albeit a form

that gives more control to the spectator. In the rear observation car, they have nowhere else to

move. They are unable to engage with other riders unless these riders come to them. The white

riders themselves are limited in their ability to see the panoramic views of the landscape afforded

by the observation car. Mr. Hatch has effectively replaced the spectacle of nature with that of

the Native American. By directing them to the observation car, Mr. Hatch produces a situation

where passengers "crowded to look at" the Gros Ventres, thus becoming a space in which Mr.

Hardman and his fellow tourists can more fully control when and how they see something they

consider unsavory yet interesting. The observation car's situation at the rear of the train

encourages passengers and conductors to treat it as a place to hide something (or someone) from

view, from being a nuisance.[4] And yet it is because of this location and the open space characterizing the observation car that makes it a railspace most effective at displaying the other rider for the viewing pleasure of other passengers and passersby.

From turn-of-the-century magazine articles and images of the "Observatory Sleeper" to modern day blog posts from Amtrak about how to "Rock the Observation Car" (Scientific American 274; Amtrak "5 Ways"), promotional articles and advertisements have consistently highlighted the view afforded by the railcar, hinted at micro-spaces of privacy, and created a spectacle of the railcar itself. In 1891, *Scientific American* achieved this through its article on McBride's Observatory Sleeper, one of the earliest manifestations of a domed railcar. The article concentrates on the rider's view and comfort, reporting,

> When a traveler is seated at the side he faces a large 40 inch window, made slightly curvilinear...which will enable him to view the highest mountain peak, and to the right or left of those seats, and from the various end cross seats, a full view is had of the train top, engine, roadbed, and scenery to the right, left, front and rear. A forward balcony view is also given from the end or cross observatory seats of the lower portion of the car. (274)

The article's accompanying illustration of the railcar's interior shows riders perched in the observatory, staring out to the presumed landscape. Others look out from the first level, a man ignoring the book in his hand, a woman standing and staring at an angle, transfixed at nothing in particular. The periodical unironically celebrates the fact that McBride's design encourages installing "an observatory over the lavatories or smoking room" or sleeper in order to provide the

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[4] This comes up again more demonstrably in *Double Indemnity*, discussed at the end of this chapter.

greatest number of riders a unique vantage point. This design is an erasure of privacy for

passengers underneath those in the observatory and an amplification of privacy for those seated

up on top, as further confirmed by the mannequin-like poses of the first-floor riders. By

allowing observatory riders to retreat to their own perch away from other passengers and giving

them the best view outside (and to the minor spectacle of others enjoying quotidian amenities on

the first floor), the observatory sleeper forms the argument that the best view is one that is

experienced alone. Meanwhile, as a featured invention in *Scientific American*, the observatory

sleeper itself becomes something of a spectacular sensation. Especially in the 1880s, *Scientific

American* was a periodical that was dedicated to reporting and lauding new inventions and

patents. Most of the articles therein have the style of celebratory wonderment at the inventions

described, thus creating a miniature spectacle of each device. Of rail travel itself, the article

notices that railcars have become more elaborately designed and decorated so as to "still more

largely attract tourists," a fact that the periodical mirrors in its desire to still more largely attract

readers. Most recently, in the early twenty-first century, Amtrak recalls the spectacular views

afforded by the observation car (what Amtrak renames "sightseer lounges" on its website) while

leveraging the modern rider's propensity for sharing information through social media as a

method of manufacturing an ongoing digital spectacle.

Amtrak's blog about the observation car recalls this early article on the observatory

sleeper in that it describes the composition of the railspace and lays out clear instructions about

what to do while in it, all while leveraging a subconscious nostalgia for rail travel. In "Welcome

to the Observation Car!" Amtrak describes the oversized windows, unassigned seating, and first-

floor café car that are featured within their two-level "sightseer lounges." Another post, "5 Ways

to Rock the Observation Car," directly lists what to do in the railspace. Each suggestion orbits

around the view from the car window: "Load[] up some of your favorite tunes while peeping those gorgeous views"; "multitask like a pro and in between chapters of the latest best seller...take in the changing landscape"; "Pop[] peanut M&M's while watching the landscapes fly by is like being at a movie — but better"; "Watch the views roll by: Just sit and soak in the prairie sunsets, emerald green forests, or wild oceans. Feast your eyes on amber waves of grain, majestic mountains or babbling brooks." These methodical descriptions ostensibly are unnecessary; what could be more natural than looking out the window and relaxing at the scenery while riding in an observation car? Yet these descriptions, which Amtrak calls "suggestions," are effectively stringent rules of the road that are necessary to maintain the shape of the railspace: experience nostalgia; sit and gaze at the scenery; keep your other senses occupied; "share the experience" with fellow riders and through social media ("5 Ways"). By maintaining control and structure of the observation car through these instructions, Amtrak creates a railspace that is passive, personal, and ultimately exploitative of the rider while also amplified for digital spectators.

By distracting the rider's non-optic senses, Amtrak effectively seeks to control the polysensorial creation of railspace. With familiar food and climate-controlled, shock-absorbent railcars, Amtrak limits the gustatory and tactile perception of railspace. And aurally, Amtrak suggests that listening to your own music rather than the "click-n-clack of the tracks" makes the "gorgeous views...all the more enjoyable" ("5 Ways"). Just as McBride's observatory sleeper would eliminate travelers' exposure "to the tempest, dust, cinders...and the chilling air of the glacier regions" that they would have otherwise felt upon an open-air observation car, so too does Amtrak's sightseer lounge mute and alter passengers' sensory experiences of the railroad, thus serving to make the experience more relaxing and intimate and in these ways, private.

Of course, Amtrak prefers that its passengers share this private view with their social networks, thus furthering the observation car's wide pivot from serving passengers looking out to voyeurs looking in. In the aforementioned instructional blog post "5 Ways…," Amtrak reiterates how easy it is "making sunsets a snap to Instagram" from the observation car. In the introduction to its observation car, Amtrak explains that, "Thanks to the awesome views, it's always a favorite for first-time riders and Instagramers. Try it out next time you ride one of our long-distance trains out West. And don't forget to tag your pics with the hashtag #Amtrak!" ("Welcome"). With nearly 530,000 Instagram posts using this hashtag as of the spring of 2020, Amtrak provides the manifestation of spectacle that gestated throughout the twentieth century.[5]

In between the late nineteenth century of *Scientific American* and early twenty-first century Amtrak, observation car advertisements reach their apex with the mid-twentieth century invention and introduction to the Vista-Dome railcar as part of the Western Pacific service to San Francisco. Like its observatory sleeper predecessor, the Vista-Dome featured a split-level section of the railcar, where upon the top floor passengers would ride to see an elevated view of the landscape. The dome itself was made of large panels of glass to give passengers the widest view possible. On the lower floor were lavatories or occasionally dining cars. Rail historian John H. White noted that these railcars were integral in driving increased attendance to the railroad and temporarily saved the passenger train from extinction (197-200). Due to the height

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[5] Debord anticipates the role social media plays in the production of the spectacle, noting in thesis 17 that "The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life brought into the definition of all human realization the obvious degradation of *being* into *having*. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing,* from which all actual 'having' must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. At the same time all individual reality has become social reality directly dependent on social power and shaped by it. It is allowed to appear only to the extent that it is *not.*" Debord would arguably equate the degeneration from *being* into *having* and ultimately into *appearing* as taking the form of social media influencers, who produce the spectacle purely from appearance and the social power afforded them.

clearances needed for a railcar of this size, the dome car was only feasible for rail excursions westward. Perhaps the most popular trip to the west—owing in large part to its extensive advertising—was the California Zephyr, run predominantly by Western Pacific railroad in the 1950s and 1960s.[6] These advertisements naturally highlighted the spectacular views from the train, but they were also effective because of their portrayal of the Zephyr itself as a spectacle in its own right, worth traveling on for the sheer ability to boast about experiencing the Vista-Dome oneself. Here too crouch small hints about the paradoxical privacy afforded upon this streamliner version of the observation car.

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[6] Other railroads featuring the Zephyr were the Burlington and Rio Grande, as indicated in the forthcoming advertisements.

Figure 1
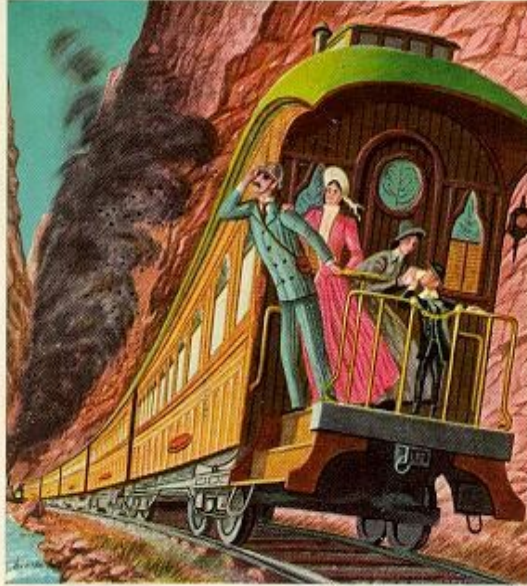
Courtesy of California Zephyr Virtual Museum

34

Figure 2

Figure 3

Courtesy of California Zephyr Virtual Museum

Figure 4

Courtesy of California Zephyr Virtual Museum

Figure 5

Courtesy of California Zephyr Virtual Museum

All Western Pacific advertisements describe the California Zephyr as the passenger train that provides the widest view of the landscape, thanks to its patented "Vista-Dome" observation cars, which "afford[] full, free vision of the scenery amid comfortable and luxurious surroundings" (Fig. 1), like oversized, unassigned seats and windows extending into the ceiling. The Zephyr used these views within nearly all of their advertisements for the route from Chicago to San Francisco. Many of these advertisements invariably include something akin to a logo for Western Pacific: an illustration or photograph of the Zephyr as a part of a vast natural landscape. The train runs toward the left of the reader, in order to see its profile and length. The final railcars recede into the background, giving the impression that the train stretches out past the horizon. Notably, the first railcar (and several more in quick succession) is a Vista-Dome. The train cuts through the tree line and winds around mountains, alongside streams, and through forests (see Figs. 1-5). Some advertisements show the train coming toward the reader, often depicting smiling riders in the foreground as they gaze at their surroundings (Fig. 1 and 5). Riders depicted in the advertisements often reiterate the Vista-Dome tagline, "Look up, look down, look all around" (Fig. 2, 3, 5), and cheerfully discuss how much they can see. In one advertisement that follows a "Zephyrette" train attendant, a child rhetorically remarks, "Signal green? Sure it is! Up here in the Vista-Dome I can see way ahead just like the engineer does. And right after we left Moffat Tunnel I saw a whole herd of deer right down near the track!" (Fig. 4). Across the page, a man holding a camera says, "Any good shots? If not, it's my own fault! What could be more scenic than a Rockies and Feather River Canyon! No wonder this train was picked to star in 'Cinerama Holiday'!" (Fig. 4). As indicated by this amateur photographer, these advertisements oscillate—sometimes within single images themselves—

between making a spectacle of the natural landscape and describing the California Zephyr itself as spectacular.

One such advertisement beckons the prospective rider to "SEE THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH from the best seat in the house!" (Fig. 5, emphasis in original). The advertisement is illustrated as a poster pinned to a tree or wooden pole, alluding to the sort of ephemeral flyer used for a traveling circus. Taking this allusion to its natural conclusion, the train would then represent the auditorium, with its Vista-Domes as the "best seat[s] in the house" to watch the singular, spectacular views of the landscape. Furthermore, with the invitation to "ride through scenic wonderlands aboard the most talked-about train in the country!" Western Pacific portrays the Vista-Dome itself as a spectacular experience of a different sort. Rather than describing the railcar as unique (after all, "the most talked-about" experiences are well behind the cultural vanguard), Western Pacific instead depicts the train as pervasively popular—riding the California Zephyr is an experience that should not be missed, lest one feel left out of the cultural moment. Western Pacific keeps coming back to the Zephyr as a momentous experience, reiterating the "most-talked about" tagline in the majority of its advertisements (Fig. 2, 3, 4).

Western Pacific leveraged the California Zephyr's popularity with more than its self-proclaimed tagline; the corporation offered the use of the Zephyr to film producer Louis de Rochemont for the film *Cinerama Holiday*, a plot-lite film mainly created to display new "cinerama" technology to moviegoers in 1955 (Lustig 51). Cinerama films used an ultra-wide panoramic lens, purportedly giving the audience a film that was as wide as the limits of human peripheral vision. The new filmic technique was popular, with *Cinerama Holiday* being one of the highest grossing films of 1955 (Lustig 53). Audiences flocked to theaters to see the novel technology and the hyper-panoramic vistas it presented. Western Pacific mirrors this spectacle

in its advertisements for the California Zephyr. Equating the novel technology of the cinerama with that of the Vista-Dome (both wherein the audience can take in panoramic scenery in a unique way), Western Pacific attempts to attract passengers the same way as de Rochemont does—by making a spectacle out of the new experience.

Winding around the *Cinerama* ad, a hand unspools a reel of film, which acts as a frame of the ad's central text and image. The advertisement inserts serialized screenshots of the movie within the individual windows of film. Some of these images show cameramen preparing to shoot the film aboard the train, but the majority of the pictures, including the central shot around which the reel unspools, feature the Zephyr as it cuts through the scenic landscape. Evoking the locomotive heard by Henry David Thoreau in *Walden* and meditated upon by Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden*, the Zephyr here winds its way through trees, mountains, and rivers, approaching the viewer amidst the natural grandeur of the American West. The "magnificent scenery unfolds before" the Zephyr and by extension, its riders, presenting a scene of nature's willingness to present itself in front of such a spectacular machine. With an invitation to "Travel to California aboard the train chosen to star in 'Cinerama Holiday'!" (Fig. 3) and by describing the Zephyr as a machine capable of revealing the beauty of the American West, the train itself assumes a position in the cultural consciousness as a spectacle that provides spectacular views.

Yet even here, with the Zephyr advertisement that most ably demonstrates the cyclical production of spectacle, there exists hints of the opportunities for concealment. The *Cinerama* advertisement touts, "you see it *all* during daylight hours!" (emphasis in original). Western Pacific here alludes to the strict schedule it keeps for the Zephyr, which ensures that riders see the Rocky Mountains and the most scenic parts of the Sierra Nevada. This advertisement leaves unsaid what others mention off-hand: "at night, you speed swiftly and smoothly across the plains

and desert" ("Designed and Timed for Sightseeing"). The marginalization of nighttime travel encourages riders to use this time to sleep, but as will be explored by Rukeyser with presidential candidate Wendell Willkie below, this time also then provides a private space within the spectacle for introspection.

These advertisements also subtly guide passengers to brief opportunities for privacy aboard the Zephyr and even within the Vista-Dome observation car. Celebrating the train's "room to roam" through the illustration of a winding path that trails a smiling man who is smoking a pipe, Figure 2 touts that the train provides for "the same standard of privacy you enjoy in your own home." With the ostensible freedom to roam everywhere throughout the train and the lack of assigned seats in the Vista-Domes, Western Pacific re-certifies the passenger's agency, providing them at least the semblance of privacy. Beyond the imagery that establishes the Zephyr as a spectacle that itself presents spectacular views and one that preserves the possibility for privacy, strategies used in these advertisements also allude to the theatrical stage, thus setting the scene for the observation car's alignment with theatrical spectacle during its use during electioneering Whistle Stop Tours.

The Western Pacific railroad company describes the Vista-Dome as "the best seat in the house" (Fig. 5), thus equating the "house" of the theater to the California Zephyr. The metaphor extends across its advertisements, with the train's observation lounges providing amenities like cocktail bars and restrooms (Fig. 2 and 4). Within the "GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH" ad, Western Pacific quotes Lucius Beebe, a contemporaneously popular syndicated columnist and railroad historian. The inclusion of Mr. Beebe's comment evokes the use of pull quotes to attract theater audiences. With the use of this language and imagery, the Zephyr advertisements align

the railroad and the panoramic landscape with the theater in order to leverage the spectacle of the stage for increased ridership.

Just as prevalent as the landscape-as-spectacle/ railcar-as-theater alignment is the perception of the railcar as a spectacle in its own right. By shining a spotlight on the Vista-Dome, by describing it as a unique railspace on display to readers, these advertisements shape the railspace into a spectacle, one that is a stage for itself, with onlookers taking on the role of the audience. Figure 1 illustrates the role of riders upon such a spectacle. Here, a pictorial family teeters on a rear-facing observation deck. Their sole purpose in the advertisement is to show the danger present in the "good old days" of enjoying the sights. But as depicted, there is a theatrical quality to their plight, with the father figure gesticulating broadly as he hangs off the deck's railing. Two children pantomime a conversation behind him, with their mother apparently holding on to her husband, helping him maintain his balance. Though somewhat crudely drawn, these characters serve as an effective entry point into a discussion of the theatrical potential and limitations of the observation deck that politicians exploit and that Rukeyser mobilizes when staging Willkie in the railspace.

Being Seen – Staging Politicians on Whistle Stop Tours

The observation car has always been a space where it is possible to enjoy the view of the landscape, but always operating in the background is the simultaneous gaze back from the landscape, its inhabitants, and, as we have seen, from potential passengers to whom the aforementioned advertisements speak. American politicians have been quick to leverage the attention generated by standing on an open-air platform, developing the Whistle Stop Tour as a

novel way to engage with the public and, as we shall trace below, to create a spectacle.[7] Eventually Rukeyser will describe these political messages through documentary poetics and discursively seal the observation car as a railspace whose contemporary remnant is wholly comprised of its role as a machine that produces spectacle.

Political theorists have long held the Whistle Stop Tour as an early supplement to the particularly American form of political spectacle but do not often regard it as an event that hints at anything new or novel. In a text oft cited by his successors, Murray Edelman treats the political spectacle as mainly a linguistic construct or a "social phenomenon" in which politics themselves are the spectacle beholden by the voting public (95, 120). Television producer Sig Mickelson does acknowledge the stage-like spectacle of the Whistle Stop Tour, but he concludes that "the paid political speech from the auditorium was the main event. We were involved in a sideshow" (99). Phil Harris situates the Whistle Stop Tour within the "pre-modern" column of an expansive table that attempts to follow "Political Campaign Evolution" (13). Harris aligns this chart with the 1996 study of *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy* by Swanson and Mancini to argue that "modernisation"—that is, the move to daily press conferences and televised broadcasts—"causes changes from direct involvement in election campaigns to spectatorship," which ultimately "makes it easier for voters to relate to media-centered campaigns more as spectacle than political action" (12, 13). In his rush to discuss the implications of what he defines as "modern," Harris (and Swanson and Mancini) looks beyond the Whistle Stop Tour as the genesis of the spectacle.

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[7] The term "Whistle Stop Tour" generated from criticism by Senator Robert Taft in 1944, who complained often and loudly about then-Vice President Truman's "whistle station" tours, which frequently criticized and condemned Congress (Withers 194).

Overlooking the Whistle Stop Tour in discussions about the political spectacle is a common occurrence. Ulrich Keller traces the acts of "producing/controlling spectacle" from the eighteenth century to the early 20th, highlighting the political speech as the central spectacular act through which presidents create spectacle (131). Keller argues that twentieth century presidents developed the ability to control this spectacle. Lyford and Payne cite Debord in their argument that photojournalism both "sustains th[e] power" of the spectacle and "open[s] up a space of critical resistance" within it (119). Each critic leaves open the question of how the observation car serves as an early stage upon which presidential candidates developed, perpetuated, and complicated the production of political spectacle before the political speech was televised and before photojournalism could be digitally mass-produced. What have also gone under-studied are the ways in which the physical composition of the railcar lends itself to the seen/being seen duality. I hope to take advantage of these opportunities, if only to point to the importance of the observation platform in creating one of the earliest iterations of political spectacle. One particular photograph of one of President Harry Truman's Whistle Stop Tours perfectly illustrates this binary process and the spectacular scene it creates.

Figure 6

"Hoosiers Hear Truman"

AP Photo/Henry Griffin

On October 12, 1948, while in the midst of his campaign, President Truman stands at a
podium upon the observation deck, reading what looks like some prepared comments to the
people of Richmond, Indiana. The outline of the car frames him, with a railing separating him
from the crowd. An awning overhead serves both to shade him from the sun and complete the
frame of the scene. Speakers amplify his speech in multiple angles. Behind him, a darkened

backdrop that obscures a monochromatic door leading to the inside of the railcar. The crowd spills over in every direction, with people hanging off roofs, ladders, and each other in the hope of trying to get the best view of the President. The audience is captivated; the only people not facing Truman are his Secret Service detail. Crowds were mandated to stay six feet away from the sides of the train and 30 feet from the rear platform, but rarely adhered to these rules (Withers 203). "You're close enough to see your dimples," one woman yelled up to Truman as he stood on the platform. "They're not dimples, they're wrinkles...you don't get dimples at 64," Truman replied (Withers 195). When another woman shouted that he looked sick, Truman replied, "That's because I ride around in the wind with my mouth open" (197). As exemplified above, Truman's 1948 Whistle Stop Tour closely resembles traveling theatrical entertainment. Audiences gathered to see Truman perform and perhaps to catch the president do something remarkable, such as continue his speech as the train pulled away or, as captured in his most famous observation deck photograph, celebrate his victory and have a laugh at the expense of the Chicago Daily Tribune. The widely circulated "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN" image, wherein Truman jubilantly holds up a newspaper that went to press before the election results were official and that which had incorrectly anticipated Thomas Dewey's victory, has memorialized the observation car as a site of spectacle and continues to underscore the novelty of seeing presidential candidates theatrically stump from the rear of a train.

Beyond Truman, politicians throughout American rail history have leveraged this opportunity presented by the observation car to aggregate local and national attention one whistle stop at a time. At each station along a planned route, spectators would flock to the resting train for the novelty of seeing someone shouting from the rear platform of a monolithic machine. The open space that naturally surrounds the station, the raised stage, and the proscenium-like frame

of the platform created an auditorium of space, ensuring audience members' ease-of-sight to the spectacle. The audience's access to the speaker was limited only to sight and sound; upon (or even preceding) the completion of the speech, the train would start up again, pulling out of the station while the politician waved at the receding and unobtrusive crowd. Audience members left thinking they had seen a truly remarkable, singular event.

The earliest whistle stop tours and political processions contain the germ of the experience's theatrical trappings and hint at what is so spectacular about a person speaking from the rear platform of a train (or being displayed thereon). As dated by Bob Withers in *The President Travels by Train: Politics and Pullmans*, the earliest iterations of the Whistle Stop Tour occur in the mid-nineteenth century. Withers speculates that Abraham Lincoln's opponent, Stephen Douglas, started the idea. He put a cannon on a flatcar and shot it to announce his arrival into the station (9). The flatcar-staged event will come up again below, with literally larger implications for the observation deck. Of course, the funeral procession of Lincoln himself exemplifies the spectacle the train affords. In the spring of 1865, Lincoln's body traveled by train from Washington D.C. to Springfield, Illinois and was seen by thousands of mourners along the way. As an early indication of the power of the railroad to unite people in patriotism (and in grief), Lincoln's funeral train evoked the feeling of an "ancient 'royal progress'" in "creating a union of its own, bringing together at places along its way more people than had ever been brought together before" in order to "justify [the nation's] claims on the people, acknowledge their sacrifices, and sustain their devotion" (Schwartz 348).[8] Its success in doing so inspired similar funeral tours for Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Robert F. Kennedy.

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[8] For a detailed timetable of Lincoln's funeral train, see Newman pp. 6-19.

Andrew Johnson was the first president to actively campaign on the train, calling his Whistle Stop Tour a "swing around the circle," traveling to 10 states in 19 days (31). Johnson was actually heckled often during these speeches (reminiscent of jeering during a performance). Still despite this apparent unpopularity, approximately 100,000 people greeted him at one stop in Baltimore, what Withers calls "a simply enormous crowd" (31). Later, Calvin Coolidge tried to travel in a regular Pullman car but saw non-stop visitors and spectators bother him through the open compartment (vii). Millard Fillmore conducted a proto-whistle stop "inauguration" tour (not a campaign) (9). William Jennings Bryan, "the great commoner," was the first presidential candidate to officially campaign from a private car's observation platform that was dedicated for the purpose of a Whistle Stop Tour, somewhat mystifyingly named "The Idler." Though the railcar was private, it was not an ornate Pullman car, which Bryan considered overly luxurious. Without the trappings of a Pullman car, audience members could more easily access the candidate. In one such incident, a farmer from the audience came aboard The Idler from the observation deck to talk directly to the candidate (63).

By the era of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Whistle Stop Tour "had been honed into a science of safety, comfort, efficiency and security. Their circus atmosphere of bands and bunting, rousing speeches and declarations of principles stirred the imagination and presented the perfect way to bring the candidate or the president together with the people" (131). FDR increased the drama of the Whistle Stop Tour speech when he intentionally timed his speeches to end just as the train would be pulling out of the station (131). By keeping to a rigorous schedule, Roosevelt further aligned the Tour with a staged performance that could only be seen at specific times, thus ensuring a large, captive audience at each stop.

No primary source materials have yet been discovered that confirm a unified and commonly held political strategy for undertaking a Whistle Stop Tour. Withers determines that rather than a political strategist, it was Charles B. Ryan, the Assistant General Passenger Agent for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, who first suggested an observation platform-based campaign (63, 131), lending to the theory that the Tour was a shared strategy to leverage the spectacular nature of the train to aggregate attention, both for the candidate and for the railroad itself. I am of the opinion that the tour manifested organically before Ryan's outright suggestion, as an outgrowth of the balcony speech and perhaps as an acknowledgement that a locomotive circuit around the country would unite geographically and politically disparate factions of Americans. Starting with Andrew Johnson and Rutherford B. Hayes, presidents felt at-ease with the prevailing transportation technology and were naturally drawn to the similarities to the balcony, namely: the ornate iron railing, the peripheral curtains, the framed opening to an enraptured audience. These allusions were intentional, as proven by a 1947 memo from Harry Truman's political strategists. Withers hypothesizes about the intention behind the decorations of the observation platform: "A blue velvet curtain was hung outside the rear door...of the Ferdinand Magellan, apparently to provide a cleaner background for photos and newsreel films" (189). Interestingly, both Johnson and Hayes claimed that they did not intend to make a speech from the rear observation platform but rather sought to dialogue with people face-to-face. Of course, each ended up making a speech at every stop (Withers 32, 46). These presidents shared an (ultimately failed) intention to re-fashion the observation deck as less of a stage and more of an informal access point to the public.

In addition to the Ferdinand Magellan, which will be discussed at length below, there were six Pullman cars most often used by presidents and presidential candidates on Whistle Stop

Tours: the Marco Polo, Henry Stanley, David Livingstone, Robert Peary, Roald Amundsen, and the Pioneer (384). The explorer/pioneer theme underscores the attempt to associate these candidates with something new, untraveled, as-yet unseen. Up through the 1940s and into the early 1950s, the observation platform still worked to attract large audiences thanks in part to these associations. Ultimately, following Eisenhower's correct prediction that 1952 would be the "last year when whistlestopping [sic] was the major mode of electioneering" (Withers 273), the spectacular Ferdinand Magellan and the observation platform in general would recede from the public consciousness before Ronald Reagan re-commissioned the railcar for a one-day, five-station tour through Ohio in 1984 (Prial).

Before its recession from the American consciousness, Wendell Willkie rode the Pioneer on a Whistle Stop Tour in a bid to unseat the then-two-term President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a trip that would be documented by Muriel Rukeyser in her long-form poem, "Campaign." A polysensorial examination of this Whistle Stop Tour can help us piece together what the aforementioned political scientists and historians could not recreate: the observation car's transition from window to the world to spectacle on stage. Rukeyser's poem goes further, complicating the concept of spectacle by invoking other stratigraphic potentialities of the railcar to blur the line that demarcates the spectacle from the spectator. What follows from this point is a de/reterritorialized railspace where actor and audience conflate and the spectacle is revealed as a zero-sum event. In other words, where a rider would normally be able to mark the railcar as their territory, Rukeyser's poem—through what Gander calls "semiotic ambiguity" (Muriel 103)— de-territorializes the railspace and helps shake it free from the grasp of ownership

claimed by the rider. The space then becomes discursively re-territorialized into a space where the rider is prone to objectification by the reader and/or audience. [9]

ONE LIFE, "Campaign"

In "Campaign," Rukeyser writes the most nuanced re-creation of the observation car and the Whistle Stop Tour. Written within her poetic biography of businessman and presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, *One Life*, "Campaign" follows Willkie on his seven-week, 17,300-mile tour through 30 states in his bid for presidency over Roosevelt in 1940. Rukeyser constructs *One Life* as a long-form documentary poem, using a collage of real quotes from newspapers, autobiographical sketches, and political speeches alongside poetic re-creations of real events from Willkie's life. Catherine Gander situates *One Life* within a series of documentary poetry-based biographies written by Rukeyser, within which the poet "constructs compound portraits of exemplary lives in order to demonstrate what she believes to be ideal ways of approaching the world" (*Muriel* 112-13). This fits within the larger scope of Gander's text—and in fact, much of Gander's scholarly trajectory—as she seeks to situate the poet "firmly in the canon of essential twentieth-century American poets and acknowledg[e] her role as a critical cultural figure of her age," ultimately arguing "for a distinct and direct correlation between Rukeyser's writing and the modes, techniques and ideologies of the documentary movement as it flourished during the 1930s" (*Muriel* 1, 2). Others have taken on Gander's task as their own, both in their acknowledgement of the poet's role in shaping the genre of documentary poetics and in their estimation as an essential, canonized poet. Elisabeth Däumer introduces a collection of Rukeyser's scholarship in the Journal of Narrative Theory by calling

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[9] The term is loaded with meaning imbued by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, and it shall be unpacked more thoroughly when discussing the railroad terminus in chapter three.

attention to the poet's ability to "push[] against the conventional boundaries that still to this day demarcate the proper realm of the poetic" (247). Several recent dissertations discuss Rukeyser's methods of writing documentary poetry.[10] Yet all roads lead back to Gander's extensive scholarship on Rukeyser and the poet's role in shaping the genre of documentary poetics. The genre is one aptly suited for the description of the landscape through the observation car, a high velocity railspace that relays information anachronistically by montage, which is to say, through a collage of information assembled into a readable layout of the perceived world.

The massive ambition of Willkie's Whistle Stop Tour ensured that he would only see the country in passing. Totaling 18,789 miles over 31 states in seven weeks, the campaign took Willkie from Rushville, Indiana over to New Mexico before doubling back and heading to New York City (Neal 143).[11] Viewing and describing the crowds and the landscape perceived at such a pace requires a new technique—montage— wherein the subject processes sequences of images rapidly. It is through this technique that we can analyze the accumulation of images Willkie encounters as he merges with the spectacle of the observation car. Rukeyser intuits this herself when she relays Willkie's kinetic awareness of the speed at which he is traveling:

At a certain moment the railway forfeits metal,

Speed seizes this track, we are going fast.

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[10] cf. Nasaif, F. K. I. (2015) *Muriel Rukeyser: Poetry and the Body*. University of Reading; Kingsley, Anne (2015) *"'A poem among the diagrams'": Poetry as Archival Work in Muriel Rukeyser, Susan Howe, and M. Nourbese Philip*. Northeastern University; Grieve, Sarah (2015) *Environmental Justice Witnessing in the Modernist Poetry of Lola Ridge, Muriel Rukeyser, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Elizabeth Bishop*. Arizona State University.

[11] Rukeyser tallies the mileage at 17,300, though she may be taking poetic license; Neal's biography of Willkie lists the former number, which is corroborated by The Lilly Library at Indiana University Bloomington, home of Willkie's papers.

> The calendar's contagions, days, declarations,
>
> Flaunted away on a Hollywood montage. (134)

Despite Rukeyser explicitly calling out montage only once in the poem, no less as an action through which details are "flaunted away," the technique—as generated by American railspace—exists on a deeper level, in the marrow of the American imagination. Rukeyser knew as much, explaining in *The Life of Poetry* that "The rhythm of these sequences are film rhythm, the form is montage; and movies could easily be made of these poems, in which the lines in the longer, more sustained speech rhythms would serve as sound track" (84).[12] Within "Campaign," this rhythm plays out by forming poetic reveries of memory in verse, with prose paragraphs of documentation interrupting the memory and providing background to the scene. The aforementioned scene, wherein Willkie notices the speed of the rail, incites one such reverie / nightmare, punctuated by a rapid succession of despairing images:

> girls away at a dance...
>
> Lost villages, my frontier,...
>
> My brothers who will never vote for me.
>
> My lost self who will never vote for me
>
> *
>
> He forgets. 30 states in 7 weeks. (135)

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[12] For more on how film—specifically the films of Sergei Eisenstein—influenced Rukeyser, see Gander, *Muriel Rukeyser and Documentary*, pp. 100-103.

Though Willkie loses himself in this montage of images, ostensibly forgetting and flailing and despairing, the "sound track" to his life at this moment indicates that even these fleeting images are part of his heroic progress: "*Freedom is not just a set of laws. It is the ability of men to make these infinite combinations between one another, and between the communities in which they live. ...And so we say to you: Bring us together*" (136). "Freedom" for Willkie, writes Rukeyser, contains "infinite combinations" such as the ones he experiences in the earlier montage. Gander notes that montage, for Rukeyser, allows the poet to assemble a collection of images presented to the reader rapidly. In stitching these images together to perceive a unified narrative, the reader fills in the blanks and creates a "third image" that provides new meaning (103). Ultimately, Gander argues that Rukeyser uses montage to depict Willkie's "personal awakening through a procession of images" (104). In this case, the "third image" constructed between the interplay of images and "sound track" is one that illustrates Willkie's hope and determination, even in the midst of despair. It is this process of transformation and not Willkie himself, argues Gander, that Rukeyser seeks to heroize (98).

Apart from Rukeyser's general proclivity toward montage in her documentary poetry, Wolfgang Schivelbusch's reading of Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is the first time that the act of watching the landscape from a moving train is equated to this filmic technique. By montage, or "the juxtaposition of the most disparate images into one unit—the new reality of annihilated in-between spaces"—the reality created by the speed at which passengers travel by rail—"finds its clearest expression: the film brings things closer to the viewer as well as closer together" (Schivelbusch 42). Within the whistle-stopping observation car, it is enough to call attention to the technique's ability to force an encounter between rider and onlooker and briefly examine how this "new pattern of narrative construction"

provides "a model for a serial and sequential ordering...of narrative situations and events" within which Rukeyser situates Willkie (Ceserani 5). As such, Rukeyser's poetry moves beyond a character study of Willkie and becomes vital to the discursive construction of the observation car's railspace as a site of transformation. Rukeyser recognizes the potential for the observation car to be a space of spectacle as much as it is a space of observation. It is a railspace perceived and experienced through montage and documentary poetics. Both of these forms bring the reader/audience and the author/actor "closer together" and affect a "personal awakening through a procession of images" that extends well beyond Willkie himself.

Through the poem, Rukeyser brings to life the risk that John F. Kennedy later put into words: from an observation car platform, "there is no chance to use gimmicks to dress up a candidate. *The campaign train exposes him as he is*" (Withers 281, emphasis mine). This exposure ranges across the senses: the train exposes Willkie to the harsh glare of the sun, the monotonous din and vibration of the wheels, the taste and smell of smoke on the air. Rukeyser weaves all of these senses and more into her description of Willkie, his Whistle Stop Tour, and the train itself, often conflating the three and exposing the candidate as a pure spectacle.

Rukeyser infuses her poetry with rich sensory imagery, often playing the senses upon one another. In *The Life of Poetry*, the poet herself supposes that "No one sense is employed in perceiving a work of art, and probably no one sense is ever employed alone" (134). Rukeyser practices these beliefs throughout her oeuvre, with the "synaesthetic meeting-place of human beings, of modes of human consciousness, and of communication" fueling the muckraking poetry of *The Book of the Dead* (Gander, "Senses" 192), and her exhaustive examination of Wendell Willkie. The verses within *One Life* then use olfactory, auditory, and tactile/vestibular imagery in a way that makes the long-form poem a lesson in how to create railspace

polysensorially. By constructing this railspace through all the senses, "Campaign" reveals the allure of the observation car for politicians—this mobile, speedy stage that seems to magically attract, retain, and incite an audience. The poem equally attempts to reaffirm the exhibitionism possible on the platform and to reconcile this spectacle with the earlier use of the observation car as a semi-private space for looking outward onto the landscape. In hinting at this original use, "Campaign" serves as a useful set-up for the interplay of publicity and privacy examined later in this chapter.

The visual imagery of Willkie's campaign oscillates between representations of its railspace as auditorium and stage, or as reiterated throughout the poem, "Distance and the crowd" (117, 128). Rukeyser uses the phrase at the beginning of "Campaign" to introduce how Willkie, an audience of one, perceives the landscape—as a never-ending "distance"—and the people who watch him while on display. In her descriptions of the visual scenes, Rukeyser uses ambiguous language that could describe passersby as looking at Willkie or Willkie looking back at them. During the first leg of the journey, there appears "eleven men standing at a railroad crossing / The arm of the signal swinging Stop red Look red Listen. / Stop. People standing, looking separate in the morning air" (117). This small audience is "looking separate" at Willkie as much as they are "looking separate" to Willkie. The same is true for every person Rukeyser describes, from "a man in overalls walking the eleventh furrow" to "The hard eyes of bigots. The hard eyes of the poor" to "People standing, still and lonely-looking in the thin, chill air" (122, 136), the reader remains unsure about who is the subject and object. Every crowd both sees the stage and is seen by the candidate on it, if only for a moment, in passing. In this sense, and as indicated by the elimination of the word when Willkie ultimately speaks at Madison Square Garden—here there is no "distance," only "The crowd" (141)—"distance" does not just

describe Willkie's travel across the country; "distance" is the proximity of Willkie to his audience. "Distance" is the opportunity to remain apart, in order to draw the audience in, to aggregate and maintain the crowd.

While Willkie looks outward to "the famous view" of the receding landscape, his crowds look in on him with uncertain effect (Rukeyser 132). From the start of the Whistle Stop Tour, Willkie's audience is largely unresponsive. Near Chicago, the crowds stare blankly at Willkie:

> They shine in their leather, but they make no sign.
>
> …They make no sign.
>
> In their stained aprons they listen, standing; they turn
>
> Back to the cool immense bloodyards. (118)

In Tucumcari, New Mexico, a "great pure Apache watches from his eyes" and simply "stares at the candidate" (124). What is important here is not the crowd's lack of enthusiasm, but the fact that Willkie can attract it and maintain their stare with the act of speaking from the train. Even if the message itself is an uninspiring one, like in Albuquerque, reporters still "said it was the largest rally in the state's history" (125). The spectacle of seeing a presidential candidate on the platform makes people curious enough to come see it. The Whistle Stop Tour manifests an audience through the novelty of seeing an imposing machine at rest display a political candidate. While not in motion, the observation platform naturally creates an outdoor thrust stage, where the actor/candidate can be seen and heard from three sides.

The Whistle Stop Tour transgresses the norms of the railroad, one of which being the use of the observation deck by riders to look out to the rapidly receding landscape. To recall our

earlier point, the observation car was created and marketed as a space for rail passengers to visually take in a panoramic view of the landscape. The railspace enabled a view out to the landscape, not a view in. But when the train does something that runs counter to its nature—that is, remains at rest and/or gives its riders access to its outdoor platforms—the laws of the train break down, and a spectacle manifests. Giorgio Agamben alludes to this act of creating the spectacle in his definition of "use" as all quotidian performance and action: "What cannot be used is, as such, given over to...spectacular exhibition" (82). In other words, this quirky theater-space attracts an audience through sheer novelty and attraction to the show at-hand. Thus, back in Albuquerque, people "invisible" from an airplane now "Came down / To bleachers piled with local cotton and beef" amongst "Hills of oranges, glass honey-hives" to see Wendell Willkie speak from the back of the Willkie Special (Rukeyser 125). The question remains as to whether or not the image is unique enough to the audience to create a spectacle.

In a poetic dialogue between undefined supporters and detractors, Republican boosters imagine Willkie as a "giant" on the observation platform who stands eye-to-eye with Roosevelt, before others quickly argue upon and reconstitute Willkie's appearance in a brief dialogue:

> He's not a giant!
>
> He draws his crowds.
>
> Dead whales on flatcars draw their crowds.
>
> Nobody votes for a dead whale. (126)

Just as the whale show uses a specially built railcar platform to present the spectacle, so too does Rukeyser's candidate stump across the country in his 12-car "Willkie Special." By equating Willkie with a dead whale in the attempt to attract large audiences (with a potentially uninspiring

message), Rukeyser presents the possibilities and limitations of the Whistle Stop Tour with regard to its ability to produce and maintain a spectacle.

Any large-scale spectacle displayed upon the observation deck will command an audience, as proven in the 1930s with the "whale shows" to which Rukeyser alludes (Boyett). During one such show, "a monster whale…a 60-ton mammal…a specimen of the largest animal ever created" was displayed upon a railcar in Henderson, Kentucky ("Whale Car"). As reported by the Henderson Gleaner, each stop of the specially- designed Whale Car attracted hundreds of students and adults to the spectacle. The event does not relay any new information to the crowd—children recite whale facts from their school lessons and ask rudimentary questions like "is the whale dangerous?" The whale is accompanied by a nostalgia-filled whale hunter, who reminisces on how difficult it used to be to hunt the creatures, before explaining that the explosions used to kill this whale are quite ordinary, and there is no "danger or excitement in whaling any more" ("Whale Car"). Despite the relative ease in which the whale was killed and displayed and the lack of a complementary compelling message, like Willkie, the sheer novelty of the event alone is enough to drive an audience to each stop.

Their similarities extend beyond the unique absurdity each presents upon the observation deck. The whale, an otherwise apex submarine creature that thrives out of sight, is killed in order to be seen; its carcass is presented as a carnivalesque science lesson for children at every stop. So too is Willkie, an otherwise compelling presidential candidate, momentarily laid bare as a despairing, lifeless novelty civics lesson as he is paraded across the countryside while lamenting about "my lost self who will never vote for me." In the manufacturing of the whale's corpse, life is stripped from the creature to produce a spectacle; the Whistle Stop Tour whittles lively debate about political change down to practiced quotes shouted and gestured from

observation platforms. In each case, the spectacle is based upon two interrelated ideas: one, through observation, the real becomes objectified and thus, artificial (e.g., the whale is killed to be seen and Willkie's message becomes inert); two, the very singularity that attracts an audience to an object (a dead whale, a Whistle Stop Tour) is made common by its recurrence throughout the countryside on the observation platform, and yet this commonality does not water down the marvelousness of the spectacle for each audience. In fact, this recurrence aggregates the experience into a larger and larger spectacle while simultaneously mass-producing it to become paradoxically an omnipresent singularity. When combined, these actions undertaken as part of the Whistle Stop Tour and whale show delimit the observation car as a railspace that produces and reproduces spectacle easily, though the spectacle created as such is restricted to the realm of vision. How then do other senses collaborate to create spectacular railspace?

Rukeyser visually sets up a behind-the-scenes look at the political players witnessing Willkie's performance from the proverbial wings of the stage. In doing so, she introduces the role that sound plays in the creation of railspace, particularly in its collaboration with the senses of feeling and balance to physically inculcate the candidate into the railspace. Rukeyser provides another "sound track" to transcribe this backstage chatter: "*On the campaign train is a lounge car for the 'boll weevils.' The local politicians. They are criticizing Willkie's inability to 'get political.' …Every now and then we wonder whether he isn't beginning to talk mechanically.*" (133, author's emphasis). This brief scene illustrates a railspace that contains various people potentially destabilizing the visual spectacle of Willkie's Whistle Stop Tour by calling into question the candidate's effectiveness and lamenting his monotony. However, their ear for Willkie's "mechanical" talk hints at the candidate's gradual transformation into becoming part of the actual railspace and as such, effectively producing and maintaining the spectacle. Rukeyser

invokes polysensorial imagery like this to merge Willkie with the railroad, bringing in senses beyond sight and using what Gander calls "semiotic ambiguity" to re-signify Willkie as a symbol built into the observation deck, the train, the railroad (*Muriel* 103). This interwoven sensory imagery merges the candidate-as-spectacle with the railspace-as-spectacle to give credence to Rukeyser's belief in the "efficacy of the symbol" through the "liberating and energising effects of velocity" (Tales 335), ultimately portraying Willkie himself as a map that lays out "the ideal way of approaching the world" (Gander, *Muriel* 113).

The auditory imagery of "Campaign" aligns the candidate—specifically his voice—with the sound of the rail. This connection makes solid the role of the individual in constructing railspace—through sound and feeling, the candidate both shapes and conforms to the observation car. Rukeyser finds commonality between the stage-voice projection that is possible on (and limited by) the observation platform and the unceasing echoes of the steel-on-steel train and rail. She describes Willkie sitting "on this side or that side of the balcony" of the rearmost car, traveling east and practicing his speeches, which, due to the speed and length of travel and the surrounding noise, "begin to be unreal to him" (132). Here, Willkie is "On the red rails, the train hurling his words / Down all the arteries of tears" (132). With his voice echoed and amplified by the rail, the candidate lets the railspace carry his message for him. Without the ability to define himself apart from the railspace through his voice, Willkie becomes disoriented and lost in thought, "dizzy and blind" (133). This calls the reader's attention to earlier descriptions of the importance of Willkie's voice in self-reaffirmation of the candidate's ability to become president. "From the throat he can rally strength" and "Voice did this, Willkie heard the memory, / Voice, get me out again!" (119, 121), Rukeyser notes, during one of Willkie's daydreams about losing his voice like Roosevelt lost the use of his legs.

From the observation platform, Willie's voice rallies the strength of the people at the cost of his own, highlighting the auditory limitations of the observation car and suggesting the interplay of the senses as they conflate Willkie with the rail. Choosing not to use a microphone for his whistle-stop speeches, Willkie strains his voice and endangers his campaign in the process. Willkie's advisers bring a throat specialist on board to examine the candidate (Neal 146-147). Rukeyser's verse dramatizes it as such:

> Doctor Barnard hearing
>
> The rasping impossible voice under the beating light,
>
> Rocking among the train: My God, I can't make him stop.
>
> He goes right on night and day.
>
>   Words traveling
>
> Straight on the land. (121-122)

Willkie's voice reverberates around descriptors like "rasping," "beating," and "rocking," which all suggest something rhythmically enduring to his speech, like feeling the pulse of the train tracks while traveling by rail. Using this railspace as an amplifier, Willkie channels his "impossible" voice into a straight-lined trajectory along the landscape.

The trajectory of Willkie's voice mirrors the trajectory of his body, now inextricably merged with the railroad. On this ride, the rail alternates between smooth, straight stretches across the landscape and jarring, bumping jolts felt by all passengers. Rukeyser describes the

journey as a "plexus of rails" in Willkie's own body (134).[13]   Throughout the "Campaign," the train incorporates Willkie auditorily, kinetically, and vestibularly. Willkie is "bull-thewed...in rocking corridors, talking torrents, his arms making giant swipes in the dark air" while he feels the speed at which he travels (137). At other times he perceives the smoothness and straightness of the rails (while articulating its stratigraphic imperfections). After an invocation of "Distance and the crowd," our focus shifts to the rails:

> The track, the development, the tracks on their light-gray crystal,
>
> The knotless, nodeless line. Stuck into water-light.
>
> No but knotted, cloved, notched, scarred, travel brightened by tears,
>
> Good steel rails and riding them
>
> Development riding onto the tracks of law.[14] (128)

The "semiotic ambiguity" created by Rukeyser in these lines conflates Willkie both with the "knotless, nodeless" rails and the "development" riding upon them. In merging the two and reiterating (and celebrating) the rail's uninterrupted straight line, Rukeyser indicates her preference for how to read Willkie within and as part of the railspace and gives us an encapsulation of how spectacle operates within the observation car.

Attending to Rukeyser's dependence on geologic and geometric symbols such as the precipice, the boulder, and the spiral in her documentary poetry, Bryn Tales quotes *The Life of*

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[13] Further considerations of the vestibular sense and the railroad's effect on the nervous system are featured in Harrington's "On the Tracks of Trauma: Railway Spine Reconsidered."

[14] Chapter three discusses in depth the stratigraphy of railspace, particularly of railroad tracks. Here it suffices to say that Rukeyser recognizes the physical labor that went into making these "knotted, cloved, notched, scarred" rails with the same sensitivity that Willkie physically feels them.

Poetry and argues that the poet "offers the diagrammatic symbol as a depiction of the process by which we consciously question 'the existence of the problem of the relationship of movement with life.' They offer us, in their diagrammatic form, the chance to conceptualise and view our agency, or lack of agency, in the midst of relationships." (335). If we take minor liberty with what Tales would consider a diagram, then the straight line that Willkie inhabits through his immersion into railspace becomes its own sort of diagrammatic symbol for Rukeyser. In this symbol, the straight, "knotless, nodeless line" runs uninterrupted because it is the pathway of the hero, of Willkie, of the "ideal way." Following this trajectory still demands a sensitivity to how the "tracks of law" are created—with "travel brightened by tears" of laborers, which the railroad then manifests as "knotted, cloved, notched, scarred" rails. The straight line ultimately suggests progress forward across a level route. Along the way, others can see, track, and follow clearly, paralleled by Willkie's continuous forward motion across "30 states in 7 weeks," which constantly exposes him to the view of the audience. Rukeyser employs this symbol of the straight line to meditate upon Willkie's agency (or lack thereof) during his Whistle Stop Tour and extrapolates that meditation to comment on his entire life. For Rukeyser, the observation car is a manifestation of this two-dimensional symbol, with which Willkie navigates the "relationship of movement with life." Furthermore, by describing Willkie as feeling the "plexus of rails" in his body and sonically equating his "talking torrents" with the train's "rocking corridors," Willkie becomes part of this symbol himself, thus developing Rukeyser's long-form attempt to read the candidate as an actualized diagram of the "ideal life" and which, incidentally, further incorporates the individual rider into the railspace as a component perpetually exposed to spectacle. The byproduct of this polysensorial stitching- together (and central to my own argument) is the revelation of the observation deck as a railspace invested in the production of

all-encompassing spectacle, both of the landscape and itself. Rukeyser symbolizes the

"energising [sic] effects of velocity" through Willkie's unceasing straight line of a Whistle Stop

Tour, which attracts and accumulates audiences as it runs along the railroad track.

Simultaneously, when viewed by the observation car rider, the entire landscape rests upon the

straight line of the horizon, displaying the natural spectacle to rail riders.

In "Campaign," Rukeyser describes the Willkie Special as a railspace that transforms the

observation platform from a space reserved for the rider to view the landscape into one upon

which a candidate performs for an audience. While Rukeyser lays out this change on the page,

the Ferdinand Magellan manifests it within physical railspace. Doubling back to the Magellan

affords us the opportunity to tie together "Campaign" with a physically constructed presidential

railspace in order to investigate its opportunities for concealment and to cast a line out to chapter

two's discussion of privacy in railspace.

Built in 1929, the Ferdinand Magellan is one of the last of the business class cars

developed by the Pullman Company, and it accumulated all of the security features of the past

iterations of private railcars. It was retrofitted with target hardening equipment and an alteration

to railroad right-of-way practices to accommodate for the security of the President (Waggoner).

Cully Waggoner, Train Master and Director of the Gold Coast Railroad Museum, notes that

every train ceded its rail to the Magellan when traveling in proximity to the president. This

right-of-way process helped to ensure the security and uninterrupted progress of the president

while the train was moving. Other security features further defined the Magellan apart from the

typical business class car. The president's railcar had three-inch thick bulletproof windows, a

triple-locked door to its observation platform, an escape hatch on the roof, and steel plates added

to the outside walls. These features made the railcar weigh 285,000 pounds, by far the heaviest

railcar at that time. The Magellan, or "U.S. Railcar No. 1," was unmarked as a government vehicle, and was painted green, characteristic of other Pullman cars of the same type (Waggoner).[15]

The added security of the Magellan makes the railcar distinct from other rolling stock of its class and accentuates the line between publicity and privacy manifested within the observation car. The reinforced walls and windows separated and secured the president, his family, and his staff, along with a 1,500-pound door that "looked like the entrance to a bank vault" (Withers 384) and provided access to the rear observation deck. Crossing the threshold of the door frame onto the deck, security gives way to spectacle: mounted speakers, decorative ribbons, and an elevated stage in front of a proscenium arch all serve to aggregate an audience at each whistle stop.

The vastly increased security parameters and attempts at anonymity (e.g., no indication that it is the president's railcar, uniform coloring) run counter to the Magellan's ability to produce a spectacle from the observation deck. These paradoxical features underscore the common theme across all iterations of the observation car—this railspace is a machine that produces spectacle through aggregation, siphoning off, and redirection of vision and observation. Perhaps in the production of spectacle, and the resultant tripartite relationship between seeing, being seen, and seeking obscurity, the observation car reveals that, at least within railspace, spectacle is a zero-sum event, where surveillance is always directed toward or away from a specific space, with attention aggregating in one location or in one direction at the expense of another. What remains to be seen, quite literally, is an examination of what is left behind

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[15] The Gold Coast Railroad Museum applied for the use of the Seal of the President of the United States upon the railcar's observation platform while on display at the museum.

following the redirection of attention toward the spectacle and what opportunities does this residual railspace provide for those who can take advantage of its unlit corners?

Chapter Two

Fear and Contest in the Passenger Car through Naturalism and *Noir*

As with the observation car, the passenger car is comprised of a portfolio of discourses that shapes its railspace. Unlike the observation car, the passenger car's intertextuality is dangerous rather than spectacular. With heavy influence from *noir*-based literary and filmic texts, this discourse increases the perception of the passenger car as a railspace that generates fear and discomfort among its riders. The discomfiture of the railspace infects riders with what cultural geographer Doreen Massey calls the nostalgia of "traveling imaginations" (117), where travelers search for a place—ultimately imagined and un-locatable—that evokes the safety and security of the past (124-125). In the cramped quarters of the passenger car, rail riders navigate around and through this unease in relation to each other. As a "product of social relations," this space is "altered" by these travelers, who "participate in its continued production" (Massey 117, 118). Riders develop and execute tactics of navigation that shape the railspace with their actions. The texts employed here not only depict the danger of the passenger car but also describe riders who navigate through it with varying degrees of success. When charted, the riders' tactical maneuvers and navigations delimit a railspace that is, at its core, metonymic. That is to say, it is a space that forces its riders and readers to be sensitive to and dependent upon shortcuts, elisions, economical movement, and "contiguity" (Cohan 29). Fictional characters operating within this metonymy amplify fear and unease in the railcar and shape the passenger car's railspace into a zone of contestation that sets riders against one another.

To establish the map of the passenger car's railspace, this chapter first introduces the texts best suited for its cartography and the geocritical tools needed. The geocritical tenet of intertextuality is briefly revisited to establish the usefulness of taking up pairs of texts—that is,

novels and their adaptations into film—in the analysis of railspace. A definition of the passenger

car itself and a synthesis of the concepts of strategies and tactics as developed by Michel de

Certeau follow. Railroad critics appropriate de Certeau's theories to discuss railway travel in

England and hobo culture in America.[1] Both will be taken up here. John Lennon, the American

rail critic who most extensively takes up de Certeau's concepts, points the way forward for how

strategies and tactics generate fear along the railroad corridor, opening the door for a discussion

on film and literary *noir* as it amplifies this tone. As two of the textual pairs discussed in this

chapter fall within the *noir* genre, with the other in the antecedent genre of naturalism, a

discussion on genre follows. Conventions of these genres beget the narrative device of

metonymy, the central mode through which these authors and directors discursively shape the

railspace of the passenger car.

The subsequent readings of three pairs of literary and filmic texts are informed by an

understanding of the device and the ways riders experience the passenger car as a site of

contestation. In the naturalist novel *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser deliberately articulates the

interiority of his protagonist and her first foil, gesturing toward the ways in which passengers

spatially negotiate with one another in the railcar. The novel's filmic adaptation directed by

William Wyler stages the railcar as a space that Carrie feels is inescapable. The mise-en-scène

frames Carrie's claustrophobia and the minute movements she makes to retain some privacy.

Double Indemnity establishes metonymy as the central device through which fear and unease

dominate the discourse of the railspace, particularly in its filmic adaptation by director Billy

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[1] Generally, British texts favor the term "railway" over "railroad." There is no semantic difference in terminology here. Though the study is limited in scope to the American railroad and its creation of railspace through literature and culture, European texts such as de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* and Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey* speak to universal characteristics of the railroad/way, and as such, I lean on them liberally. Others, like the articles cited here by Bissell and Bailey, speak to specifically British characteristics. As such, I only touch upon their ideas here to provide a survey of railroad cultural criticism.

Wilder. It's protagonist (and main rider), Walter Huff, leverages other riders' fears in this space and moves about the passenger car freely, cloaked in shadow. In *Strangers on a Train*, Patricia Highsmith describes a collaboratively constructed railspace, where riders shape the passenger car through their transgressions against and reactions to one another's movements. Alfred Hitchcock adapts Highsmith's novel into a more insidious contest between the two riders. These three textual pairings shape the passenger car into a railspace that is defined by its riders and their encounters with one another. They reveal a passenger car that is predicated upon fear and pliable through transgression.

As with the observation car in chapter one, the passenger car's railspace is best diagrammed by using a multiplicity of perspectives. Multifocalism brings into view the different facets each text lends to the space. *Sister Carrie*'s opening scenes demonstrate the threats particular to women in the passenger car and gesture toward the claustrophobia and general unease felt by riders upon whom transgressive riders encroach. Cain's *Double Indemnity* meticulously follows Walter as he develops and executes his plan, highlighting the predominant role that sight plays. Wilder turns the camera on the strategies of the railroad and other riders, and he activates brief metonymic snapshots of Walter that serve as encapsulating symbols of fear and danger in railspace. In this way, Cain's *Double Indemnity* shows the rail rider's visually based tactics more deliberately than its filmic counterpart, and Wilder's version more ably sets the discursive tone for the railspace. In Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*, Bruno mirrors Guy as a doppelgänger, one who deploys tactics against his fellow rider that amplify the claustrophobia-inducing characteristics of the passenger car. Hitchcock's adaptation streamlines the relationship between the two characters by maintaining Guy's innocence and invoking imagery that puts the characters in direct contest with one another and on more equal footing. More than Wilder,

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Hitchcock does more to show the physical proximity and interaction between riders as they navigate the railspace together.

This chapter contains various components that warrant more thorough explication, namely the concept of the passenger car itself, the interplay between strategies and tactics, the geocritical tenet of intertextuality, and metonymy. The category "passenger car" encompasses many different railcars, namely, the private Pullman car, the lounge car, the dining car, even the observation car discussed in chapter one. Nearly every space inside the train that is designed to contain (and control) riders can be defined as a passenger car, as demonstrated by John H. White Jr. in his oversized two-volume compendium, *The American Railroad Passenger Car*. White presents the difficulties in pinning down the passenger car as one railcar when he enumerates basic questions about the railcar to suggest how different each can look: "what they looked like at various periods, how they were made, what materials went into their construction, who made them, how the interiors were arranged, how many of each type were in service, and what they cost" (xi). He understates the scope of the project by noting that "the subject is a complicated one, for the passenger car is a product of many crafts and technologies" (xi). For the purposes of this study, I embrace the all-encompassing nature of the passenger car. While the tactics of resistance and navigation among observation car riders might differ from those who ride in the coach or the dining car, their inclination toward undertaking these tactics remains uniform. As such, the texts discussed here depict characters who unfailingly attempt to reclaim agency from the train (and from each other), regardless of the type of passenger car within which they operate. As a category of rolling stock then, the passenger car can be loosely defined as any railcar designed for the paying rider.[2] The railspace discursively constructed between these passenger

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[2] The boxcar freeloader, the hobo, and the traveling tramp all profane the railroad more audaciously than the passenger car rider. In doing so, they repurpose railroad rolling stock, from boxcar to flatbed to passenger car and

cars and their riders amounts to a dangerous, exciting, and claustrophobia-inducing space whose passengers experience gradations of success in navigating through it.

While chapter one mainly used the geocritical tenets of multifocalism and polysensoriality to inform the reconstruction of the observation car, this chapter invokes the principle of intertextuality to compare textual adaptations. Intertextuality holds that real and fictional spaces perpetually "interface" with, and thus inform, one another (Westphal 170). In the passenger car, the interface between mimetic adaptation, the actual passenger car, and its riders discursively constructs its railspace and thus informs its conceptualization in reality. In every intertextually created space, "The virtual properties expressed through the narrative will be added to the progressively actualized properties of the referent" (Westphal 102). The referent in this case is the passenger car itself. But geocritical intertextuality also works in the opposite direction—real and fictional spaces perpetually "interface" with, and thus inform, one another. It is the geocritic's duty to explore this system in order to "bring into closer rapport the library and the world" (Westphal 170). This proximity between the literary text, the film, and the actual passenger car develops the tension that subverts the behavioral norms of the railroad and keeps the railspace open for transgression. Put another way: an intertextual reading brings textual adaptations together with the referent railcar. It reveals the passenger car's contested spaces and shines light on its riders, who negotiate for privacy with each other and with the space itself. Riders experience this negotiation as tension; by seeking out ways to relieve it, riders transgress the unarticulated rules of the railroad.

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thus deconstruct even the most general definition of the latter. Furthermore, hobos act upon constituted objects (that is, constituted discursively, with metonymies and metaphors) rather than the 'real world' objects themselves (Wanderer 131). For a look at how hobos use metonymy, metaphor, and symbolism as a secret discourse on the world (and how that discourse creates a reality for them), see Wanderer, Jules.

When exploring the strategies of control in railspace and tactics of riders' resistance, this chapter leans heavily on the work of Jesuit philosopher Michel de Certeau. De Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, explores how the urban pedestrian literally navigates through the city by employing tactics that momentarily bypass and reshape the norms set by its urban strategic design. In the middle of this text, de Certeau briefly discusses the railroad as an example of a system of "traveling incarceration" wherein its riders are immobile and cannot execute the tactics undertaken by the urban pedestrian (111). However, de Certeau fails to imagine the micro-tactics of the "incarcerated" rail passenger. By applying his own concepts of "strategies" and "tactics" to the passenger car, I will arrive at the ways in which the rail rider has more potential for tactical resistance than de Certeau purports.

De Certeau defines "strategies" and "tactics" in reference to their relationships with space. While "a strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propere*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it," a tactic "cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization). ...It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances" (xix). It can be said then that strategies generate from what is situated as "proper"—i.e., they are the rules of a well-paved road. Tactics are executed improvisationally in an already-codified situation; any "independence" claimed through tactical efforts is achieved within the "circumstances" in which one finds him/herself. Strategies belong to the place; tactics belong to those who operate in it. De Certeau encapsulates these terms by proposing that

> strategies are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the
>
> property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalizing
>
> discourses) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces

are distributed. ...Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc. (de Certeau 38)

Strategies "elaborate" systems, and these systems themselves have the ability to articulate places that contain power dynamics. Strategies themselves are not really constitutive; rather the systems that these strategies help to describe, argues de Certeau, are the constitutive elements of a place. Likewise, tactics only make sense as efforts conducted in time. Most relevant to the passenger car: they make increasing sense when discussed alongside "the rapidity of the movements that *change the organization of a space*" (my emphasis). Tactics in this case are not themselves constitutive either; they instead give "pertinence" to the processes within a space that organize that space. So, both strategies and tactics are indications that reveal how systems and circumstances shape a space, particularly one that expects "proper" behavior while simultaneously keeping itself open to "heterogeneous rhythms" of movement.

When combined with a regimented schedule, the railroad establishes a "place of power" and gestures to a "proper" mode of operating that can be elaborated upon by a set of strategies. The railroad's macro-level organization of the landscape through which it travels is this set of strategies, for "what once was wild, dangerous frontier space suddenly becomes property as the iron rails are secured in the ground. These tracks define, categorize, and regulate the environment—something passengers are oblivious to when they sit in their assigned seats" (Lennon 39). Simultaneously, the open space within the passenger car (cf. "Room to Roam,"

figure 2, ch. 1) and unplanned encounters between riders provide opportunities for tactical efforts within the railspace. *Sister Carrie*, *Double Indemnity*, and *Strangers on a Train* depict the way strategies and tactics circumscribe the contests between the railroad and its riders and between the riders themselves. In the scenes set in the passenger car, riders demonstrate successful and failing attempts at tactical execution. Like the spurious amateur attendant who grabs your bags without you asking and then demands a tip or the entrepreneurial busker who performs on the subway and passes a hat around to a captive audience, the most successful rail passengers are the ones who leverage railroad strategies (in these cases, the hurried boarding process and the congregation of riders in a subway car) to impose upon other riders. They deploy tactics in ways that "change the organization" of the railspace.

De Certeau's brief discussion of mobility and incarceration on the railroad in *The Practice of Everyday Life* has informed most of the cultural criticism about the railroad that follows in its wake. There are a number of British texts that tackle de Certeau's theory of the everyday. Nigel Thrift introduces the automobile to de Certeau's theories of pedestrian activity in the city. Thrift "shows the world of driving to be as rich and convoluted as that of walking" and, while acknowledging the technological genesis of both the automobile and the railroad, finds them too dissimilar for his purposes (45).[3] In aligning the car to the pedestrian (and in opposition to the railroad), Thrift lays out the tactics of driving in the city and points to the "extraordinarily complex everyday ecology of driving" (48). David Bissell describes the experience of "differently-mobile passengers" as they experience the British railway station (176). He cites de Certeau as well to highlight the improvisational and constitutive abilities of

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[3] Ultimately, Thrift contends that the automobile challenges de Certeau's theories of "everyday" urbanity. The railroad operates on the margins of the automotive streetscape of the city and operates largely outside of the scope of Thrift's article.

"tactics" as they are "developed through active, exploratory encounters rather than planned in advance" (186). To prove that differently-mobile, "encumbered" passengers adopt these tactics to operate in the railway station, Bissell points to Tim Ingold's concept of the "taskscape, which emphasizes the importance of understanding places as produced through embodied practices" (186).[4] Peter Bailey surveys Victorian literature and culture to re-cast the alienation experienced in the era—and magnified by the British railway—and argues that it was "neither as uniformly oppressive nor as unrelenting as its principal nineteenth century theorists claimed" (13). Instead, "alienation and its anonymities could be conditions of opportunity that precipitated engagement, intimacy, and the modern erotic adventure" within "the new heterosocial, democratised spaces of the leisure zone, which by extension included the distinctive configuration of open, closed and negotiable space" that manifests within the Victorian railway car (13, 15).

In *Boxcar Politics*, John Lennon—one of the few American literary critics writing about the railroad—examines the varied ways hoboes navigated railspace and American society at-large from the inception of the transcontinental railroad through the passage of the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act, which hastened the end of the railroad as the American traveler's preferred method of crossing the country. Lennon agrees with de Certeau that the ticket-holding passenger is contractually immobile, docile, and without a series of tactics to upset order within railspace. Lennon contrasts this ticketed rider with the hobo in order to tease out the ways in which the latter executes the tactics that de Certeau brings to light. But Lennon does eventually hint at the way this passenger can establish control. Lennon describes the fear and anxiety generated by the railroad company's broken promise to keep the rider's privacy intact and comfort maintained.

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[4] In his belief that meaning "does not cover the world but is immanent in the contexts of people's pragmatic engagements with its constituents" (Ingold 154), Ingold aligns his "taskscape" with de Certeau's tactics, Ziegler's discursive tactics, and Westphal's geocritical intertextuality. For a discussion on "discursive tactics," see Ziegler 286-291.

According to Lennon, the rider sits in a well-lit railcar, forgetting the rocky terrain, the ostensibly dangerous neighborhoods, and the darkness outside and enjoying a "comfortable cushion" from these elements. "That is why," states Lennon, "when that order is disrupted, the anxiety and betrayal passengers feel is of such great magnitude" (40). The cushioned, docile rider is prone to anxiety when faced with the disorder of the railcar. Better to remain aware of the surrounding darkness and danger, and even better if the rider takes up an active role in creating disorder. In other words, the entrepreneurial passenger traffics in his co-riders' fears in order to gain control in the passenger car.

Double Indemnity operates wholly within the *noir* genre, a style that is well-versed in leveraging fear and unease to tell a story. Likewise, *Strangers on a Train* contains many of the elements of *noir* fiction. Through an "atmosphere of paranoia," the genre seeks out space that is fertile for "a crime of passion, a crime for money" (Ballinger 3).[5] *Film noir* marked a "new mood of cynicism, pessimism and darkness," most easily identifiable in the crime thrillers of the 1940s (Schrader 8). The unease and "moral ambiguity," demonstrated by characters in a film *noir* comes through in the form of "probing and imaginative camera work and stylized sets" (Crowther 55). Whereas in earlier films the actor is illuminated to stand out from the scenery, these *noir* films are low-lit, with the actors and scenery afforded the same lighting (Schrader 11). Likewise, in literary "American *Noir*" like Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*, "hidden selves, and murderous *doppelgangers*" creep "beneath the placid surfaces of everyday normalcy" (Payne 149, author's emphasis).[6] The *noir* genre destabilizes the shape of the passenger car.

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[5] Though *noir* characteristics differ from decade to decade (see Miklitsch xv-xx, particularly regarding the 1940s and 1950s), what remains throughout are the underlying moods of fear and unease, the concepts with which this chapter concerns itself.

[6] Admittedly, *Sister Carrie* is not part of the *noir* tradition. It is rather the central text of American naturalism, and its author, Theodore Dreiser "More than any other American novelist…has been associated with naturalism" (Gogol ix). According to Christopher Orr, film *noir* arrives as "an expression of specific developments within the naturalist tradition" (47). For similar arguments, see Lehan 228 and Jeff Jaeckle, "American Literary Naturalism and Film

Just as the "the familiar story of a declining tax base followed by urban decay" redefines the

subway as a diminished network its riders view as a "non-productive, chaotic, even terrifying

space" (Ziegler 289), so too does the fear generated by *noir* narratives redefine the passenger car

in the eyes of its riders.[7]

William Marling sources film *noir* back to these types of crime thrillers and detective

novels, dubbing them "roman *noir*" and noting that both styles "derive[ ] from the same techno-

economic matrix" (ix, 237). Part of this matrix is the railroad. Even when not directly invoked

in the text, the railroad aligns with roman and film *noir*. The roman *noir* takes on the

characteristic speed and straight-line trajectory of the railroad, as desire motivates the entire plot

of such novels, stripping away nuance and subplot in favor of a fast-paced, thrilling story. Joyce

Carol Oates describes "the visual and literary design of speed" that such novels create

(paraphrased in Marling 181). According to Oates, James M. Cain "narrowly conceived" a story

where the background becomes "blurred" and the narrative "streamlined" through the character's

desires (qtd. in Marling 180-81). In a line blatantly evocative of the railroad, Marling calls film

noir an "optimal vehicle [for] an infinitely consumable narrative of deterioration, invisibly

balanced by the techniques and technology of a narrative of improvement" (xv).[8] Ultimately, the

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Noir." Thus, as central texts of naturalism, the Dreiser's novel and Wyler's film are antecedents that contain hints of the conventions associated with *noir*.

[7] Fear has been a constitutive element of railspace from its earliest iterations, as one early rider encapsulates when recounting his first travel by rail, in 1868: "On my making some observations on the number of pistols that were forthcoming ready-loaded at a moment's notice, the gentleman seated next to me replied that it was quite possible that I was the only man unarmed on the train; in consequence of the frequent robberies no one ever thought of moving without his six-shooter" (Zincke, qtd. in Mencken 144). For the manifestation of fear on the British railway system, particularly during the Victorian Era, see Barrow 341-356; for the bonds that form during crisis in the Victorian railway carriage, see De Sapio. For the role that spectacular staged railroad crashes play in displaying the fearsome destructive potential of the train, see Schabacher 185-206. For the ways in which the railway passenger's anxieties begin and end in the rail station, see Löfgren 331-351.

[8] Reading the "optimal vehicle" as the train, the "infinitely consumable narrative of deterioration" finds a likeness in the train's ceaseless "annihilation of space and time," described in Schivelbusch 33-44. See also Benjamin, Walter. In this case, the "techniques and technologies" become the railroad's de Certeaulian strategies and the train's revolutionary capacities in the Industrial Age.

"streamlined" trajectory of this "vehicle" aligns with the rail rider's feelings of speed and inescapability in the passenger car.

This study is indebted to William Marling, not just for his explication of the roman *noir* but for his revelation about how metonymy operates in these texts. Marling keeps returning to this rhetorical device to read film *noir* adaptations against their literary source material. Metonymy is "a rhetorical device in which one term, through actual proximity or widespread association, has become closely enough identified with another term to signify it" (Cohan 28). Metonymy results, Marling argues, from the streamlining of the *noir* plot from page to screen (xv, 237-38). For Marling, and likewise, for the purposes of this chapter, metonymy lies at the heart of the film *noir*, though its genesis can be traced to the roman *noir* texts that precede film. Metonymy allows directors like Hitchcock and Wilder to "Eliminate steps" and strip their source material down to the studs and use visual cues to do the work of pages and pages of text (Marling 246).[9] Both Hitchcock and Wilder use this narrative device by lingering upon items, facial tics, and actions and in doing so, symbolize entire systems of power negotiated between rider and railspace. But metonymy also conceals, eliding nuance and replacing it with a short-hand representative symbol. A quasi-*tableau vivant* in *Double Indemnity* encapsulates the fear that is pervasive on the railroad; a tracking shot of train tracks evokes a sense of disorientation and doubling in *Strangers on a Train*. In each case, riders who understand these metonymic evocations are equally as adept at operating in the shadows of the passenger car and at tactically navigating through railspace to reclaim agency. If metonymy's chief principal is that of

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[9] The original instruction to "eliminate steps!" came from production studios during the Great Depression. Studio executives felt economic pressure to make films on the cheap, and they charged their filmmakers to take advantage of new technological advancements to cut costs. In doing so, these filmmakers "turned economic necessity into stylistic virtue" (Marling 250-51). For a practical investigation of "how a reader's seemingly unprompted understanding of metaphor in narrative context may actually be decisively shaped by subtle metonymic cues," see Strack 37, 47-48.

"contiguity" (Cohan 29), then the device naturally aligns itself with the tactics of spatial orientation that rail passengers undertake.[10]

Film *noir* directors use metonymy meta-narratively as well: "Hitchcock said that correct casting saved him a reel in storytelling time, since audiences would sense qualities in the actors that didn't need to be spelled out" (Ebert 428). By casting actors representative of certain characteristics—for example, the "softer, more elusive" nature of Farley Granger coming through in his portrayal of Guy (Ebert 428), and Wilder's subversive casting of Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray, actors known for their work opposite each other in *Remember the Night*, a popular romantic comedy in the 1940s (Phillips 61-62)[11]—these directors "eliminate steps" even before filming begins.[12] While film *noir* uses metonymy to economize railroad imagery and shows how the railroad adopts a strategy based on control and elision, the adapted roman *noir* literary texts more ably describe riders' tactics through the interiority of the characters, reserving metonymy to set the tone of the story and subtly introduce recurring motifs. Both mediums of *noir* texts feature the train as the mechanism upon which the narrative pivots. Through pivotal metonymic scenes, staging, and streamlining, these novels and films develop the tactics needed to destabilize the passenger car's strategies of control and reclaim a space for the rider.

Sister Carrie/*Carrie*

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[10] For an in-depth chronology of scholarship that takes up the metonymic origins of film *noir*, see Marling, pp. 238-269.

[11] "Wilder wanted MacMurray to play Walter precisely because Walter's charming manner and affable grin belie the lust and larceny inside him, and MacMurray's surface charm would make his performance all the more chilling as a result," while the director toyed with the audience by tempering Barbara Stanwyck's natural beauty with "a tacky blonde wig because he wanted it to project 'the phoniness'" of Phyllis Dietrichson (Phillips 61-62).

[12] In a way, the directors' efforts control and economize the constitutive elements of the film production bring to light the railroad companies' own cost-saving efforts of control, namely, the controlled docility of riders.

The opening scene of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and its film adaptation by William Wyler encapsulates the characteristics of the passenger car and its riders that are mapped out in this chapter. The dual texts also show how the passenger car's railspace is constructed multifocally—in this instance, by the contrasting foci of literature and film upon the same scene. Theodore Dreiser's penchant for labored prose reveals itself early in the author's description of Drouet's seduction tactics. Close-up shots of Carrie's face and the meticulous blocking of the actors in the passenger car efficiently summarizes Wyler's directorial tendencies, namely, "the careful staging of scenes in a dynamic, three-dimensional space and an interest in his actors as well as an ability to showcase their performances…[and] concentrat[e] on mise-en-scène" (Anderegg 81).

First, the interiority foregrounded in the literary text highlights the tactics of resistance needed to carve out a private space within the railcar. The railcar itself encourages this behavior, in part. The novel opens with Carrie Meeber settling into a seat on the train that is taking her from her small-town home, Columbia City, Wisconsin, to start a new life in Chicago. As she sits down, she is overwhelmed with bittersweet reflection for what she has left and anticipation for what lies ahead. Looking out the window, Carrie sighs as "the familiar green environs of the village passed in review" (1). The train picks up speed, and she "gazed at the green landscape, now passing in swift review, until her swifter thoughts replaced its impression with vague conjectures of what Chicago might be" (1). Dreiser's repetitious description of Carrie's view clues the reader into the speed of the train—the village simply "passed in review," then the landscape is "passing in swift review" before the train picks up enough speed that Carrie transitions from a "swift" review of the landscape to "swifter thoughts" of the future. Carrie looks out the window and watches the landscape until it becomes a blur, at which point she turns

her attention forward to what lies ahead. She consoles herself with the knowledge that "there was always the next station, where one might descend and return" (1). The passenger car provides Carrie with a window to the receding world and with the freedom to depart at any station and return to her old life. Simultaneously, the speed of travel and forward-facing seat encourage her to literally look ahead and to make "vague conjectures" about what she will find in Chicago (2). The passenger car comforts Carrie with a tether to the past and excites her with its forward trajectory. But just as these traits of the passenger car ensconce Carrie into her seat, they also keep the railspace prone to insidious use by other, more well-traveled riders. Charles Drouet, a traveling salesman who doggedly pursues Carrie, is one such rider.

Dreiser introduces Drouet as a force who immediately and thoroughly compromises Carrie's sense of privacy on the train, invading her senses. He first speaks to her unembodied as "a voice in her ear" (2), offering context for what Carrie sees out her window, though "she felt him observing her" from behind for "some time" beforehand. Carrie glimpses him in her periphery, "conscious of certain features out of the side of her eye" as he "leaned forward to put his elbows upon the back of her seat" (3). Eventually, Drouet teases out enough of a conversation from Carrie that he feel emboldened to "come about into her seat...putting [his] card into her hand and touching his name" (6). Dreiser describes the effect of Drouet's tactics as efforts that Carrie "both delights in and fears" and that she addresses with "instincts of self-protection and coquetry" (3). Drouet's actions portray him as a rider at home in the passenger car. The salesman is able to use the space for his own purposes—he knows how to read the landscape that passes by; he knows that the railspace encourages riders to either look ahead or out the window, so he can whisper in Carrie's ear from behind and manufacture an intimate encounter; he feels comfortable undertaking the transgression of leaving his seat and sliding into

another. The reader becomes aware of Drouet's nature not just through inference from his aforementioned actions. Dreiser subsequently spends two laborious paragraphs describing Drouet's character and interiority, setting up the descriptions by metacommentary: "Here was a type of travelling canvasser for a manufacturing house" and "Lest this order of individual should permanently pass, let me put down some of the most striking characteristics of his most successful manner and method" (3, 4). Dreiser explains his characters' interiority as an introduction to the ways that resourceful rail riders navigate around the rules of the passenger car, the same rules by which the naïve rider is trapped.

As indicated above, the literary text articulates Carrie's and Drouet's spatial awareness of each other, showing through their interiority how effectual or ineffectual each is in tactically navigating around (or to) each other. The film speeds up this encounter, spatially situates Carrie within the railcar, and cinematically zooms in on her claustrophobia, apprehension, and fear of Drouet's predations. In the film adaptation of the novel, Carrie's discomfort with Drouet is apparent from the moment he engages her in conversation. Drouet leaps at the opportunity to help Carrie store her bag above her seat, then drapes himself over Carrie's shoulder as he sits in the seat behind her. The scene transitions from a wider view of the passenger car into a close-up of Carrie and Drouet facing forward. In this intimate portrait, Drouet tries to catch the corner of Carrie's eye as the heroine stares straight ahead intently looking at nothing. It works, until Carrie breaks her unfocused gaze to try to look out the passenger car window. An oncoming train shocks her back away from the window and into Drouet, whom upon she smiles in embarrassment despite her reservations of engaging in conversation with a stranger on the train. After a metonymic snapshot of his business card in Carrie's hand, Drouet forces the card into her purse, then rises and shows her "a trick I learned on my first year on the road"—he flips the seat-

back of the seat in front of Carrie up and over, effectively allowing him to sit face-to-face with her in the same space. Carrie's surprise of the ease at which Drouet performs the maneuver offsets her heretofore general discomfort about engaging the salesman in conversation. Wyler returns again and again to a close-up of Carrie's face, showing her unease with Drouet, with the situation he has presented to her, and with the railspace of the passenger car. Within the first minute and a half of meeting, there are no fewer than four examinations of Carrie's face as she navigates this space and encounter. The film frames these emotions as contained and generated by the passenger car.

Within the passenger car, the contest between strategies and tactics operates from the window seat.[13] As a stationary, reclining, padded chair situated next to a large window, the passenger car seat encourages the rider to submit to comfort (cf. figure 4, ch. 1). The seat gives the rider a modicum of choice—the rider can rotate and recline the seat, and, when permitted or ignored by the conductor, the rider can switch seats at-will. As demonstrated by Drouet, these strategies can be leveraged as a tactic by riders who use the option for their own gain. Drouet seizes the opportunity to flip the seat and encroach upon Carrie and become closer to her. Carrie, meanwhile, is an example of a rider who does not (or cannot) effectively wield any tactics of resistance against the strategies of control put upon her while she sits in the railcar. Instead, she half-heartedly tried to wield tactics of resistance against Drouet, oscillating between "instincts of self-protection and coquetry" in both the novel and film (3). Her ineffectual tactics of looking out the window to escape Drouet and her reluctance to engage in conversation fail, even as they are some of only a few options afforded to women to combat male advances within the passenger car.

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[13] For a study of the passenger car seat as a prefiguration of the cinematic tool of montage and how montage lulls the rider into submission, see Stilgoe, 245-262.

Carrie's tactics fail because she does not know when to deploy them; women are afforded no sense of the moment in railspace and no map with which to navigate the space. As noted by Patricia Cline Cohen, women on the train were "presented a possibility for cultural improvisation," since there were few articulated rules for behavior between male and female passengers (110). Cohen goes on to explain that "Acceptable gestures, thresholds for physical contact, permissible conversation topics, deference and dominance, in short, general deportment between men and women, had to be negotiated and renegotiated each time the train whistle blew or the stage door slammed shut and a new set of strangers moved through space together" (111). In such an improvisational space, the figurative winner of this spatial negotiation would be the passenger who has operated in the space more often. The traveling salesman thus inherently will be more comfortable in this railspace than a young woman traveling by railcar for the first time. When tempered by an unfamiliarity with the space and by the implied threat of "sexual peril" (Cohen 112),[14] the ostensibly improvisational railspace nevertheless provides limited options for women to deploy effective tactics.

With the tools afforded to Drouet and men in general, Carrie may otherwise have a better understanding of the workings of the window seat. On the other hand, Drouet is an example of the rider who understands the strategies of railspace and tactically inserts himself into the railspace by imposing himself upon other riders. By leaning into Carrie's personal space, flipping the seat around to share her seat, and inserting his card in her hand so as to extend their relationship beyond the train ride, Drouet deftly and prudently executes tactics that give him more control in the railcar, though they are actions against other riders more than they are actions

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[14] Cohen examines the letters women sent home to their families after surviving the railroad and arriving at their destinations. Though the letters were primarily written to assuage any fears their families felt, they "often include indirect evidence of a woman's sense of sexual peril, as revealed by the measures taken in anticipation of danger" (112). For examples and analyses of these letters, see Cohen 113-119.

against the railroad. The novel describes this dance of control by peering into the characters'

interiority; the film enacts this choreography through staging, blocking, and metonymic

snapshots.

Through metonymic close-up shots, Wyler represents Drouet's tactile invasions upon

Carrie. With his business card filling the frame, Drouet holds Carrie's thumb and moves it

across the raised lettering of the card. The card—and the visual of Drouet's intimacy with

Carrie—stands in for Drouet's salesmanship, both of his vocation and of himself as a suitor. It

depicts him as a salesman and a passenger who transgresses the rules of etiquette between rail

riders. The image encapsulates these attributes and elides their vocalization. The audience is left

to make these connections, and as such, plays a role in the discursive shaping of railspace. This

snapshot creates a railspace dependent upon intimacy and transgression, and it gestures toward

the larger role metonymy will play in *Double Indemnity* and *Strangers on a Train*. More

specifically, these texts replicate Wyler's economical imagery to represent characters or themes

that ultimately and efficiently mold the passenger car's railspace.[15] Furthermore, as the directors

rely upon the audience to fill in the blanks left by metonymy, the device makes the audience

complicit in the creation of this railspace.

In sum, these dual interpretations of the same scene serve as a larger guide to both forms

of media in this chapter: in the literary text, interiority is deliberately articulated, showing the

ways in which characters negotiate their roles in the passenger car's railspace; in film, railspace

pervasive and inescapable, and the medium foregrounds the emotions engendered by this

claustrophobia. All of these efforts are streamlined in the film *noir*, particularly so through

metonymy.

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[15] For other examples of Wyler's use of metonymy, see Cohan and Shires's discussion of his film *The Letter* in *Telling Stories* (66-67, 70-72).

Through a fast-paced plot and the pervasive tone of danger, James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* articulates the fear and opacity inherent in the passenger car. The novel operates from the perspective of Walter Huff, a rider who attempts to commit the perfect crime and in doing so executes tactics of visibility and obscurity that reshape the passenger car. Billy Wilder's adapted film stages this plan as metonymic snapshots that situate Walter and his fellow characters in a tonally and visually darker space. In Wilder's version, the railspace envelops Walter and places him within the railroad's strategies of control. Within this railspace, Walter operates with tactical precision and successfully reclaims momentary agency, revealed through metonymy. He is this chapter's most effective rail rider in this regard. Through the comparison of the crucial (and literal) scenes of the crime in both the literary text and the film, these two perspectives work together to describe and depict a rider who successfully uses de Certeaulian tactics to navigate through railroad strategies. Furthermore, they point to discursive tactics that destabilize the railroad and insert riders' (and readers' and moviegoers') agency in the process of recreating railspace.

Like Drouet in *Sister Carrie*, Walter's success in navigating and repurposing railspace is directly correlated to his ability to understand the strategies of control in effect within the passenger car. But while Drouet deploys tactics that impose upon other riders, Walter uses tactics that take advantage of riders' tendencies to keep to themselves, particularly when faced with discomfort (e.g., seeing someone struggling to walk on crutches). Walter weaves his way through the passenger car, aggregating just enough attention that Nirdlinger can be established as an awkward passenger ambling through the railcar, but not so much attention that other

passengers would recognize differences between Walter and the man he is impersonating. The success of Huff's plan depends upon this paradox of being simultaneously seen yet unseen.

Though Wilder uses metonymy liberally to "eliminate steps" and pare down the danger present in railspace to its visual and tonal cues, the few instances of metonymy present in Cain's novel prime the reader's awareness of the motif of the seen-but-unseen. From the start of the novel, Cain uses "a metonymic, minimalist style," making California into a "metonymic reduction" of Spanish-styled houses, lavishness, and migrancy (Marling 245). For Walter himself, "it's a purely statistical, metonymic world, in which 'tragedy' no longer has any teleological meaning" (Marling 177). By glossing over the novel's setting and the main character's worldview, Cain creates a concealed space within which *noir* thrives. Recall that the genre—particularly its literary manifestations—creates characters that lie "beneath the placid surfaces of everyday normalcy" waiting to burst forth (Payne 149). The act of *noir*-based concealment indicates that rail riders, if they understand the ways that railroad strategies operate as unsaid rules, can navigate through these strategies in the shadows, hidden in plain sight. Tactics are made possible by allowing the rider to operate in railspace publicly, under the cloak of metonymy.

The "minimalist style" recognized by Marling shines through in Walter's reiterated phrases and paradoxical aphorisms that allude to the seen-but-unseen rider. As he explains and the re-visits his plan with Phyllis, Walter is emphatic that Nirdlinger "gets on the train, and yet he don't get on it...he gets on that train but he don't get on it" (237, 252). Eventually, Phyllis and the reader will understand Walter's point—Walter will impersonate Nirdlinger and board the train as him. By deliberately making himself a doppelganger of Mr. Nirdlinger, Walter subverts testimony and memory by inhabiting the dual characteristics laid out in chapter one, namely,

laying the passenger bare to view and yet affording the opportunity for concealment and obscurity. In this way, passengers are convinced they saw Nirdlinger on the train but cannot quite remember what he looks like. Of course, these passengers are intentionally and willingly distracted by their own tactics to reclaim agency on the railroad, while the railroad agents are occupied by their roles in perpetuating strategies of control (e.g., ticketing all passengers, stowing baggage, assisting riders to their seats, etc.). Huff explains that "All three cars were full of people getting ready to go to bed, with most of the berths made up and bags all out in the aisle. The porters weren't there. They were at their boxes, outside. I kept my eyes down, clicked(?) the cigar in my teeth, and kept my face screwed up. *Nobody really saw me, and yet everybody saw me* because the minute they saw those crutches they began snatching bags out of the way and making room" (261, emphasis mine). Later, investigators interview a railcar steward about the event, but his testimony is inconclusive (279). Thus even the employee whose sole job it is to observe people going in and out of the observation car cannot serve as the final arbiter of what is seen within this railspace.

Walter funambulates upon the line that separates spectacle and secrecy within railspace. Upon boarding the train, Huff successfully calls just enough attention to himself as he says to Phyllis upon boarding the train: "Come back to the observation platform. I'll say goodbye to you there, and then I won't have to worry about getting off the train. You still have a few minutes. Maybe we can talk" (261). In announcing his instructions to his apparent wife within earshot of the other passengers boarding the train, Huff-as-Nirdlinger begins to establish Nirdlinger within the other riders' recollections of the evening's events and alludes to the spectacular novelty of talking to someone outside the train from the observation platform.

Cain plays with the fact that there is an ostensible danger in riding on the rear platform of the train. Walter literally stages a fatal fall off the rear platform, and in doing so, effectively hides within the spectacle imagined by passengers, investigators, and onlookers. In fact, Walter acknowledges that such an accident is extremely unlikely, indicated by just how much a person would make through a double indemnity insurance payout.[16] "All the big money on accident policy comes from railroad accidents," explains Huff to Mrs. Nirdlinger, "...people always think a railroad train is a pretty dangerous place to be, or they did, anyway, before the novelty wore off, but the figures show not many people get killed, or even hurt, on railroad trains" (236). With this scam then, Huff depends upon the public's ability to recall the traces of spectacle still generated by the railroad, leveraged by their imagination of a sensational accident. At the same time, he depends upon riders' introversion and general passivity in order to navigate through the passenger car and leap off the rear platform.

Huff-as-Nirdlinger depends upon the solitude granted on the observation platform at night. While the space allows idling passengers to talk with one another (and when the train is at rest, with people outside), the lack of a clear view of the landscape at night and the chill nighttime air discourages passengers from staying out on the platform for too long.[17] Still, a man sitting in the open-air observation car complicates Huff's plan and nearly ruins it. The obstacle and Huff's response to it illuminate his skill in deploying improvisational tactics in railspace. This man, Jackson, sits outside to enjoy a cigar before the train ride gets under way. He attempts to engage Huff-as-Nirdlinger in some small talk, though Walter rebuffs him and dedicates his

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[16] This actuarially low-probability accident was still enough for Amtrak in 2018 to propose ending the use of open-air observation platforms from partnering private car owners and operators, stating it is a new "safety rule" in place for the protection of passengers (and most likely, for reasons related to liability insurance) (Gunnoe). For an exploration of Walter Huff's scheme as an actuarily perfect crime, see "Beating the Boss, Cain's 'Double Indemnity,'" by John T. Irwin.

[17] This is partially why the California Zephyr timed its train so deliberately to be travel through the most picturesque views of the landscape at the hours when passengers were awake.

time on the platform to talking with Mrs. Nirdlinger, who stands on the tracks behind the railcar and talks to him over the railing in a display of spousal affection and intimacy right before the train departs (performed in view of onlookers and Jackson). As the train picks up speed, Jackson continues to engage with Huff-as-Nirdlinger, and Walter runs the risk of being remembered more clearly than he would like. Walter adeptly improvises, leaning on Jackson's friendliness and willingness to help an immobile passenger in distress by claiming that he left his ticket in his bag all the way back inside the train, in the passenger car. Jackson understands the trouble Huff-as-Nirdlinger would be in without a ticket (i.e., he subconsciously recognizes that not having a ticket would be too transgressive of the railroad's strategies of control), so Jackson volunteers to fetch his ticket for him. This is all the time Walter needs to jump from the train. Indicating how easy it is to access the train tracks and jump from the train unseen (while also hinting at the very real danger in attempting such an action), Huff narrates, "There is nothing so dark as a railroad track in the middle of the night. …We were picking up speed a little now. ...I threw my leg over the rail, and let myself down. One of the crutches hit the ties and spun me so I almost fell. I hung on…[then] I dropped off. ...The train shot ahead, and I crouched there...there wouldn't be any chance I could be seen from the highway" (263-64). Walter uses certain traits of the space— e.g., ostensible visibility, fresh air, the ability to reach or talk to people not on the train, the slight sense of danger on the observation platform while the train is moving—to create a quotidian spectacle and lure witnesses into a (false) sense of normalcy and rationality about how someone could accidentally fall off the train. Walter's more esoteric knowledge of railspace—e.g., the observation platform's access to the track, the awareness that no one has much use for the observation car at night, the understanding that people will largely mind their own business and do not want to be bothered on the train at any cost—ensures the success of his plan. It is this

creative combination of tactical use of railspace that marks Walter in the novel as a particularly

successful and tactical rider.

Wilder's adaptation maintains the novel's streamlined crime narrative and its motifs of

the seen-but-unseen and of lurking, inescapable danger. In the film however, "Cain's words

become more 'photographable,'—in a word, more luminous" (Simons 353). Cain's words might

become illuminated by Wilder's adaptation, but Wilder shrouds Cain's railspaces in shadow,

making its riders blend in with the background. As a literally darker version of the plot, the film

amplifies the tone and metonymic processes that that Cain develops, contrasting Walter and his

ability to navigate railspace more clearly against other riders. Simultaneously, the film's

techniques trap Walter in the world of *noir*. By contrasting his ineffectuality and docility in the

world against his agency in the railcar, the film expands upon the idea of the passenger car as a

railspace where tactical resistance is possible, for riders who know where and how to execute it.

Many scholars of the film version of *Double Indemnity* describe Walter as a character

who is under "technology's control," emphasized by "deep focus… [and] deep shadow"

(Marling 265).[18] Navigating through a world constructed by these *noir* techniques, the character

"resists what he feels happening to him" and is an "existential rebel in a consumer economy"

(Marling 175, 176). Protagonists like Walter are "trapped...in a nightmarishly claustrophobic

world of evil" (Leitch 126). *Noir* techniques like deep focus and deep shadow effectively

"trap" Walter in many of the film's scenes. Yet as he passes through the train's passenger cars

during the scene of the crime, these techniques give Walter the freedom to operate within the

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[18] "Deep shadow" is a self-explanatory monochromatic color palate. "Deep focus" is a specific technique most often used in film *noir*, which develops through staging a "great depth of field, using relatively wide-angle lenses and small lens apertures to render in sharp focus near and distant planes simultaneously" (Columbia Film Language Glossary).

"consumer economy" and the "claustrophobic world," reclaiming agency and reshaping railspace in the process.

The effects of the deep focus and *mise-en-scène* employed by Wilder during the scene of the crime run counter to the effects of the techniques throughout the rest of the film. Wilder often captures Walter and Phyllis with "a high camera angle...that hem[s] in the conspirators...to pin them to the spot with a God's eye view that sees them exactly as they are despite their best efforts to hide" (Leitch 136). In the passenger car however, amidst the deep focus of a tracking shot down the aisle, Walter freely operates his ruse in plain sight. The camera follows Walter from behind through the train and toward the observation platform. Three passengers in clear focus are in the railcar through which Walter limps: on the left, a man reading a newspaper and a woman knitting; on the left, a man sleeping. Despite the lateness of the hour, the railcar is uncharacteristically well-lit, particularly for a film that is otherwise submerged in shadow. Wilder's camera follows Walter as he moves through the passenger car, the character's back acting as a large, solid black shadow that cuts through the otherwise relatively well-lit railspace. Walter hobbles slowly through the railcar on crutches, giving each passenger the opportunity to look up and see his face. None do. Each rider is caught up in their own micro-tactics of privacy in railspace. Walter bets on being able to blend in as just another rider who wants to be left alone. Pulling his hat down on his head, refusing the service of a steward, and remaining taciturn—where these actions might be considered rude anywhere else, in the passenger car, they are silently acknowledged as tactics for privacy, just like reading, knitting, and sleeping. When Walter crosses the threshold from the lounge car to the observation platform, he encounters a rider operating with a different set of expectations to match a different railspace.

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Where Wilder wields deep shadow to cloak Walter on the observation platform, the director maintains deep focus to amplify the tension of the character's encounter with another rider adept at navigating through the strategies of the railroad. Walter walks onto the platform and does not notice another passenger there, sitting and smoking. When Jackson, this passenger, engages him in conversation, Walter keeps his back turned to him, never makes eye contact, and remains standoffish. While Walter adopts these mannerisms to keep his face concealed (and thus keep up the ruse of impersonating Dietrichson), these actions also represent an amplified version of the tactics regular riders employ to maintain their privacy in railspace. As a last resort (and using another tactic of escape familiar to anyone who has encountered an overly chatty seatmate), Walter fabricates a scenario in which he forgets his cigar case in "car 9, section 11." Rather than leaving to retrieve it himself, Walter silently hopes that Jackson will see the crutches and offer to fetch the item. Jackson does indeed make the offer, and Walter obliges. While Walter uses the seat location and the crutches as tools to execute his own manifest tactics, these repeated invocations gesture to more universal systems of representation. For other riders and for the audience of the film, the crutches and the seat location are visual cues of tactics that will aid in the recreation of the passenger car as a railspace replete with danger and crime. Wilder develops these discursive tactics through metonymy and in a process more visually "luminous" than that of Cain's novel.

Metonymy pervades Wilder's *Double Indemnity*, from its effects through the film's reiterated phrases, its props, and its most memorable shots. Wilder uses the device to establish the railroad's predominant strategy of control and again as Walter tactically navigates through the train. Finally, Wilder presents one last metonymic image to conclude the scene, displaying the resultant subconsciously developed fear of the railroad upon its own rails.

"Car nine, section 11." The phrase, invoked throughout the scene first by Phyllis, then by the porter, the conductor, the porter again, Walter, and Jackson, acts as a code word to gain access to the train and a mantra that affirms the railroad's strategies for its workers and riders. When approaching the train, a porter greets Walter and offers to take his bags. Phyllis steps in front of Walter to shield him from view. As the porter asks for the location of Walter's seat, Phyllis offers, "Car nine, section 11," which is then repeated by the porter in confirmation. The phrase is then repeated again by the conductor, who is checking tickets by the door to the train. Phyllis follows Walter up the stairs to help him with his bag (as Walter is on crutches), and they kiss goodbye passionately. The porter inserts himself between the lovers, hurrying Walter along by saying, "Section 11, sir." Eventually when Walter uses the phrase to direct Jackson away from the observation deck, Jackson confirms the location in the same way that the porter and conductor do earlier—by repeating it back to the person saying it. The call-and-response of the same phrase metonymically represents the norms on the railroad and its strategies of control. Phyllis provides it to the porter to prove that she and Walter have accepted the terms set by the railroad, namely, that the porter will deliver luggage directly to the passenger car, and in turn, the passenger will proceed directly to their seat in this railcar. Offering the phrase to the conductor, Phyllis and Walter again accept the railroad's strategy of assigning each rider a specific seat, which is confirmed upon entry. The porter wields the phrase as a mobile strategy of control when he alludes to it in order to break up an intimate moment (one that is outside of the railroad's control). Even between passengers, the phrase recalls the railroad's strategies, though Walter adroitly re-purposes it to gain a moment of solitude. To Jackson, Walter's invocation of "car nine, section 11" (and Jackson's own confirmation by repetition) is akin to Walter accepting his lack of control in the railcar — as he is on crutches, Walter-as-Dietrichson appears to

begrudgingly accept help he knows he needs, since traveling back and forth from railcar to railcar is much more cumbersome.[19]

Walter's use of crutches serves as a paradigm for how ably he executes tactical resistance to the railroad at the expense and through other riders. Phyllis primes the railroad employees for discomfort when she cuts off the porter from addressing Walter-as-Dietrichson and says, "Thank you, my husband doesn't like to be helped," implying that Dietrichson would not like any additional attention called to him as someone on crutches. The porters quickly and wordlessly cede to Phyllis's request and let Walter board the train uninterrupted and without much notice. Within the passenger car, the crutches are the device that cause other passengers to pointedly ignore Walter, giving him the space to tactically operate unseen in plain sight.

Walter's perfect crime depends almost entirely on the crutches—what they represent and the tactics they enable him to deploy. "Walter's plan...does not so much involve him substituting himself for Dietrichson as it does reducing Dietrichson metonymically to his crutches and then substituting Walter-on-crutches for Dietrichson-on-crutches" (Leitch 142). By paring down the crutches into a metonym, Wilder broadly represents discomfort in the passenger car. The rider navigating through the train with crutches does so with great difficulty and with great risk to his safety. Railroad employees and other passengers are discomfited themselves amidst the crutches, recognizing just how difficult it is to pass through the passenger car when using them. Rather than help, rail employees are eager to yield the right of way through the railcar while other riders avert their eyes in their attempt to give the man on crutches an audience-free walk down the aisle of the passenger car. Finally, railroad authorities and the police identify the crutches as the cause for Dietrichson's accidental death on the rails. The crutches then

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[19] The film changes Nirdlinger's name to Dietrichson and Walter's last name from Huff to Neff.

metonymically represent the eponymous "double indemnity," a fact corroborated by the enshrouded man on crutches—presumably Walter though conceivably Dietrichson himself—who methodically limps toward the camera during the film's opening credits, until his silhouette fades into the shadow through which the opening scene (and in fact, the entire film) is filtered as grey and black. Whereas the metonymic mantra of "car nine, section 11" establishes the railroad's main strategy of control (and Walter's awareness and ostensible acceptance of it), the crutches metonymically represent the manifest tactics Walter undertakes on the railroad: the tactically efficient rider who walks the line between safety and danger; the act of remaining hidden in plain sight; the risk (and opportunity) for double indemnity as caused by an accidental death on the railroad.

Wilder imbues Walter's jump off the train with less risk than Cain does. In the film, the music swells and Walter jumps, stumbling a bit and rolling for a half-second before resting on his stomach on the tracks. The entire action takes less than 15 seconds. While the action is anticlimactic, the imagery shines through as the camera lingers on Walter laying on the tracks for a beat. Out of context, the shot shows a body dressed in all black, cloaked in shadow, lying prone on the tracks as the train pulls away behind him. One of the tracks cradles his head, while his legs extend past the other. He is motionless for a second, then looks as if he is writhing on the ground and slow to get up. The brief image evokes a *tableau vivant* in which Wilder arranges Walter's prone body as a stylized and symbolic visual. The image of a body across the tracks metonymically evokes the audience's general fear of the railroad. It seems to say, "this is what happens by neglecting the dangers of railspace; at its core, the railroad is a dangerous, threatening space." Thus the final metonymic image of the scene is the most lasting and

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subconsciously affective. As a standalone image, the man lying on the tracks reconstitutes the railspace as a site suffuse with danger and darkness.

Strangers on a Train

      Double Indemnity follows an individual rider as he tactically navigates through the railcar with an understanding of how railroad strategies control the docile passenger. He uses this knowledge to manufacture a tactic of being simultaneously seen yet unseen. In executing this tactic, the railspace of the passenger car becomes shaped by the fear and unease felt by docile passengers and onlookers. Yet the only perspective provided by Cain and Wilder is Walter's. The audience watches as the adroit rider leverages other riders' discomfort in an attempt to subvert railroad strategies. *Strangers on a Train*, written by Patricia Highsmith and adapted and directed by Alfred Hitchcock, puts two passengers in tactical opposition to one another. Their dance across passenger cars shapes the railspace as a site of contestation that becomes, as in *Double Indemnity*, a site of fear and unease, particularly of the passenger who loses this power struggle. The more passive passenger then becomes virtually part of the railroad's strategic apparatus. Ultimately, the only effective tactics are ones that a rider deploys against other riders.

      At its core, Highsmith creates a psychological case study and Hitchcock a streamlined thriller out of the same *noir* plot "germ"—"Two people agree to murder each other's enemy, thus permitting the perfect alibi to be established" (Highsmith in Mahoney 104). Their meeting point—and the point of convergence for the characters themselves—is the passenger car, where the characters' doubling manifests through imagery and the negotiations of movement around the railcar. Mahoney argues that the main differences between the novel and film are plot and focus. In Highsmith's novel, Guy kills Bruno's father after a slow mental unravelling, and the plot focuses on the psychological dependency created between Guy and Bruno. In Hitchcock's film,

Guy maintains his sanity and refuses to commit murder, thereby altering the focus of the film to follow Guy as an "innocent hero," whom Bruno, a criminal stranger, opposes at every turn (103). Pared down into a villain (albeit one of the most memorable in Old Hollywood), Bruno becomes the archetypal criminal-stranger feared by the everyday rail rider. In an article that classifies the different "types" of strangers—with particular attention to the "criminal"—Bran Nicol argues that Highsmith's and Hitchcock's text differ in their respective efforts to describe strangers. For Nicol, Hitchcock looks to this codification as a rule to follow while Highsmith calls it into question. Nicol attributes this distinction to each text's genre and form, situating Highsmith within the "gothic tradition" and modernism and Hitchcock as a director of the early cinematic thriller (44).

Hitchcock streamlines the plot by maintaining Guy's innocence and using it to distinguish Guy from Bruno. In Hitchcock's version, these two riders understand railroad strategies and execute combatant tactics against one another in their separate quests for agency in the passenger car. Highsmith, on the other hand, complicates their relationship and extends "the deliberate image of them as doubles" (Mahoney 104) by aligning Bruno and Guy in their goal to get away with murder. In Highsmith's passenger car, Guy's "passive vulnerability" prevents him from executing any tactical resistance. Instead, this vulnerability activates another rider— Bruno—in an attempt to develop communal tactics of operation. As a force of "aggressive curiosity" however, Bruno turns toward the rider and reflects the most overpowering rail strategies back upon Guy in order to create some tactical space for himself (Mahoney 108).[20] Bruno's tactical advantage over Guy in the novel shapes the passenger car's railspace in a

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[20] Though Mahoney does not describe Bruno's and Guy's actions as "tactics," but his terminology, which I have quoted here, is applicable to the style in which each rider operates in railspace. For expanded readings of the doubling present in the film version of *Strangers on a Train*, see Mahoney 105 and Wood 170.

method distinct from the one created through the more equal contest between the two riders in the film. The film depicts the railspace as a sports arena, reflected later in the film with the famous tennis court scene. In Hitchcock's version, the passenger car becomes a space defined by its contestants jockeying for position and supremacy. The *noir* theme of inevitability suggests that this contest is the natural result of putting passengers in such close proximity. The novel describes the railspace as a closed, claustrophobia-inducing system from which there is no escape for the passive rider (Guy) and within which the aggressive rider (Bruno) can operate freely. In this system, transgression is rewarded with increased agency.

The film captures the passenger car as a site of contestation by using visual motifs and symbolic cues to establish themes of inevitability and inescapability within railspace and by literally focusing on the encounter between Guy and Bruno in the railcar. After showing Bruno and Guy boarding the train (discussed in detail below), the film fades into an interlacing of railroad tracks, with the camera positioned low on the front of the train. This positioning sets up the strategies of control that will inform the contest between the two riders and "prepare[s] us for a film that will take place largely in a subterranean world of anxiety and nightmare" (Brill 76). Each set of tracks splits into two separate paths, two choices for the train and its passengers. As the train picks up speed following one set of these tracks, the web of rails becomes more tortuous, leaving the audience dizzy with the number of possible paths the train might take. Yet the train does take one of these paths; its rails situate the train and its riders on one line as they travel undeterred on a planned schedule. Lesley Brill applies this characteristic of the railroad to its riders:

> As the action of guilt and entrapment commences, images of descent and
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> imprisonment proliferate. ...The image of the converging rails...serves as an

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emblem of the plot, in which characters in a chaos of unconnected human lives

coincidentally converge and collide, turn apart, and pursue critical actions in

parallel. …The railway tracks also establish the importance of the visual motif of

strong parallel lines. The first shots of Bruno and Guy together are full of

verticals and horizontals that will, as the film progresses, become increasingly

associated with threats of entrapment and imprisonment—like the shadows of so

many jail cell bars. (77)

Through the imagery of converging and coinciding pairs Hitchcock evokes the claustrophobia

and the inevitability of encounter that are characteristic of passenger car railspace.[21] The

"emblem" of plot Brill refers to manifests as not just as the converging tracks but also the

crossed tennis rackets embossed onto Guy's lighter, and the recurring entreaty from Bruno to

Guy to execute "criss-cross" murders in each other's lives.[22] This emblem opens the scene, with

the criss-crossing tracks fading into the railcar, and it closes it, with Bruno mumbling the phrase

to himself. Hitchcock uses the emblem to trap Guy in the passenger car and forces him to

engage with Bruno's attempts to recruit Guy for his plan. Hitchcock is then free to focus on the

body language and dialogue that occurs within the confined railspace.

With its first shot, the film sets up the concept of navigating and shaping railspace

through the contest between two passengers. The film opens by oscillating between two pairs of

feet navigating through the railroad station and walking toward one another. The camera stays

mid-knee until the two pairs of legs sit across from one another in the passenger car and

accidentally touch. Or rather, Bruno sits down first, his foot angled out just enough that he is

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[21] For more on encountering strangers in the passenger car and on feeling claustrophobic on the rails, see the first-hand accounts of early rail travel in Mencken.

[22] The motif recurs in the scene of Guy's tennis match later in the film, where the match's spectators track the ball being hit back and forth by rhythmically and uniformly oscillate their heads from one side to another.

perhaps taking up a little more space than he should. Guy follows and sits across from him, also kicking his foot out a little in an attempt to get comfortable. Rather than adopting Walter's tactics from *Double Indemnity*—which leverage the railroad's strategies of control—each rider here imposes on the other in his attempt to claim a little more space in the passenger car.[23] These minute instances of tactical control continue throughout the scene; each of Bruno's attempts to engage with Guy are met with a reluctant and opposing response. Bruno's rejoinders are eventually sharp enough to bring Guy along through the passenger cars and into Bruno's plan.

After accepting Bruno's apology, Guy begins to immerse himself in a book. Bruno recognizes Guy as a semi-famous tennis player (a departure from the novel, where Guy is a moderately famous architect), and immediately crosses the aisle to join him on the bench that extends the length of the railcar. The camera frames Guy's face as he looks mildly exasperated and glances around the railcar for a way to escape. Finding none, he cedes to Bruno's questioning until Bruno gossips about Guy's private life. Now insulted, Guy makes a half-turn away from Bruno to either begin to get up from the seat or to return to his book. Guy is prevented from doing so by Bruno, who puts his hand on Guy and apologizes by being self-effacing. After Bruno cajoles Guy into having lunch with him, the camera fades into Bruno's private car. Bruno is laying back; Guy is more or less at ease as well. Now, with each shot of the two of them facing each other, the window is between them, and we see the landscape as a blur through the window. Once Bruno begins to proposition Guy about his perfect plan for murder, Guy makes feeble attempts to leave. Bruno keeps him there through sheer force of will and by powering through his hypothetical scenario. Once the train begins to pull into the station,

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[23] A real-life example of this tactical reclamation of space occurs everywhere there is a shared armrest between two people.

Guy has the excuse he needs to leave Bruno. Once Guy leaves, Bruno lies back down on his seat, mumbling "criss-cross," which he mentioned while explaining his plan to Guy.

Note that the boldness with which Bruno approaches Guy is reminiscent of the way Drouet invades Carrie's personal space in *Carrie*.[24] Both Bruno and Drouet touch their prey, gently refusing to take no for an answer or to read social cues that would indicate that the other is uninterested in engaging with them. These mannerisms and tactics bring to light the ironically communal nature of privacy on the rail—in order to claim autonomy in passenger car railspace, riders must recognize the efforts of their fellow riders to do so. Everyone has to buy in for that to work. Yet what more often happens is that riders who are less inclined to crime and transgression take up micro tactics of resistance like reading, turning into themselves or toward the window, and moving from one railcar to the next, while more bold, transgressive riders adopt tactics that invade the space of their fellow passengers.

Each of these moments of micro-conflict between Bruno and Guy indicates a railspace collaboratively created by their contest. When Bruno and Guy are sitting across from one another and kicking their legs out, they are imposing their will on each other, not the railroad itself. The space into which each character tries to expand is granted to the passenger sitting across from him. Likewise, Bruno puts his hands on Guy, and Guy's combatant tactics are against Bruno, not the railroad. That is to say, he folds into his book, turns away, tries to leave Bruno's railcar, tries to read to avoid eye contact, etc. In the passenger car, Guy and Bruno talk to each other and virtually no one else. Aside from Guy asking one question about the dining car to a porter (which Bruno eagerly dismisses), they speak to no one else on the train, no conductor,

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[24] Reminiscent but not equal to. As mentioned earlier, Drouet approaches Carrie in a railspace that is more open to improvisation from men than from women. Bruno approaches Guy with similar tactics, though Guy can attempt tactics that Carrie would have been discouraged from attempting.

no attendant, no other porter. Hitchcock leans into the contest between the two characters to increase the narrative tension of the film, even using the characters themselves as a frame around the window that shows the blurring landscape, as if to highlight for the audience that all that occurs in the railspace happens within the boundaries of the two riders. As a result the passenger car becomes a scene shaped entirely by their encounter and how each one navigates through it.

While Hitchcock's film delimits the passenger car through a direct contest between the two riders, Highsmith's novel depicts Bruno as an extension of Guy; as Guy is unable to execute any effective tactics of resistance, Bruno takes up that role for him. Yet Bruno's success as a rider is due to the comfort he feels amongst the railroad's strategies of control. When the conductor confronts Bruno and asks him if he is sitting in his assigned seat, "Bruno leaned possessively into his corner" and, seeing that the conductor would not make him relocate, "leaned forward and gazed out the window amusedly" (13). Bruno's possession of the corner and the amusement he feels about the incident run counter to the way Guy "hitched himself back against the seat" after looking out the window with an irrepressible sickness building inside of him (9). Bruno wears these strategies like a cloak, using the passenger car's closed-in space and the train's jolting, unceasing momentum to execute his tactical transgressions not against the railroad but against other riders. Eventually, as in the film version, Bruno's transgressions threaten to overtake Guy, and they part, which sets up the decent into the murder plot for the rest of the novel.

As Highsmith describes it, the railroad is a force of inexhaustible energy that subdues its riders by forcing them to sit through a maddening oscillation from sheer velocity on the rolling prairie to lurching motion around station stops: "The train tore along with an angry, irregular rhythm. It was having to stop at smaller and more frequent stations, where it would wait

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impatiently for a moment, then attack the prairie again. …But progress was imperceptible. The prairie only undulated...The faster the train went, the more buoyant and taunting the undulations" (9). This motion has a destabilizing effect on the rider, both physically and mentally. When Paul Schrader articulates the characteristics of film *noir*—characteristics that Marling argues find their genesis in literature—he explains, "When the environment is given an equal or greater weight than the actor, it...creates a fatalistic, hopeless mood. There is nothing the protagonist can do; the city will outlast and negate even his best efforts" (11). Substitute "landscape" for "city" and the same would be true for Guy's experience on the train as a subdued passenger.

The train's passenger car provides its riders with seats that offers a literal window to the world in order to endure this sickening, implacable motion. Rather than comfort, the seat encourages its inhabitant toward docility with stifling ridicule. While advertisements that promote the observation car tout the panoramic spectacle that the rider experiences from the window seat, Highsmith describes the seat as a space that encourages introspection. The window seat allows the train to taunt Guy with something out of reach, to limit and sicken him in an increasingly claustrophobic railcar, and to hint at Guy's metaphorical metamorphosis into a component of the train himself, depicted in Guy's reflected image in the window. Immediately after the opening description of the train attacking the undulating prairie, the narrator's attention turns toward Guy: "Guy took his eyes from the window…Hate had begun to paralyze his thinking" (9). The window encourages Guy to take on these aggravations, this anger, upon himself, as he begins to corrosively daydream about his estranged wife and her new lover. The passenger car provides a seat for Guy to sit and brood and in doing so, encourages docility with feelings of inadequacy, indecision, and impotence.

The strategies of the railroad incorporate Guy's life into the railroad's own processes. In doing so, the railroad inculcates him into docility. Highsmith spells out the connection between Guy's wife, Miriam, and the prairie: "He could sense Miriam ahead of him, not much farther now, pink and tan-freckled, and radiating a kind of unhealthful heat, like the prairie out the window. Sullen and cruel" (9). In response, Guy "automatically" adopts characteristics of the train: "he smoked in slow, steady pulls," reminiscent of the locomotive's smokestack while "again and again" his eyes "dropped to the stubborn, fascinating ground out the window" (9). As reflected by the window, Guy's face takes on the qualities of the train: "In the reflection the dusk had started to create in the window's glass...The rise of hair and the slope of his long nose gave him a look of intense purpose and somehow of forward motion, though from the front, his heavy, horizontal brows and mouth imposed a stillness and reserve" (9). Even when cheered by the thought of his lover Anne, Guy stays within the boundaries set by the controlled railspace. He daydreams about Anne, "felt a pleasant explosion of happiness inside him, and relaxed in the corner of the plush seat" (10). The railcar's "plush seat" incubates this spark of happiness and uses it to further immerse Guy into the seat designated for him. Ultimately, Highsmith portrays Guy as an inert rider, ensconced within the passenger car and fully prone to the railroad's strategies of control.

The railroad forces an "imposed direction" and the "cessation of choices" upon Guy (Mahoney 112), ultimately leaving him with no other option but to channel all his agency and desire through another rider, one of pure tactical and transgressive action in railspace. The train deposits Guy into his seat and leaves him with two choices: to look out the window or to read. He chooses to read and "For a few moments… The words made sense to him and began to lift his anxiety" (11). Guy's thoughts drift back to his estranged wife, Miriam, and to his lover,

Anne. Later, after having too much to drink at the behest of Bruno, Guy notices that Bruno's

private car is filled with detective novels, but when "he tried to read a few lines, the print swam

and he closed the book" (21). Though Guy's inability to read here is most likely due to his

inebriated state, the railroad itself has a long history of its riders feeling intense motion sickness

when reading.[25]

Whereas Hitchcock eliminates Guy's interior struggle and opposes Guy and Bruno with

the opening shot of their legs walking toward each other, Highsmith describes Guy's gradually

increasing psychological struggle. This struggle makes Guy even more susceptible to Bruno, a

rider whom Highsmith introduces as a passenger who is half asleep, waiting to be activated by

one who needs his services. Guy suddenly feels "helpless" when looking out the window, and

"seeing his own image...shifted his position, accidentally touching the outstretched foot" of

Bruno, "and watched fascinatedly as the lashes twitched and came open. The bloodshot eyes

might have been focused on him all the while through the lids" (12). Rather than two characters

at war with one another, the novel portrays the development of a symbiotic relationship where

Guy attempts to call upon Bruno to subvert the railroad's strategies and to give in to the "impulse

to tell Bruno everything, the stranger on the train who would listen, commiserate, and forget"

(26). And Bruno needs Guy to give him direction and purpose. Guy becomes a rider upon

whom Bruno can impose his will. Indeed, once pointed in the right direction (i.e., when he

undertakes his plan for murdering Miriam), Bruno "strolled back to his seat feeling like a million

dollars. A sense of purpose, strange and sweet to him, carried him along in an irresistible

current. Merely gazing out the window, he felt a new coordination of mind and eye" (66). The

only anxiety he feels is only through "wishing the train would go faster" (67). Bruno's comfort

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[25] See Mencken 5-8 for train sickness and discomfort in the early railroad; for the science behind motion sickness on the railroad, see Persson, Rickard.

within railspace is in direct counterpoint to Guy's discomfort. Highsmith uses descriptions like "strolled" and "sweet" and "gazing" to describe Bruno's experience in the rail car, and within the railspace he feels a coordinated "sense of purpose." To get to the point when he can navigate the passenger car freely, Bruno executes tactics that quickly annoy, then horrify his fellow passenger, signaling to Guy that Bruno is a force of pure transgression, one that Guy cannot control any better than the railspace within which they operate. Meanwhile, Guy slowly becomes more indecisive and subsequently more susceptible to Bruno, adopting characteristics of the docile passenger prone to the railroad's strategies of control and to other riders' tactics of transgression against him.

The spatial limits of the passenger car manufacture Guy's claustrophobia and re-confirm his metaphorical incorporation into the train. These effects are exacerbated by Bruno's constant imposition upon him. After Bruno goads Guy into talking about Miriam, Guy tries to get up and shake himself out of self-pity. Yet, there "was no place to move in the room. The swaying of the train made it difficult even to stand upright" (24). Guy feels the heat of the room and becomes suddenly aware of the threat Bruno presents, that his fellow passenger "looked less friendly...since he had told him he was married. And more curious" (24). With no escape, Guy again tries to find solace by looking out the window, but the window "gave him nothing but his own image. He could feel his heartbeats shaking his body, deeper than the train's vibrations" (25). And again, when escaping of Bruno, "Guy caught a glimpse of himself in a narrow panel mirror on the wall. His eyes look frightened, he thought, his mouth grim, and he deliberately relaxed" (28). Regardless of Guy's physical and mental relaxation, Bruno keeps transgressing into his personal space. Highsmith characterizes all of Bruno's actions toward Guy as invasive. Bruno's "obtrusive boredom" keeps Guy from reading (13); Bruno must "insist" that Guy have

dinner with him and does not wait for an answer (14); he "thrust his smile solicitously half across the table" and interrupts Guy's reverie about Anne (20). During Bruno's onslaught, Guy "wanted to get out and take a walk, but the train kept on and on in a straight line, something that would never stop. ...He felt sick of Bruno. Bruno was smiling" (33). Guy's last thought of Bruno before passing out for the night is that he left his book in Bruno's room. He imagines Bruno invading his privacy by "touching it and opening it" (36).

Combined, these transgressions make Guy feel hemmed in and unable to escape the railspace's limitations even outside of the train. When Guy departs the train during a station stop, the "organic air...struck him like a smothering pillow" (13). Once Bruno deploys his final transgression of telling Guy about his plan for the perfect crime, in which Bruno kills Miriam and Guy kills Bruno's father, "a nightmarish heaviness held" Guy in the room with Bruno (34), causing Guy to

> thrust him away, harder than he had intended. Bruno rose resiliently from the
> window seat. Guy glanced about for air, but the walls presented an unbroken surface.
> The room had become a little hell. ...Guy had at least thought of the door. He went
> out and opened another door onto the platform where the cooler air smashed him like
> a reprimand and the train's voice rose to an unbridled blare. He added his own curses
> of himself to the wind and the train, and longed to be sick. (35)

To the rider, the train, with all of its discomforts and stilted air and obnoxious cohabitants, is still something to which the rider has already adapted, into which the rider fits, and wherein the rider belongs. The "reprimand" of the outside air, the enraged "blare" of the train at Guy's escape, Guy's sickness and alignment in cursing along with the train and wind—these descriptions betray the rider as a material component of the railroad. Because of the docility and incorporation of the

imperfectly tactical rider into the train and its strategies and as indicated by Bruno's complete

comfort when confronted with such strategies, the most effective rider in the passenger car is one

who directs their transgressions toward the other riders rather than directly toward the railroad

itself. Highsmith intuits that this relationship transcends Guy and Bruno and speaks to the larger

action of "moving on the tracks" as "not an event, not a moment, but a condition, something that

had always been and always would be" (193).

Conclusion

Rail strategies seek to prevent riders from complicating the system with improvisational

or disruptive behaviors. The railroad wants docile passengers who do not misuse the space.

These strategies redirect riders' tactics toward other riders. This is why Drouet and Bruno are so

effective (at least, effective in navigating railspace)—their odiousness (and in Bruno's case,

criminal behavior) is directed toward their fellow riders rather than the railroad. Meanwhile,

Walter leverages the discomfort inherent in rail riders (e.g., their eyes will be downcast or

otherwise occupied with their own tactics of distraction) in order to use the space for his own

purposes. Transgressive riders like Drouet, Walter, and Bruno circumscribe the passenger car as

a railspace permeated by danger, invasion, and crime, while others, like Guy and the unnamed

riders who shy away from Walter, passively become absorbed into the railroad's strategic

apparatus. In any case, the passenger car's railspace can now be understood as a site of

contestation between riders jockeying for privacy, authority, and control.

Though *Double Indemnity* discursively shapes the railspace just beyond the train's rear

railcar into a dangerous space and though Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train* shows how the

persistent strategies of the passenger car extend their reach into Guy—and in fact, every rider—

when they temporarily escape at a rest stop, other texts more fully explore how the disembarking

passengers explore, map, and re-shape the "world of silence and total blackness" left behind in the train's wake (Highsmith 35). Highsmith hints at the redemptive possibilities of the spaces abandoned by the railroad and its strategies when she describes how Guy sees the train from a distance: "Far away on the flat black prairie a locomotive wailed, on and on, and then again, farther away. It was a sound he remembered from childhood, beautiful, pure, lonely. Like a wild horse shaking a white mane" (36). From inside and in proximity, the train is a stultifying, inescapable railspace that drudges up the past and locks its passengers into the railcar with a "nightmarish heaviness." From outside, the train evokes sweet memories of solitude and innocence. Other characters and actors might then populate and play within these forgotten spaces of "total blackness" that constitute the landscape left in the wake of the train. Disembarking from the passenger car, we now turn toward these unclaimed railspaces suffuse with potentiality.

Chapter Three

Progress, and Profanation at the End of the Line:

Reterritorializing the Wild West through Zane Grey's *The U.P. Trail*

Earlier chapters on the observation car and the passenger car framed arguments upon the geocritical tenets of multifocalism and polysensoriality, relying upon viewpoints created by several texts and with all the senses to diagram dimensional, actualized railspaces. This chapter departs from this concentration on these two tenets and takes up another put forth by Bertrand Westphal—stratigraphy. A stratigraphic study is most useful in an investigation of the land itself. As such, I will dig into the railspace that is constructed reiteratively in mid-nineteenth century terminal boomtowns and ghost towns during the construction of America's transcontinental railroad. This chapter will deploy stratigraphy alongside Giorgio Agamben's theory of profanation to argue that the Hell on Wheels constructed at the terminus acts as a release valve for the pressure built up during the construction of the transcontinental railroad. In this role, these towns destabilize the metanarratives of Progress and Manifest Destiny that carried Americans toward the Pacific coast in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Early westerns, most notably Zane Grey's *The U.P. Trail*, provide some of the richest textual instances of these stratigraphic actions, and as such, the text illustrates and undertakes the profanatory actions needed to destabilize such a narrative.

Stratigraphy

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari borrow the concept of stratigraphy from geology and reestablish it as a method of spatially defining the process of reading. Bertrand Westphal further develops the concept into a central tenet of geocriticism. In geology, stratigraphy is "concerned

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with the order and relative position of strata [layers of rock] and their relationship to the geological time scale" ("Stratigraphy" OED). Deleuze and Guattari adapt the term in *Cinema II* to be "not in reference to a single timescale of geology but a mode of *reading* that diverges into multiple and incompossible lines" that comprise time (Colebrook 443, emphasis in original). This framework of divergent, distinct layers, or "lines," of reading situates a literary space not in a particular time period that has formed by preceding historical events but rather in "a grandiose time of coexistence that does not exclude the before and after but *superimposes* them in a stratigraphic order" (Deleuze 59, emphasis in original). The reader aware of the stratigraphic shape of literary space understands it through superimpositional layers of discourse (including literature and art). The space is read as a palimpsest, where "Certain paths (movements) take on sense and direction only as the shortcuts or detours of faded paths…and images of thought cannot arise at any order whatever because they involve changes in orientation that can be directly located only on the earlier image" (58).[1] Westphal incorporates stratigraphy as a tool for the geocritic, whose subject of inquiry is the literary space. Westphal calls this space the "*topos*," or the culturally constructed space that, like a geologic formation, "is understood to comprise multiple layers of meaning, deterritorialized and reterritorialized" (Tally, *Spatiality* 142). The deterritorializing-reterritorializing process decouples the land from its meaning, refashions the meaning, and returns it to the land with new purpose. The process repeats itself in the same space throughout history, adding layers of reconstituted land on top of one another. Stratigraphy cuts lengthwise through the space to understand how these layers are formed.

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[1] Deleuze and Guattari ultimately use this model to distinguish philosophical time from scientific time, that is, "stratigraphic time" versus "serial, ramified time" (124). See *What is Philosophy*, Part 2.

The land deeded to the Union Pacific for the construction of the transcontinental railroad forms a *topos* that we can understand only through stratigraphy. The U.P. Trail's surveyors and engineers charted and built on leveled out stretches of land, often annexing Sioux trails, wagon routes, and indigenous flat expanses into the future railroad's right of way. With each annexation, the railroad deterritorializes the land from its previous use (e.g., leveling out a hilltop or staking a claim to a well-traveled route) and reterritorializes it as a constituent piece of the railroad (by developing a survey and laying tracks). The railroad's process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization—enacted through profanation—is never clearer than at the railspace formed in the impermanent camps and towns raised wherever the terminus of the railroad happened to be at that time. The *topos* of de/reterritorialized railspace that develops herein is called the Hell on Wheels.

Hell on Wheels

The Hell on Wheels is a shanty town built at the end of the line during the construction of the transcontinental railroad. Its provisions and attractions served the needs and desires of the laborers, soldiers, and wanders that orbited around the rail terminus. The "societal flotsam" who provided these services had one purpose, "to pocket the wages of the ten thousand or more men toiling on the construction of the railroad...to relieve workers of their pay" (Kreck 108). This carnival of characters serves up cheap forms of entertainment and services and goods that exist together as a parody of entrepreneurial capitalism. These "predators" use the railroad itself to transport their flimsy storefronts and tents from hell town to hell town (Kreck 110). Wherever the end of the line was, that's where the Hell on Wheels was as well. Samuel Bowles, a mid-nineteenth century journalist and traveloguer out of Springfield, Massachusetts, describes these towns as "rough and temporary" with

settlements...of the most perishable materials—canvas tents, plain board shanties, and turf-hovels—pulled down and sent forward for a new career or deserted as worthless at every grand movement of the Railroad company. Only a small proportion of their population had aught to do with the road, or any legitimate occupation. ...Restaurant and saloon keepers, gamblers, desperadoes of every grade, the vilest of men and women made up this 'Hell on Wheels,' as it was most aptly termed. (56)[2]

The Hell on Wheels and its "societal flotsam" deterritorialize the space the town inhabits by taking control of the terminal point of rail construction and setting up a commercial town of vice on the site. It reterritorializes the site into a railspace built upon the worst vices of its constituents. As dramatized in Zane Grey's *The U.P. Trail*, these de/reterritorialization efforts in this railspace did not just affect the physical landscape at the end of the line; they also had ramifications for the motivating western narrative of Manifest Destiny, itself an effort of de/reterritorialization.

Manifest Destiny

Manifest Destiny sparks the mythos that carries America through the nineteenth century and finds its emblem in the transcontinental railroad. Introduced in 1839 by newspaper columnist John L. O'Sullivan, the concept became shorthand for the inevitable and righteous westward expansion of the American nation and its beliefs. At this point, "The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and

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[2] As the end of the quote ("as it was most aptly termed") indicates, Bowles did not coin this phrase. It is nevertheless understood as the earliest recorded use of the phrase.

time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High—the Sacred and the True" (O'Sullivan 437). This belief in a wholly American future became the impetus for a metanarrative that encompasses western expansion, American individualism, and a genre full of both. This "often monochromatic national mythology—the myth of the frontier, of westering, the idea that the process of conquering and settling the West made Americans American (self-reliant, idealistic) in popular belief…owed its spirit to the nineteenth-century belief that the West was America's (providentially made) Manifest Destiny" (Handley). The transcontinental railroad, running from Council Bluffs, Iowa to Sacramento, California, carried out this westward ideological conquest, as what historian and museum curator Wendell Huffman dubs the "technological manifestation of Manifest Destiny" ("Transcontinental Railroad"). Everyone—from politicians to soldiers to laborers to capitalists—had a role to play in this effort, that is, "working to build the railroad in an attempt to complete the United States' dream of manifest destiny" (Breithaupt 6).

A pattern emerges from this stratigraphically diagrammed relationship between the West, Manifest Destiny, the transcontinental railroad, and its Hell on Wheels towns. Manifest Destiny is the mythos within which the United States deterritorializes the western landscape. Surveys and the construction of the transcontinental railroad become American tools for reterritorialization of the space, making it a controlled process of westward expansion. The railspaces erected and destroyed at each temporary terminus of the line—the Hell on Wheels— deterritorialize the space again, wresting control of the space from the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads. The actions of the "societal flotsam" and idle laborers in such a space—the vices, the play, the degeneration—reterritorialize the railspace as a site that destabilizes the

metanarrative of Manifest Destiny. It is toward these actions that I now turn—to the profanation of this once-sacred railspace.

Profanations

The laborers, the loafers, and the desperadoes reterritorialize the end of the track through a process that Giorgio Agamben qualifies as "profanatory." Through profanation, the space, act, or object is reclaimed from the sacred or mythic realm and opened to new use. The Hell on Wheels follows, beat-by-beat, Agamben's essay on profanation as if it were a set of instructions. Ultimately, this profanatory railspace—and the genre of the Western, which portrays it—is situated at the center of the contradiction between the mythoi of Manifest Destiny and the "Wild West."[3]

In his essay, "In Praise of Profanation," Agamben conducts a genealogical etymology of the profane and in doing so, arrives at a spatial metaphor where "the removal of things from the sphere of human law" (i.e., "consecration") can only be undone through profanation, which can "return [things] to the free use of men" (73). In a process that echoes de/reterritorialization, objects, spaces, and people are removed from the sphere of human law and consecrated into the sacred sphere, wherein they cannot be put to common use. Profanation reclaims them from the sacred sphere and returns them to the sphere of the common, where they take on new meaning. The processes of consecration and profanation each occur within a distinct "apparatus"— ritualized sacrifice and play, respectively (74). Agamben devotes an entire nine-book series to

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[3] Though omnipresent now, the concept of the "Wild West" originated with "Buffalo Bill's Wild West," a traveling show in the mid-1880s that dramatized the life of "Buffalo" Bill Cody starring himself and other cowboys, gamblers, and gunplayers like "Wild" Bill Hickok and Annie Oakley. For detail on the exhibition itself, see *The William F. Cody Archive*.

the effects of sacrifice in society and on the body,[4] though this brief essay encompasses the majority of his thinking on "play" as a revolutionary concept.

Through play, the sacred is "reused" (75), "put to new use" (87), and "enters a new dimension of use" (76) within the profane sphere. Here, play "becomes a pure means, that is, a praxis that, while firmly maintaining its nature as a means, is emancipated from its relationship to and end; it has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end. The creation of a new use is possible only by deactivating an old use, rendering it inoperative" (86). Agamben describes a cat playing with a ball as an example of the apparatus of play in nature. Replacing a mouse with a ball deactivates the natural predatory structure of hunter and hunted (85-86). This example also gestures to the ability of play to "deactivate" use in any sphere and destabilize the separation of an object/person/space from the sphere of the common. If "every separation also contains or preserves within itself a genuinely religious core" in the sense that "religion can be defined as that which removes things, places, animals, or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere" (74), then I would propose expanding Agamben's defined process of profanation to include other, non-divine spheres of influence. Agamben himself allows for this expansion when he notes that play is an effective type of profanation that works to "deactivate" ritual and myth and the apparatus of sacredness across other spheres, such as economics, law, politics, and war (76).

For the purposes of this chapter, the translation of profanation to other spheres and apparatuses of power is pivotal. Using Agamben's paraphrasing of Emile Beneviste that "The power of the sacred act...lies in the conjunction of the myth that tells the story and the rite that

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[4] From *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995) to *The Use of Bodies* (2014)

reproduces and stages it," and that it is play that disables this conjunction (Agamben 75), a tripartite structure emerges, one which also forms the railspace I investigate here. The metanarrative of Manifest Destiny becomes the "myth that tells the story"; the construction of the transcontinental railroad is its reproductive and representative "rite"; the Hell on Wheels the playful profanation that throws a handbrake on the myth of uninterrupted progress. To use another metaphor, which Agamben invokes in his discussion of Benjamin and Kafka and the sphere of law, the play undertaken in the Hell on Wheels—and illustrated in Zane Grey's *The U.P. Trail*—"opens the gate" (76) of the sphere that limits railspace at the end of the line and thus amplifies the voices of the laborers, riders, and hoboes who operate in its margins. Thus, when the novel's chief engineer General Lodge notices that these people are "all together moving from camp to camp, where there can be no law," he describes the migratory desire of a certain population of Americans to find a space outside the sphere of influence that the railroad symbolizes (Grey 26).

Agamben's model of profanation informs how the railroad operates within the discursive sphere of Manifest Destiny. It is what Beneviste would call "the myth that tells the story" (Agamben 75), driving Americans across the continent on the railroad In this context, the "rite that reproduces and stages" the myth is twofold: one, the construction of the transcontinental railroad itself; two, because a rite reifies myth through repetition, the peripatetic pilgrimage across the country on the railroad by its laborers. The labored-upon land itself becomes the "sacrifice" that moves the railroad from the realm of everyday use to the sacred sphere of progress. The U.S. government sacrifices land to the Union Pacific Railroad, which then demands strenuous labor to maintain the railroad's progress across the continent. Finally, the final playful, profanatory act "drops the myth and preserves the rite" (Agamben 75),

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reterritorializing the railspace terminus and repurposing the rites (labor and travel) into

purposeless acts, demonstrated through the "societal flotsam" of people who travel to the site

only to mill about and prey upon the laborers (Bowles 56). This playful act, the reiterative

construction of the Hell on Wheels, is the means to its own end. With another purpose,

profanatory behavior "deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the

spaces that power had seized" (Agamben 77).

This model could in itself generate an entire anthropological study of the creation and

maintenance of American ritual, but I am most interested here in its final stage—the

"play"/profanation that returns the land (i.e., the consecrated object) back to everyday use. There

are certainly other segments of the train where riders and actors profane railspace, thus returning

it to the realm of "common use." Hobos profane railroad rituals all throughout the train and its

corridor by riding the rails, riding in (and on top of) boxcars, and by setting up hobo jungles

along its margins.[5] Yeggs and hobos like Jack Black and Boxcar Bertha escape from jails, crack

safes, and reterritorialize the rail corridor from a closed industrial system to a space open to great

adventure. Even my earlier studies of the observation car and the passenger car contain kernels

of profanity, as when Walter jumps off the back of the train in *Double Indemnity*. But the

mythos developed by the transcontinental railroad and the entwined metanarrative of Manifest

Destiny collectively outweigh that of any specific railcar. Likewise, only the Hell on Wheels

profanes this railspace so thoroughly that the only way it can be re-consecrated is an all-

encompassing sacrifice of space—a thorough dismantling of the entire town so that the tracks

can pass through uninterrupted to the next terminus. What follows is the stratigraphic excavation

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[5] See *Boxcar Politics: The Hobo in U.S. Culture and Literature, 1869-1956* by John Lennon.

of this town, the discovery of its sedimentary layers created through profanation, and the texts

that document and determine the role of the Hell on Wheels as a force of de/re-territorialization.

Benton

The worst such town is Benton, Wyoming. As the "epitome of a Hell on Wheels" (Kreck

112), Benton perfectly encapsulates the stratigraphic impermanence of a railspace that has been

shaped and re-shaped through profanatory action. Furthermore, the infamy of the town inspires

the Western genre of literature popularized in the early twentieth century and gestures again

toward the profanation/consecration duality that lies at the center of Manifest Destiny, the

transcontinental railroad, and the American West.

Located around milepost 696 from Omaha and 122 miles west of Laramie,[6] Benton

contained an astounding 23 saloons and five dance halls, in addition to a 4,000-square-foot Big

Tent that housed micro-dens of gambling and prostitution (Kreck 170). At its apex, the town

contained 3,000 inhabitants (Breithaupt 42). Benton had no natural water source, so water

needed to be transported in from the North Platte River three miles away (Kreck 171). With

alkaline land and limited water, it would have been virtually impossible to grow anything of

substance. Combine the lack of nutrients with a critical mass of people and nothing to do other

than drink, dance, and gamble, and it is easy to see how "Benton was regarded as the worst of

these towns and, not unexpectedly, the most legendary" (Breithaupt 42).

Benton was infamous in its own time as well. In a stylized narrative of factual historical

events described in the personal diary of surveyor's assistant James Carson, Deibert and

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[6] Kreck actually measures the distance as 123 miles, though according to the editors of *The Frontier Index* it was
122 miles. Cf. *The Frontier Index*, July 21, 1868, page 3.

Breithaupt describe the trials of Ferdinand V. Hayden, the nineteenth century's most prolific

surveyor of the Western Territories. Hayden passes through Benton near the time of its

destruction, in September 1868, and is victim to the criminal aspects of the Hell on Wheels.

Hayden had been robbed just outside of Benton and had to buy a horse in the town. His

paycheck never arrived in Benton, so Hayden was thankful for buying a horse for only $80. Yet

the horse was apparently stolen from a soldier, hence the discounted price. Though the railroad

was Hayden's "lifeline" to Eastern supplies, "its construction had brought a great influx of

lowlifes, congregating in small masses in [these] temporary tent towns," including the robbers

who stole six horses from him (5-6). The actions of these "lowlifes" became the equivalent of

popcorn fodder for mid-nineteenth century newspaper readers. In Laramie's *The Frontier Index*,

a column entitled "Items from the End of the Track" collected news from the terminus, wherever

it was located on any given date. From July to September 1868, the column's concentration on

Benton meant that the town's infamy was broadcast to a larger reading public. Here, readers

discovered that "A fight was started at Benton, Friday night, but was stopped by the soldiers,

who are acting as provost guard of the town. Strange to say there was no shooting done. The

town is under martial law, and soldiers are stationed at every street corner" and that "Jack Harris

was arrested by the soldiers yesterday morning on the charge of cutting a dance house tent with

intent to rob. Some of his friends attempted to rescue him and several shots were exchanged

without damage to either party" (7/21/1868, page 2). The news from the second report was far

more common that then first. The most surprising thing for these readers would have been the

fact that there was "no shooting done" in one instance and that when there was, it occurred

"without damage"; typically these incidents ended with spilled blood, as "over a hundred

murders were reported in this town during its three months of existence" (Breithaupt 43). It is

mainly because of these murders that Benton's reputation reached the east coast and attracted visitors westward, including General Ulysses S. Grant before becoming president. As a barren town with vices as its only commodities and a tragic fate that was embraced by its inhabitants, Benton was "the wickedest Hell on Wheels town of them all, and it was doomed from the beginning" (Pfeiffer 29).

The town lasted only 60 days by design— from mid-July to mid-September 1868. The end-of-the-line camp of laborers, soldiers, and engineers methodically moved westward, keeping to a rough schedule of completion and left Benton in its wake. Rather than fulfill the "extravagant dreams" of every pop-up town's founder who was convinced that their "ragtag assembly of tents and wooden storefronts...was destined to grow into a metropolis" (Kreck 103), Benton was destined for destruction. As noted by Dick Kreck, once towns like Benton "had served the railroad's purpose…their existence became superfluous" (106). The railroad and its people neglect these remnant towns, forsaking them for new towns ahead. Profanation, in the forms of violence and vice, thrives in this impermanent, doomed, forgotten place, and opens a space to "the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation, or, rather, puts it to particular use" (Agamben 75). The Hell on Wheels and its patrons and producers take advantage of the fact that the railroad has separated the end of the line into a terminus that is intentionally ephemeral and only reconstituted through a stratigraphic effort. Within this railspace, people practice this sort of "negligence"—purposeless, playful, profanatory behavior within a damned place.

The process of profanation is impermanent and demands a reiterative practice, which bears out through the stratigraphic display of Benton seen here and dramatized in *The U.P. Trail*. As a type of "fragile and precious" profanatory behavior, "Play...has an episodic character, after

which normal life must once again continue on its course" (Agamben 87). The Hell on Wheels is one such playful, profanatory process—the Hell on Wheels deterritorializes the railspace at the end of the line and deactivates the consecration of the terminus, the process that initially removes the town from "common use.". Within this consecrated space, its residents hope to develop the space into a Cheyenne or Omaha, boomtowns that thrive long after the end of the line moves on. But as a profane playground for the wicked and purposeless, the Hell on Wheels returns this space to the realm of everyday use and toys with the idea of progress, even as it embraces its impermanence in the face of the completion of the transcontinental railroad.

The Western

The Western is a genre uniquely suited to displaying the profanatory processes of the Hell on Wheels. It conjures a collective image of the West that inspires profanation and in fact depends at its foundation on symbolism that expresses the duality between the sacred and profane. The Western—and particularly the type of Western that Zane Grey writes—is "a medium that repeatedly projects a set of simple ideas [that] can define the amorphous perceptual lenses through which people view a landscape and fuse them into a clear, uniformly perceived place image" (Blake 202). Western writers like Grey project the ideas of the West first developed by traveling correspondents like Samuel Bowles and refine them into the railspace we come to know as the Hell on Wheels. This "formula Western" develops yet is distinct from the earlier dime novels and travelogues like those featuring William "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Lewis's and Clark's Journals, respectively, and "distilled, simplified, and preserved a sense of the past for a reading public. Readers were increasingly nostalgic for those times and places that American interests had transformed" (Handley). In other words, the Western collects the clearest concepts developed during American expansion westward and streamlines and

popularizes them for mass consumption. Eventually, this "vulgar and transgressive" genre—the vanguard of which Alan Bourassa situates Zane Grey—travels into the "profane energy" of the American Renaissance and writers like Whitman and Hawthorne (Bourassa 169).

Reading Zane Grey's *The U.P. Trail* as a Dramatization of Profane Railspace

The U.P. Trail is one of the first novels to dramatize western expansion as driven by divine providence. In doing so, the novel exemplifies how the consecration of the American West and the railroad happens and how the process subsequently creates profanatory railspace. Writers of and about the Western invoke heavily religious language to articulate the relationship between the sacred and profane along the transcontinental railroad, within the concept of Manifest Destiny, and within the Hell on Wheels. For people akin to Teddy Roosevelt, "the American West was the last frontier of freedom and individualism, and it had to be preserved as a sacred bulwark against profane industrialism" (Etulian 802). The belief of the consecrated West stands the test of time, though at the expense of making ironic its availability to the masses. Only the transcontinental railroad, the nineteenth century's paradigm of industrialism, could open and populate the West. The Rooseveltian duality between the sacred West and profane industrialism would thus become incongruent with this new discourse, based on the fact that "Every village along the route saw the coming railroad as its savior" (Kreck 103). As fresh lifeblood to an infrequently visited town and its residents, the railroad was a miracle of salvation. The discourse of Manifest Destiny bridges the gap between the West as a sort of promised land and the railroad as the divinely provided road to salvation. Because "The grandeur of western landscapes seemed to confirm for Americans in the nineteenth century that the designs of the nation were providentially sanctioned" (Handley), we must view the West as a sacred space, and the American pull westerly must be divinely inspired as also must be the method of travel to get

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there. Grey remarks upon this providential guidance through his protagonist's escape from Benton. Late in the novel, William Neale, an engineer for the Union Pacific Railroad, leaves the town after a spate of violence. Grey describes his egress: "'The last—of Benton!... Thank God!' he murmured, brokenly. Well he realized how Providence had watched over him there. And slowly the train moved out upon the dark, windy desert" (357). Divine fate protects Neale in Benton, but it guides him there as well. Grey develops this concept of the inescapability of the profane in the realm of the sacred throughout the novel.

The popularity of *The U.P. Trail* can be at least partially attributed to Zane Grey's ability to lean into and further develop these ideas for readers who are nostalgic for the Western Frontier. Grey takes up the Rooseveltian mantle, believing that "the West is a place with restorative powers, an escape for the banality and immorality of the older parts of the United States" (Blake 214). As he "wrote as though a sacred but somehow approachable spirit resided in the western landscape" (Blake 211), Grey advances the discourse of the unseen, divine pull West, a destiny to pilgrimage westward. His characters forge this path, finding "solace in western landscapes that Grey's dramatic (and often purple) prose instills with a sacred power" (Handley). Yet if Grey were only writing about the consecration of western progress, he would not have been as successful as he was. Alongside his confirmation of the sanctity of the West and the construction of the transcontinental railroad, Grey also weaponizes Samuel Bowles's discoveries of the Hell on Wheels—namely, its stature as a "congregation of scum and wickedness" (56), which recalls the idea of Benton as a profane *topos* and its inhabitants as employees of hell's "most diabolical service" (57)—to develop the narrative struggle that lies at the center of *The U.P. Trail*. In reiterating and furthering this contest within railspace in some of the most popular cultural consumption of his age, Grey proves, and in a way constructs, the

process of profanation. In doing so, the adversarial relationship between the sacred and profane

spheres becomes a foundational characteristic of the West.

Through his vision of an American West born through a marriage of sacred and profane

spaces, Zane Grey has assumed a "domineering presence in the print and motion-picture media"

of the Western genre, which has "diffused his version of the West to an ever-widening audience

and reinforced his role as the stereotype of the genre that he in large part made famous" (Blake

206). Since the Western genre is the one that best develops the duality between the profane and

sacred, and since railspace—and in fact any *topos* read geocritically—is constructed culturally

by its literature, laborers, riders, and readers, then Grey as the most popular writer of the genre

maintains an outsized role in the construction of railspace and the "diffusion" of his specific

blueprint for it. This role is evident particularly at the end of the line. Grey sets more than half

of *The U.P. Trail* in Benton and "characterized [its] westerners with specific traits that as a group

set the standard for what is now a cherished part of western folklore" (Blake 212). Grey sets the

scene for these characters in both time and place with the same attention and with the same

popular effect. In setting his novels in the late nineteenth century but with the occasional glance

ahead to his own time, "Grey contributed more than have most writers to the idea that the

frontier West is both a historical and current reality, which explains why the temporal mythical

West is not rigidly defined. Current ties of his name with western places indicate that the West

he portrayed is perceived to be alive, which, in turn, has arguably affected the national psyche"

(Blake 210). Though Grey did not create the Western genre, he did write its most popular stories

and make them "alive" in his readers' minds.[7] His ability to capture simply the West and people

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[7] It is generally held that Owen Wister's novel, *The Virginian*, is the first Western, and it made tropes out of cowboys, shootouts, and the wide-open landscape. If Grey did not create the genre, he most certainly popularized it. By one account, by the time of his death in 1939, one-half of the population of the U.S. had read a novel by Zane Grey (Blake 204, 206). At his apex, Grey was "puffed almost as a god among men" (Bold 81).

who find themselves at the end of the line (both literally and figuratively) and the amplified projection of these places and portraits that follow from being massively popular anchor this particular railspace around his vision for it in *The U.P. Trail*. While it is still true that a geocritical analysis of any railspace should be undertaken multifocally, the intertextual weight that Grey hefts at the Hell on Wheels informs how most readers, then and now, see the space. As the central "place-defining novelist for the West" (Blake 215), Zane Grey heavily shapes how we understand and reconstruct the West, the transcontinental railroad that progresses through it, and the Hell on Wheels that marks such progress.[8]

While the majority of Grey's novels invoke the name of more than 50 places, towns, and cities, in *The U.P. Trail*, "less than twenty-five places are named in total in Nebraska, Wyoming, and Utah, but many of these cannot be positively located" (Pfeiffer 24). This fact alone indicates that Benton, Wyoming is notable, both in the novel (since it is one of its few real places) and in Grey's oeuvre, since it is already part of a pared down collection of places. Grey introduces many if not all of these places through the eyes of William Neale and the surveying maps of the railroad route Neale and his fellow engineers carve through the West. The towns and forts and construction camps he sees on the map trace the progress already made and suggest the path to be taken for the railroad's completion.   These towns that pop-up at the end of the line are "pinpoints on the UP's route map, marking the progress of the greatest building project of the nineteenth century then fading away" (Kreck 104). As a marker of the transcontinental railroad's westward growth, the end of the line reifies the discourse of Manifest Destiny. Simultaneously, the Hell on Wheels reterritorializes this railspace with profane actions that play

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[8] Alan Bourassa also acknowledges Grey's foundational role in discursively creating the West and the Western, though focuses on the author as a point of origin for the moral code of the west, which virtually transforms the genre into one based on ontology, as suggested within the oeuvre of Cormac McCarthy (179).

with the concept of progress and return it to common use, albeit temporarily. In concurrently

playing both roles, these towns are profane sirens that call attention to the fact that progress is

made at the expense of places that are outmoded or insufficiently advanced. Though the cost of

progress of the railroad is often the destruction of the terminal town (that is to say, its

deterritorialization), the notorious profanatory railspace lives on in the discourse of the "Wild

West.". Thus it can be said that profanation is the marker of progress, a necessary element of

discursive destabilization against which the transcontinental railroad measures itself. Yet the

Hell on Wheels (and the profanatory experience in general) is not wholly subsumed into the

sphere of power that is progress. Even as it is inherently temporary and "episodic" and within an

all-consuming apparatus, profanation maintains its revolutionary capabilities (Agamben 87).[9]

Regardless of its duration, profanation reclaims and revises the American West and as such

remains the most important political task for disenfranchised individuals and communities. The

Hell on Wheels is never more so bilocated as both a marker and destabilizer of progress than in

Benton. Zane Grey's *The U.P Trail* represents and amplifies this railspace and the processes of

profanation that reterritorialize it into the Hell on Wheels.

    The U.P. Trail dramatizes the construction of the transcontinental railroad along the

eponymous Trail in the mid-to-late 1860s, through the project's official completion and

ceremonial linkage of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads at Promontory Summit in

the Utah Territory on May 10, 1869. The main character, William Neale, is an engineer assigned

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[9] Agamben exemplifies this through Capitalism—the ultimate contemporary religion; it consecrates (i.e., removes from the use of man) objects into consumption and spectacle. Except here, this new church has adapted into a "gigantic apparatus for capturing pure means, that is, profanatory behaviors" (87). In other words, capitalism is singularly adept at negating the revolutionary capabilities of profanation and at incorporating these behaviors into the "religion" of capitalism. Still even here there is hope for a profanatory practice that cannot be wholly consumed. Agamben describes the gaze in specific pornography to prove his point, traces of which perhaps can be found in the prostitution and sexual vices of the Hell on Wheels.

to troubleshoot some of the most difficult tasks of the endeavor from the Union Pacific side of construction.[10] Neale surveys and charts the path across ravines and gorges, around bends and up mountains. All the while he and his friends—the wanted cowboy Larry "Red" King and Slingerland the fur trapper—develop feelings for Allie Lee, a young woman recently orphaned due to a fatal attack on her caravan from the Sioux. After Allie's abduction by the Sioux and then by the crooked gambler and proprietor Durade, Neale and Red despair and commiserate in Benton during its last weeks as a Hell on Wheels. Neale finds Allie, returns to his post as an engineer for the Union Pacific, and loses her again to Durade. Neale and Durade encounter one another a final time, during the last evening of the Hell on Wheels before it is razed and relocated down the line to the new terminal construction camp. After the Hell on Wheels claims the life of several characters including Red, Neale kills Durade and endures an anticlimactic span of time without Allie as he and the laborers complete the transcontinental railroad. On the day of its inauguration at Promontory Summit, Neale and Allie reunite and are married by the same preacher who offers a benediction at the joining of the rails that day.

The U.P. Trail maintains Grey's penchant for melodrama and flowery language that displays an excess of violence, action, and emotion. The concept of excess aligns with play and profanation, as an excess is a production of more than is necessary or desired and as such, it strives toward no purpose, essentially acting as what Agamben would define as "pure means." In this light, Grey's novel is itself profanatory. It plays with the railroad and Manifest Destiny,

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[10] Meanwhile, the Central Pacific Railroad Company was building eastward toward the Union Pacific from Sacramento (which itself connected with the Western Pacific Railroad Company from Sacramento to the San Francisco Bay. For the story of the race between the C.P. and U.P. Railroad Companies to Promontory Summit, see Gordon, pp. 133-267.

destabilizing the latter and calling into question the cost of Western expansion.[11] Before

profaning the railroad, the novel first sets the scene, describing a grand project where adventure

can be found around every bend and down every slope but one that also hints at the spaces most

prone to destabilization.

Neale acts as the reader's proxy, as he romanticizes the work of the railroad and its

laborers, viewing the chance to build the railroad as a call to adventure and toward reaching a

noble end. Still, in doing so, he sees the beginnings of the problem with the increasing velocity

of progress, a problem that will eventually lead to a profanatory counterpoint at the end of the

line. Neale notices "The uncouth crowd of laborers, the hardest lot he had ever seen, the talk,

noise, smoke; the rickety old clattering coaches; the wayside dumps and heaps and wreckage.

But they all seemed parts of a beautiful romance to him. Neale saw through the eyes of golden

ambition and illimitable dreams" (105-06). The laborers who drove the actual spikes of the rail,

in Neale's estimation, "seemed to embody both the romance and the achievement" of the

transcontinental railroad project" (386-87), and he observes them as "They all toiled, swore,

fought, drank, gambled. Hundreds of them went to nameless graves. But the work went on—the

great, driving, united heart beat on" (383). Grey sets up the railroad's romantic lens as

something through which Neale views the construction; the progress of the railroad moving too

[11] Grey confirms this reading with a complete tonal shift in the coda of the novel. A Sioux chief, never before
described in the story, looks down on the railroad from high ground, and the narrator takes up his point of view:
"This beast that puffed smoke and spat fire and shrieked like a devil of an alien tribe; that split the silence as
hideously as the long track split the once smooth plain; that was made of iron and wood; this thing of the white
man's, coming from out of the distance where the Great Spirit lifted the dawn, meant the end of the hunting-grounds
and the doom of the Indian…. The old chief swept aloft his arm, and then in his acceptance of the inevitable
bitterness he stood in magnificent austerity, somber as death, seeing in this railroad train creeping, fading into the
ruddy sunset, a symbol of the destiny of the Indian—vanishing—vanishing—vanishing—" (page). This description
of the railroad runs counter to all the rail progress that Neale celebrates at the end of the novel and leaves the reader
with a sense of unease. For a discussion of Grey's stereotypes of Native Americans and how he complicates them
through *The U.P. Trail*, see O'Neill 30-42.

fast to stop and consider the bodies left in the margins. The other rail workers themselves are caught up in this discourse of progress, "seized by the spirit of some great thing to be" (16). General Lodge—a character clearly based on Grenville Dodge, the former Major General of the Union army and chief engineer of the Union Pacific Railroad—encapsulates the power of the railroad and its momentum across the continent, insisting that "Love and life are only atoms under the iron heel of the U.P.R." (271). The train is the perfect vehicle for this story about progress, a fact understood by Grey when he leans into the metaphor of a train picking up steam to reach its final destination: "The momentum now of the road-laying was tremendous. The spirit that nothing could stop had become embodied in a scientific army of toilers, a mass, a machine, ponderous, irresistible, moving on to the meeting of the rails" (400). Neale's romantic view of the railroad clouds his judgment, as he fails to anticipate the danger that lies in wait at the terminus. After all, if "nothing could stop" the "embodied" "spirit" of the railroad's progress, then what else is expected to happen but death and destruction at the end of the line before more tracks can be laid?

The transcontinental progress of railroad construction will go on to leave laborers behind in unmarked graves and eventually cause the deaths that haunt the terminus. Less dire but equally indicative of the senseless and reckless momentum of transcontinental rail progress is the greed and graft of both the Union Pacific and the Southern Pacific. In their competition to lay track, the companies intentionally overlapped their efforts by more than one hundred miles. When the grading gangs from the west and east finally meet near Promontory Point, the agreed-upon site to connect the two railroads, "They were done," yet they "had passed each other in plain sight, working on, grading on for one hundred miles farther than necessary...doubling the expense of construction" (387). Neale anticipates something like this happening when he

laments earlier just "How much needless work began and completed in the building of the railroad" (213), which later sparks "a melancholy reminder of the dishonest aspect of the road-building. And he thought of many things. The spirit of the work was grand, the labor heroic, but, alas! side by side with these splendid and noble attributes stalked the specters of greed and gold and lust of blood and of death" (387). Neale sees the railroad as a "grand," "heroic," "noble" effort filled with "romance" and laborers who carry the project forward as if driven by a united cause. Simultaneously, the greed and graft of the railroad companies open the railspace to people more inclined to vice and sin. These "specters" haunt the margins of the railspace and begin the process of profanation that will deterritorialize the terminus and reterritorialize it into the Hell on Wheels. As the best engineer of the Union Pacific, Neale sees hitches in the railroad's construction as problems to solve; graft can be weeded out just as a grade can be leveled. Neale is part of this sphere of illimitable progress, which makes him incapable of recognizing the profanation that germinates in this space.

The closest Neale gets to anticipating the profanatory nature of the railspace is his fleeting awareness of the "specters of greed and gold," personified as "grey ghosts" of drunken, degenerate men and women who haunt the progress of the railroad (252). Grey contrives Neale's encounters with these "specters" to give his protagonist something to react to and something to strive against. Grey is, after all, a prolific pulp novelist who peddles in Western adventure; he is not subtle in his craft. He sets up his protagonist as a railroad man, and the crime and violence that surrounds Neale and his love interest drive the plot. Grey himself summarizes what his novel accomplishes; through the voice of the narrator, he notes that though "Neale did not understand the mystery of what he had been through…His ambition and effort, his fall, his dark siege with hell, his friendship and loss, his agony and toil, his victory, were all

symbolical of the progress of a great movement. In his experience lay hid all that development"
(390). The melodrama of Neale's experience reifies the metanarrative of progress that is
Manifest Destiny. And yet, in his excesses of language and imagery and setting and sin, in his
cheap commodification of a monumental point of American history and of Manifest Destiny,
Grey also plays with the railroad. While he invokes the Hell on Wheels to give his characters a
hellacious setting within which to act heroically and villainously, he also dramatizes its
profanatory potential as a railspace that deterritorializes the railroad terminus and reterritorializes
it as a space for "societal flotsam" who have no place in the discourse of progress. Through the
"specters" of the Hell on Wheels Grey corroborates the melodramatic nature of the degenerate
gamblers, grifters, and nomads Samuel Bowles witnesses in his real-life travels to the town. In
his travelogue, Bowles notes:

> One to two thousand men, and a dozen or two women were encamped on the
> alkali plain in tents and board shanties, not a tree, not a shrub, not a blade of grass
> was visible, the dust ankle deep as we walked through it, and so fine and volatile
> that the slightest breeze loaded the air with it, irritating every sense and poisoning
> half of them; a village of a few variety stores and shops, and many restaurants and
> grog shops; by day disgusting, by night dangerous, almost everybody dirty, many
> filthy, and with the marks of lowest vice; averaging a murder a day; gambling and
> drinking, hurdy-gurdy dancing and the vilest of sexual commerce, the chief
> business and past time of the hours,—this was Benton. Like its predecessors, it
> fairly festered in corruption, disorder and death, and would have rotted, even if
> this dry air, had it outlasted a brief sixty-day life. But in a few weeks its tents
> were struck, its shanties razed, and with their dwellers moved on fifty or a

hundred miles farther to repeat their life for another brief day. Where these people came from originally; where they went to when the road was finished, and their occupation was over, were both puzzles too intricate for me. Hell would appear to have been raked to furnish them; and to it they must have naturally returned after graduating here, fitted for its highest seats and most diabolical service. (56-57)

Bowles describes these men and women as if they were stock characters in a play. Grey will fabulize these characters and the traits of the town in his creation of the Western genre—the barren and dusty land, the danger, the gambling halls, the desperadoes, and its impermanence— to describe a profane wildness that grows amidst Western expansion. Neale acts as the reader's proxy to this encounter.

Through Neale's eyes, Grey invokes animal imagery in Benton, particularly that of ants and bees, to describe the town and its inhabitants as a thronging, wild mass. At dawn on the weekend, the town's laborers, "red-shirted and blue-shirted, swarming as thick as ants" celebrate getting paid and the prospect of having a day off of work (152): "Benton resembled an ant-heap at break of day. A thousand songs arose, crude and coarse and loud, but full of joy" (246). In the early evening, as the Hell on Wheels warms up for the night, "Lights began to flash up along the streets of Benton, and presently Neale became aware of a low and mounting hum, like a first stir of angry bees" (162). These bees zip around the town and agitate everyone into motion. Fresno, one of Durade's henchmen, continues the metaphor, explaining to Allie that "Benton's a beehive… An' when the bees come home with their honey, why, the red ants an' scorpions an' centipedes an' rattlesnakes git busy" (259). These descriptors suggest a connection to profanatory, deterritorializing behaviors that reshape the terminal's railspace into the Hell on

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Wheels. In their wildness, animals (even insects)[12] demonstrate how natural it is to play.

Agamben purports that "even in nature there are profanations," and uses the example of the cat

playing with a ball to show that when animals play, they are "freeing a behavior from its genetic

inscription within a given sphere (predatory activity, hunting)" (85). That is to say, the animal

will seemingly go against its genetic nature to profane the sphere of predation through play. In

this activity, the "freed behavior still reproduces and mimics the forms of activity from which it

has been emancipated…but, in emptying them of their sense and of any obligatory relationship

to an end, it opens them and makes them available for a new use" (Agamben 85-86). By

continuously aligning Benton and its inhabitants alongside animals and specifically insects, the

novel hints at the profanatory behavior that occurs naturally in the space and through its actors.

The shopkeepers and laborers and gamblers play in the Hell on Wheels just as the cat plays with

the ball of yarn; by mimicking and mocking the behaviors and processes expected of them.

Gamblers go through the motions of trying to accumulate money only to lose it all on one hand

or spend it all on liquor. Laborers spend entire paychecks in the town but leave with no tangible

goods. The shops themselves are literally nothing more than facades of flimsy boards.

Desperadoes and criminals lust after gold and amass it illegally but do nothing with it. Whether

or not these playful actions are moral is beside the point. In fact, as empty actions liberated from

"any obligatory relationship to an end," the play performed at the terminus turns away from the

sphere of progress and the American society it is creating.

        Just as journalists and critics lean on language of the metaphysical and religious to

describe the West, the railroad, and the Hell on Wheels itself, so too does Grey. In Benton's

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[12] "Happiness is never better exhibited than by young animals...when playing together...Even insects play together, as had been described by the excellent observer, P. Huber, who caw ants chasing and pretending to bite each other, like so many puppies" (Darwin 38).

dance hall, Grey finds "no souls here. Only beasts of men and women to whom there was no name" (168). These soulless "beasts" make "scars of habitations where hell had held high carnival...and that spot was haunted" (345). Through this language, he aligns the Hell on Wheels with sin, readies the space for profane action, and gestures toward the symbiotic relationship between the railroad, the Hell on Wheels, and its inhabitants. In one demonstrative scene, the thronging mass of workers and desperadoes mills about Benton during the day, waiting for the pay-train to arrive. At first, "The powers of heaven smiled on the clear, quiet morning, but the powers of hell waited—for the hours to come, the night and the darkness" (247). In the meantime though, "There were laughter, profanity, play—a continuous hum, but compared to Benton's usual turmoil, it was pleasant" (247). Grey uses the words "profanity" and "play" to connote harmless fun occurring during the time before the pay-train arrives. But the "continuous hum" present alludes to the town's comparison to a "beehive" and the threat of danger that is ever-present in the railspace. Thus the "profanity, play" are inextricably connected to the subversive chaos of the Hell on Wheels. The chaos re-emerges with the sight of the oncoming train. The narrator supposes that the train "might have been a harbinger of evil, for a subtle change, nervous, impatient, brooding, visited that multitude. A slow movement closed up the disintegrated crowd and a current of men worked forward to encounter resistance and opposing currents" (248-49). If the train can be said to be a manifest metaphor for what is consecrated into the sphere of progress, then the sacred and the profane currents felt in this railspace converge at the point of the payday. In other words, through the train, the sphere of progress literally transports money to the people of Benton, money which then brings their profanatory behaviors to the surface.

Neale witnesses this scene from afar. In a monologue to the gambler Place Hough, Neale worries over his own soul and that of his friend Red King. In doing so, he connects the language of damnation with deterministic evocations of the Hell on Wheels and the transcontinental railroad and hints at a symbiotic connection between the two railspaces:

> I have crazy impulses. They've grown on me out here. They burst like lightning out of a clear sky...Strange—not understandable! I'm at the mercy of every hour I spend here. Benton has got into my blood. And I see how Benton is a product of this great advance of progress—of civilization—the U.P.R. ...Benton has called to the worst and wildness in [Red]. He'll do something terrible… The moment will come, born out of this abnormal time. I can't explain, but I feel. There's a work-shop in this hell of Benton. Invisible, monstrous, and nameless! …Nameless like the new graves dug every day out here on the desert. ...How few of the honest toilers dream of the spirit that is working on them… They are men. There are thousands of them. The U.P.R. goes on. It can't be stopped. It has the momentum of a great nation pushing it from behind...we are all so stung by that nameless spirit that we are stirred beyond ourselves and dare both height and depth of impossible things. (243-44)

These "impossible things" are both the construction of the transcontinental railroad ("height") and the destabilizing profanation ("depth") enacted in the Hell on Wheels. One depends upon the other. The Hell on Wheels is a "product" of the railroad, made in the "invisible, monstrous, and nameless" "work-shop" of the town, itself made manifest through the railroad designation of the place as the temporary terminus of the railroad and by "the travelers, the business people, the strugglers, the nondescripts, the parasites, the criminals, the desperadoes, and the idlers—all who

must by hook or crook live off the builders" (159). Simultaneously, the Hell on Wheels cultivates Neale's "crazy impulses" while its "nameless" mechanism is duplicated by the "nameless" gravestones, which fail to mark the corpses claimed by the construction of the railroad. Grey clearly articulates the former "parasitic" relationship that Benton develops with the railroad (244). The Hell on Wheels feeds off and depends upon the railroad and its workers, and it ceases to function when the railroad moves on from the space. But in a different way, the railroad depends upon the Hell on Wheels, using it as a relief valve for people who (and actions that) do not fit into the narrative established by Manifest Destiny. This is not the same "parasitic" relationship that the Hell of Wheels has with the railroad but rather one that suggests the relationship between the two railspaces is more like symbiosis, where there is a reciprocal benefit to each as part of their spatial proximity.

While Neale sets up the parasitic relationship between Benton and the railroad, the gambler Place Hough responds by homing in on the "nameless spirit" that stirs men to sin and salvation. He locates this spirit within the railroad's laborers and articulates how it operates through these men:

> There's mystery in the air. This Benton is a chaos. Those hairy toilers of the rails! I've watched them hammer and lift and dig and fight. By day they sweat and they bleed, they sing and joke and quarrel—and go on with the work. By night they are seized with the furies. They fight among themselves while being plundered and murdered by Benton's wolves. Heroic by day—hellish by night...And so, spirit or what—they set the pace. (244)

Regardless of what the "spirit" is that motivates them, the "toilers of the rails," who operate as agents both of the railroad and of the Hell on Wheels and more generally, as "heroic" actors in

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the sphere of progress and "hellish" players of profanation. Hough uses the word "fight" to describe the laborers actions at the rails and in Benton, and the blood shed on the rails parallels that spilled in murder in the town. The construction of the railroad and the Hell on Wheels find commonalities in violence and blood, which the laborers perform and spill and thus determine the fate and shape of both railspaces.

The Hell on Wheels derives its energy from the same source that powers the transcontinental project (i.e., the laborers) and thus assumes a greater role in the development and construction of the transcontinental railroad. The railspace opens an area for laborers and drifters (and women, as will be explored below) that is otherwise inaccessible to them. The Hell on Wheels amplifies their voices and actions as they undertake work and play that, in the words of Hough, "set the pace" of the railroad's progress across the continent. Dick Kreck confirms this idea of the terminal railspace as a metronome of progress when he notes, as mentioned earlier, that these terminal towns are like "pinpoints on the UP's route map, marking the progress of the greatest building project of the nineteenth century then fading away." That is to say, Benton begins as a "pinpoint," suggesting that the railroad and its discursive sphere of influence are demarcated by a railspace that is inherently profane. When the Hell on Wheels is deterritorialized and relocated, the town it leaves behind in its wake is summarily washed away. So perhaps it can be said that the sphere of influence of Manifest Destiny (and of the railroad itself) was never more manifest than during its construction, when the dreams of boom towns were at their apex and the frontier was still open and in front of Americans. This is what a geocritical reading of the railspace of the terminus reveals. Grey's novel reifies this point to the reading masses, taking up the "fading away" of the Hell on Wheels through first tracing how its blood and violence align with the railroad itself through death.

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Death links the railroad to the Hell on Wheels through the mantle of anonymity. Both railspaces are replete with the "nameless" dead, whether caused by sin, sacrifice, or accident. This connection reflects Agamben's discovery of a genealogical symbiosis between profanation and sacrifice, which connects the concepts from the Latin root word "profanare," meaning "to render profane" and "to sacrifice" (77). When Neale and Slingerland come upon the body of Service, an engineer who was trapped alone in the cold and froze to death, they bury him as Neale despairs about "Another nameless grave!" and wistfully remarks that "the railroad will run along there! Trains will pass this spot. …Thousands of people—going, coming, busy, happy at their own affairs, full of their own lives—will pass by poor Service's grave and never know it's there!" Slingerland replies, "If people must hev railroads, they must kill men to build them" (97). Though this quote gestures toward the unmarked graves of all the laborers who died in making the railroad, it also alludes more generally to the death that surrounds the terminus as it reterritorializes into the Hell on Wheels. In this sense, death fuels the U.P. Trail and Benton, both. Grey recognizes and reiterates the coequality of death between the railroad and the Hell on Wheels later in the novel. Ruby, a young woman Neale finds in one of the town's dance halls, commits suicide and is buried alongside a nondescript "sandy mound" of other graves, one of which contains a laborer who recently died accidentally by a blast on the rails. In a direct allusion to Service the engineer, the narrator exclaims, "Another nameless grave! …As the workman had given his life to the road, so had the woman. Neale saw a significance in the parallel" (245). The people sacrificed to the altar of Manifest Destiny and the people who die as part of the profanatory resistance to it are buried next to each other, each giving their lives to shaping the railspace of the terminus. Caught up in the death toll is Neale's wistfulness for the railroad, all that has been lost and gained, all that has been left behind, and all that lies ahead.

The buried laborers and sinners generate all of this; they operate as a stratum upon which the Hell on Wheels operates and with which it is comprised. They haunt the profane railspace as a stratigraphic recurrence in memory.

Just as the bodies of these men and women lie unmarked and are remembered only as a nostalgic memory, so too does Benton itself become a ghost of a memory for Neale, for the railroad, and for the reading public. Despite the town's traceless decomposition, the Hell on Wheels continues to haunt the progress of the railroad. It manifests again with the establishment of a new terminus. Grey's novel shows the cyclical and episodic nature of profanation through the Hell on Wheels. Grey marks Benton as a doomed town early on, knowing his reader will anticipate the town's violent and total demolition. When introducing the town, Grey writes, "Benton was prey for sun, wind, dust, drought… No sage, no cedars, no grass, not even a cactus-bush, nothing green or living to relieve the eye, which swept across the gray and the white, through the dust, to the distant bare and desolate hills of drab. The hell that was reported to abide at Benton was in harmony with its setting" (158). The reader knows this place raises up from hell and will return again; it is just a matter of watching how fast it will burn first. Because of this expectation, Grey decouples the death of Benton from the story's climax—where Neale and Durade meet and the latter is killed by his own knife. Of the ostensible end of the town, Grey writes, "In the madness of that night there was written finality—the end. Benton had reached its greatest, wildest, blackest, vilest. ...The scene at midnight was unreal, livid, medieval. …Benton seemed breathing hard, laboring under its load of evil, dancing toward its close" (252). And yet, "when the sun arose, splendid and golden, with its promise of beauty, it shone upon a ghastly, silent, motionless sleeping Benton" (253). In its death throes, the town lies sedated, but alive for another 100 pages. Its remaining time as a profanatory railspace is spent as

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a "ghastly" space, already beginning to haunt all the people who traveled through the town over the past three months and making them uneasy to the point of leaving to seek out the next terminus.

Grey describes the end of Benton as its "written finality" (296), as if it were destined for destruction. He continues with language that further suggests the anticipated, scheduled deconstruction of the town, indicating that "The great and vile construction camp had reached the end of its career. It was being torn down—moved away—depopulated. There was an exodus" (296), and "In forty-eight hours Benton would be a waste place of board floors, naked frames, debris and sand, ready to be reclaimed by the desert" (323). The "career" of the now-"depopulated" railspace is ending at a set time. Its remnants are expected to be lost to the desert. This process tracks with the town's real-life gradual decline, the deterritorialization of the Hell on Wheels, and the subsequent reterritorialization of the profanatory railspace down the line in "Roaring City" (296).[13] Grey understands this process when he readies Benton's waste "to be reclaimed by the desert." The novel indicates that Benton's remains (or rather, the lack of them) haunt the space that the desert reclaims. Irishmen put in charge of digging graves at the site remark that it would be decent to also "bury the remains of Benton" (340-41), indicating some respect for its remnants and the belief that burying them might let the town rest in peace. As a buried, deterritorialized railspace, the former terminus left behind no tangible trace. Grey sets the scene of the desolate, blank land, and "In the midst of the stark space lay the spot where Benton had been. A spot lost in the immensity of the desert...There was not a light. Flat patches of pale gleams, a long, wan length of bare street, shadows everywhere—these marked Benton's

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[13] For Grey, this is the name of the new end-of-the-line temporary town. In actuality, the town was called "Rawling Springs" (Harris 1).

grave." (Grey 377). The "pale gleams" and "shadows" filtering through the space and doubling

as grave markers suggest to the reader a plain of land that haunts Neale and the railroad. And as

Grey describes it as an unrecognizable remnant of the construction of the latter, the railspace

haunts the discourse around Manifest Destiny. This haunting continues today, as Benton

maintains its both infamy as the most wicked Hell on Wheels and as a figurative ghost town,

thanks to the impossibility of determining its exact coordinates.

     As a "torn-down...depopulated" terminus, Benton only exists as a memory or ghost town

in the discourse of the history of Western expansion. But the Hell on Wheels remains, haunting

the transcontinental railroad as a profanation waiting to re-manifest down the line. The "episodic

character" of profanation that Agamben describes is inherently temporary and must be

continually re-visited and re-engaged, as demonstrated by the continuous razing and raising of

the Hell on Wheels, from Laramie to Benton to Rawling Springs. While some towns, like

Cheyenne, survive and even thrive once the terminus moves on, most deconstruct completely,

like Corinne and Benton. Regardless of the status of the post-terminus town, the profanatory

railspace it contains is reborn wherever the railroad re-establishes the end of the line.

     Journalistic accounts of the end of Benton recognize, report on, and reify the episodic

nature of profanation of terminal railspace. As a special correspondent, Chance L. Harris begins

his "Letter from Chance" column on Sept. 15, 1868 with a report from Benton. When Harris

arrives to the town, he finds it "played-out-and-fizzled… [a] nameless locality where sunshine

comes no more" (1). Harris goes on to describe a forgotten town, reclaimed by the army,[14]

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[14] As the only active army presence within 100 miles and just across the North Platte River, Fort Steele "was near, but not too near, the resources and distractions of the despicable town on Benton" (Breithaupt 41). Its soldiers were often tasked with "bring[ing] peace to Benton when things got too out of control there" (Breithaupt 42).

where "Martial law has gradually died out; the civil authorities have hung their banners on the outer walls, Virtue asserts her sway; plethoric pocket-books are safe from midnight marauders; cold weather has choked off the daily *demi monde* baths in the *Platte* [River]. Benton is happy as a mackerel in cashmere socks" (1). And yet, the Hell on Wheels remains through relocation. Now it is at Rawling Springs, "the spot where any and every body can be waltzed too for most any price. Ten cents in your weasle [sic] skin will rope you in—and five dollars get you out—of the sheriffs [sic] hands. … If you have any money… and intend coming here, leave it at home, because they don't arrest any body who is unable to buy himself out of the guard-house—after moon down" (1). Harris's description of the new terminus could have applied to Benton not even a month earlier, when the *demi monde* baths were in full swing and when it was news to report, "nobody killed, and not even a respectable dog fight!" during the mayor's inauguration (*The Frontier Index*, 9/11/1868). The quotidian nature of Harris's reporting—he does not insinuate that the "played-out" nature of Benton is anything unexpected, and "fizzled" connotes a feeling of being naturally burned out—and the language he uses to describe Rawling Springs that is reminiscent of how others described Benton just a few weeks earlier confirm the idea that profanation is ever-present at the end-of-the-line; the only change is its location.[15] This sensationalized language about the graft and danger in the Hell on Wheels, now located at Rawling Springs, affects the readership's opinion of the new terminus and of the one quickly forgotten, as does the speed with which the newspaper leaves one terminus to adopt another.

After September, Benton disappears completely from *The Frontier Index*, and Rawling Springs and Green River City increase correlationally. This speed tracks with how the

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[15] The editors of The Frontier Index anticipate the cyclical nature of the Hell on Wheels when over the course of three months they move offices from Laramie to Benton to Green River City (relayed to their readers in a front-page column on August 11, 1868)

newspaper views itself. On June 30 in a bit of self-hawking, the editors note that "*The Frontier Index* the pioneer paper of the West, keeps pace with the successive termini towns of the Great Union Pacific Railroad" (6/30/1868). Thus altogether, this is the final way in which the Hell on Wheels informs the progress of the transcontinental rail—as an episodic profanation that marks the intervals of progress along the rail. During its episodic phases, the profane railspace haunts the railroad's past as a ghost town, halts its present construction as the Hell on Wheels, and lies in wait at the to-be-determined terminus down the line. The decomposition and reconstitution of the profane terminus despite its lack of a geographic remnant calls attention to the importance of stratigraphy and geocriticism at-large in following what Deleuze would call the "Certain paths (movements)" of the Hell on Wheels in relation to the spaces it has deterritorialized and reterritorialized. In other words, the very nature of the Hell on Wheels as a traveling, temporary railspace replete with vice, violence, and death necessitates studying it as a space episodically built, razed, and rebuilt again and again. Each iteration of this profane railspace is comprised of its earlier manifestations, its constituent laborers and sinners, and the understanding that it was inherently doomed from the start.

"The railroad spelled the end of the wilderness" (Grey 406), and as the prevailing symbol of the discourse of Westward progress, the railroad also recurrently spells the end of the wild profanations that crop up at terminal towns. But one could also posit that the end of the railroad (i.e., the terminus) spells out the wilderness (the profanation), or perhaps even that the wilderness/profanation technically spells the end (the terminus) of the railroad, articulating a new railspace that reterritorializes the end-of-the-line as a place of pure means that welcomes the West's "societal flotsam" alongside its laborers, prospectors, and capitalists. The new meaning granted by profanation to the reclaimed railspace is this re-opening of the rapidly shrinking

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frontier. Zane Grey's *The U.P. Trail* discursively amplifies the potentialities of this railspace and further constructs the Hell on Wheels as a paradoxically profane marker of rail progress, a necessary element of discursive destabilization against which the transcontinental railroad measures itself.

Chapter Four

"Something more racial, say bigger, than mountains":

Racial Memory, Location, and Labor on the Tracks in the Poetic Deep Maps of C.S. Giscombe

This study's first two chapters looked into the train to see how the railspace of two of the most discussed railcars have been shaped by the discourse that describes them. Chapter three departed from the train to dig into the *topos* of the end-of-the-line, where pioneering riders and laborers built and demolished and built again the towns that would define the "Wild West." This chapter looks more closely at the tracks upon which the train travels and the right of way built by railroad laborers. Here, I will use stratigraphy in order to show how C.S. Giscombe's poetic deep maps unearth the buried memory of African Americans' labor and locality along the inland railroad tracks of the American Midwest.

Giscombe's poetry about the railroad and its connection to the African American experience follows an established history of the railroad as a site where African American writers, activists, and laborers negotiate attitudes and laws concerning race. The passenger car was a contested site for civil rights and segregation in the 1890s, adjudicated through the Plessy v. Ferguson case in the Supreme Court. The African American porters who served passengers faced similar discrimination, as they were not eligible for promotion to jobs like conductor or engineer due to their skin color. This in part eventually motivates porters to create the first African American union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, which endeavored to "redefin[e] the Pullman Car as a site of economic equality rather than social inequality" (Berte 221, 223). By the 1920s, writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Claude McKay were publishing fiction that furthered this vision of what could be newly possible for African American rail workers. Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte coins the term "micro-geography" to designate the spaces

where this activist work takes place. Of Du Bois and McKay, she observes that they are

"reappropriating the micro-geography of the rail car in order to renegotiate individual identity…

and group identity," thus arriving at a new conception of the relationship between these identities

and the space through which they are formed (226).[1]

Following in the wake of the efforts of Du Bois and McKay to use railspace to alter the

discourse around African American identity, C.S. Giscombe considers the "micro-geography" of

the railroad's tracks as they cut across Ohio. His cumulative work—culminating to-date with

Ohio Railroads in 2014—calls attention to the racial memories that constitute the railspace of the

tracks, particularly through what Andrew Zawacki calls Giscombe's "associative prose."

Associative prose relays information more through connotation than denotation, and through this

45-page "poem in essay form" (back cover), Giscombe infers meaning through the connections

between racial memories, histories, and physical layout of the rail corridor. For example, in the

second section of *Ohio Railroads*, Giscombe delves into the layout and history of the railroad in

Yellow Springs, Ohio and the neighboring city, Xenia. In the space of a page, Giscombe jumps

from observations about the track to the racial history of the area to his father's memories. He

informs the reader that "the railroad's right of way between the two places has been made into a

bicycle trail. Yellow Springs is known as 'the most miscegenated place in America' but in

Dayton, according to stories, it was common, as early as the 1940s, to see Negroes walking

downtown with their white girlfriends. In 2008, my father remembered Xenia in the 1950s as 'a

country town'" (16). Eventually, Amtrak takes over the train service that passes through the

area, and "At that time the station stop at Xenia was eliminated" (16). Now the railspace only

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[1] One could substitute railspace for "micro-geography" and reterritorializing for "reappropriating" and easily see the similarities between this dissertation and Berte's regarding how both conceive of the discursive construction of the American railroad.

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affects rail travel whenever "east- and west-bound National Limited trains would meet at Xenia" (16). Giscombe unearths racial history and memory from an elided railroad location. Each of the eight sections of *Ohio Railroads*, what Giscombe dubs his "prose pieces," are similarly "rangy" in their geography and chronology, and across Ohio, Giscombe finds racial memory buried along the margins of the right of way. [2]

To introduce racial marginality along the tracks and how African American laborers and riders reinscribe the railspace from the periphery, particularly within *Ohio Railroads* and Giscombe's earlier work, this chapter will first contrast two photographs taken by Union Pacific Railroad photographer Andrew J. Russell and show how these margins are visually relayed to a national audience. Then I will situate the poetry of C.S. Giscombe within the concept of a "deep map," a term which will be explored through a reading of one episode in William Least Heat-Moon's *PrairyErth*—the book that creates the idea of the deep map. This sort of cartography and its tools reveal new information and understanding about the railspace of the tracks, the physical labor that builds it, and the locations that arise along its edges. With this framework in mind, I will explore how Giscombe creates a poetic deep map of railspace, particularly of the tracks, and in doing so, how he lays out the strata that comprise the railspace—strata that are formed by racial memory and locality and history. The exposure of these layers is itself an effort to reterritorialize and recognize the tracks and the right of way/rail corridor as a networked railspace that delimits, contains, and occasionally symbolizes racial memory and locality. Giscombe "contexturally" develops this project across several of his essays and poetry compilations (Frank 62), meaning that the themes he introduces early in his career carry through

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[2] In his "Lunch Poems" talk at University of California Berkeley, Giscombe puts the phrase "prose pieces" in air quotes as he says it, as if to imply that others have dubbed these pieces "prose" but that he still intends to have them retain a poetic aspect. In the same introduction, Giscombe calls the poems "rangy" in subject matter and form.

and can only be understood in the context of his entire body of work. As such, this chapter will take up Giscombe's *Prairie Style* (2008), his essays collected in *Border Towns* (2014), and *Ohio Railroads* (2014) to trace the development of the railspace that comprises the tracks.

Andrew J. Russell and Photographed Labor

Andrew J. Russell captured more than 1,000 images of the Union Pacific Railroad between 1868 and 1869 (Davis 7), though he is best/only known for one of his last photographs of the project—"East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail." It captures the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad during the Golden Spike Ceremony at Promontory Summit in the Utah Territory (see Figure 7). "East and West…" depicts the chief engineers of the Central Pacific Railroad and Union Pacific Railroad shaking hands in front of two locomotives facing each other. Engineers and laborers crowd in front of the camera and drape themselves over the locomotives. Russell creates a wedge of empty space that divides the Central Pacific and Union Pacific workers and draws the audience's eye to the middle of the photograph, where the trains and chief engineers meet. With the joining of Eastern and Western hands, the photograph becomes a symbol of the unification of America following the Civil War—its reproduction and resulting popularity reoriented the narrative of America from a North-South polarity to an East-West trajectory (Willumson 4), and rallied support for the narrative of Manifest Destiny. As the most popular photograph of the construction of the transcontinental railroad, "East and West…" operates as both a "historic document" and "aesthetic object," which "celebrates the historic association of the photograph and transforms it into a metaphor" (Willumson 4). This metaphor is one that was "widely exhibited, marketed, and reproduced in the national press" of the day (Sandweiss 158) and one that continues currently, as proven by the Golden Spike National Historical Park's observation that the "most famous photograph" of the transcontinental railroad

"seems to capture a defining moment in our nation's history" (Golden Spike National Historical Park). It is an image that has endured as a celebratory symbol of Manifest Destiny. It is also a railspace intentionally shaped to exclude ethnic labor.

Figure 7

"East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail"

Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California

With only white men in the frame, the photograph is decidedly homogenous. This despite Chinese trackmen comprising approximately 90 percent of the Central Pacific labor force (Sandweiss 160). These laborers were "Pressed to the edges of the crowd, so far off to the margins they do not appear in the photographs" (Sandweiss 159-60). Ultimately, out of the approximately 35 photographs of the event, only one definitively captured Chinese laborers

(Willumson 179).[3] By whitewashing the labor force of the railroad and depicting its construction as ethnically homogenous, the photo's authors (both Russell and the railroad companies present at the event) literally and figuratively push racial struggles and economic inequality to the periphery beyond the border of the frame and establish this process as the symbolic norm of railroad construction.

Figure 8

[Military railroad operations in northern Virginia: men using levers for loosening rails][4]

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

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[3] Daniel Davis cites a journal entry from U.P. engineer James Maxwell regarding the difficulty of getting Chinese laborers to pose for photographs, saying "pictures of them [Chinese laborers] were desired, but none could be had, as everyone would drop his tools and run, as soon as he knew that the lens was pointed in his direction" (74). Additionally, the Stanford Digital Repository librarians claim that they have racially identified as Chinese two of the laborers in the photo by locating these same two men in other photographs (purl.stanford.edu/hx407zx8552). These counter arguments seem to contradict one another—if it was difficult for photographers to capture Chinese laborers, how do other photographs exist of them? In any case, whether there are two Chinese laborers out of the nearly 100 men in the photograph or none, the fact remains that there is scant representation of ethnic labor at a railspace that was physically constructed by and which contained on its margins a disproportionate number of Chinese trackmen.
[4] Title devised by Library staff.

In "East and West…" Russell elides ethnic labor by pushing it to the margins, but in his earlier photos, taken when he was part of the Union army (1862-1863), Russell foregrounds the work of black men on the rails. Even here, the unsaid history of the photos' subjects and their labor and the necessary artificiality and deliberate construction of the photos themselves betray a conceptual forgetfulness that serves to bury ethnic labor just as efficiently as its marginalization at the Golden Spike ceremony. Included without much context in photographic compilations by Daniel Davis and Theodore Kornweibel Jr., Russell's "[Military railroad operations in northern Virginia: men using levers for loosening rails]" depicts black laborers in Virginia as they loosen tracks that were previously operated by the Confederacy. The image shows two sets of men: the first men, in the foreground, pose defiantly and hold a rail perpendicular to the tracks still joined to the ground. The other group of men is in the middle ground of the image, posing in mid-action as they bend the rest of the rail to render it inoperable and unsalvageable. There are two railcars in the background, owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad and still on the rails. The middle-ground laborers hold the twisted rail up; the man on the right should be pulling the rail in the same direction, but he looks as if he is posing as well. Posing "for at least a quarter of a minute" would have been necessary to ensure that Russell could capture an unblurred image of the laborers (Davis 74)—note the blurred man in the middle-ground on the left in "East and West…," whose silhouette, perhaps captured in mid-fall, is in direct contrast to the detailed faces of the men who hold still.[5] In this way, this image is more akin to a *tableau vivant* than a candid shot; the action is performed and held in position so that Russell could capture it clearly. With such an intentional focus on the laborers, the photograph runs counter to how Russell typically constructed images of the railroad. Often, Russell "composed scenes… using the ties and rails to

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[5] For an extended explanation of the meticulous science and deliberate positioning required of mid-nineteenth century photographers, see "Making the Photographs," pp. 27-65 in Willumson.

draw the viewers [sic] eye into a landscape" (Williams 42). In "[Military railroad…]" rail cars obstruct the landscape from view, with the rails drawing the viewer's eye into contact with the laborers who stare back. The deliberate staging of the scene enables it to be captured photographically, but it also relays a sense of artificiality that distances the viewer from the railroad's black laborers, particularly when combined with Russell's concentration on the labor more than the laborers.

Russell's sheen of artifice aligns with how literature and theater of the time discursively distanced White Americans from black labor and agency along the rails. With the exception of the folk tales of John Henry, African American characters in rail literature derived from the minstrel tradition and were depicted as vaguely threatening "dim-witted buffoon[s]" (Sartwell 86-87). These efforts to exclude African Americans (and the Chinese, Mormons, and to a lesser extent, the Irish) through caricature and broad insults were part of an intentional "re-scripting of ethnic labor" undertaken by popular frontier writers of the time (Sartwell 70). The "re-scripting" of labor ultimately "serve[d] to ease Americans' unease with minorities by creating a comical representation of ethnic characters that clearly removes any threat to 'real' (i.e. 'white') Americans." (Sartwell 78). With more than 300 formerly enslaved African American men working on the transcontinental railroad between Omaha and Utah in the late 1860s (Kornweibel 41) and many others joining the Union Army to build the U.S. Military Railroad as "contraband of war" (which includes the laborers shown in Figure 8) (Kornweibel 30), the photographic strategy of artifice employed by Russell would have resonated at least subconsciously with white Americans as an attempt to allay their unspoken "unease" at the prospect of escaped slaves building the tracks upon which the entire nation would depend for travel.

Whether through conscripted laborers, enslaved laborers, or other types of labor that remain unacknowledged and along the margins, the railroad's "advancement rested on exploitation" (Kornweibel 28).[6] "[Military Railroad…]" joins "East and West…" as part of a larger discourse on ethnic labor on the tracks that buries ethnic labor, history, and locality on the tracks through visual omission and conceptual forgetfulness. This elision allows such photographs to serve "as celebratory and self-congratulatory images for the railroad owners" while failing "to document or explain in any comprehensive way the labor that allowed them this moment of triumph" (Sandweiss 161). It is this discourse that these photographs reify, that deep mapping unearths, and that which Giscombe's poetry re-traces.

Though I will eventually show that with *Prairie Style* and *Ohio Railroads* Giscombe creates poetic deep maps of the inland prairie and Dayton, Ohio, others situate him into more pre-established poetic genres—the lyric, the geographic poem, the post-black arts movement poetics, surrealism, the *avant garde*, ecopoetics, poetic cartography. Giscombe situates himself as a descendant of the literary tradition established by Jean Toomer's *Cane*, which he attributes as the catalyst for his poetry in *Here* and *Giscome Road*.[7] The critics, poets, and peers who categorize Giscombe across these wide-ranging genres do so with language laden with spatial imagery, thus aligning with my reading below of Giscombe as a poetic cartographer of the deep

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[6] Enslaved African American men constructed most of the South's railroad network. They experienced more brutality and hazards than did any others due to the high likelihood of injury or death from blasting accidents, boiler explosions, and the fact that they were rented out to railroad overseers who faced little to no repercussions for their injury or death (Kornweibel 27). These exploitative practices continue to bear fruit today, as some of the railroad rights-of-way still used by CSX, the Norfolk Southern, the Union Pacific (among others) are the ones that were cleared and graded by enslaved laborer in the early nineteenth century (Kornweibel 28).

[7] In "Miscegenation Studies" (an essay developed in *tripwire* and upon which Giscombe expands in *Border Towns*), Giscombe admits that his poetry is in response "to the literary value Toomer assigned to the African American migration north, to his articulation of that, meaning how he broke all that down. To be north with the south still in your head after all this time" (100). Perhaps Toomer's own experience on the train is another motivator for Giscombe, as he began writing early drafts of the first section of *Cane* on the train from Georgia to Washington D.C. (McKay, *Jean Toomer…* 5, 33).

map. Giscombe wields these traditions as mapmaking tools he uses to dig into the *topos* of the railspace of the tracks.

The concept of space is inextricable from Giscombe's poetic situation. Coleman Hutchison recognizes that the "signal feature" of Giscombe's work is the tension between "the roots of identity" and a "projective" force" across cultures, across time, but also across the country, via train (110). Hutchison aligns Giscombe alongside poets for whom "race is represented as a spatio-temporal phenomenon" and within "the encompassing, projective poetics of identity" (110). As an aside to a larger study on the Projectivist movement of Charles Olson, Jason Vernon Starnes notes that "C.S. Giscombe's *Here* and *Giscome Road* are perhaps the closest in affinity with the spatial aspects of Olson's project, mapping a subjective spatial experience with comparable attention to geographic-historical detail, while adding a sensitive consideration of race" (49).[8] As an introduction to their essay collection, *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field*, Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne categorize Giscombe (and particularly *Prairie Style*) as one of only a few "recent postpastoral and postgeorgic reimaginations of the field" (5), where "the field" is an evolving spatial metaphor for the critical work of ecopoetics.[9] Whether as an offshoot of Projectivism or on the vanguard of ecopoetics, Giscombe is located as a poet driving and shaping spatiality, particularly as it relates to identity.

Much of the direct criticism of his work has been produced by those who know him as a colleague: they have worked with him at Illinois State University or University of California Berkeley or have published alongside him in collections such as the *tripwire* journal's collection

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[8] Giscombe himself identifies with the velocity of the Projectivist movement when he writes about "The traveling public" as "the surge beyond the self" ("Rollsigns" 164), and states that "Traveling in public on surface transportation is the situation I come to again and again for a poetic that crosses over, for the surge" ("Rollsigns" 165).

[9] Later, they also cite Giscombe as one of only a few poets who "investigate the field's poetic legacy" (250).

of essays on poetics. These critics and peers have developed an understanding of Giscombe's

poetry by following in real-time his trajectory as a poet and availing themselves of the

opportunity to discuss poetics with the poet himself, still depending upon spatial metaphors to

make sense of what he is trying to do.[10] Poets and writers who attended a conference in 2000

with Giscombe on "Expanding the Repertoire"—later collected in a 2001 issue of *tripwire: a*

journal of poetics—explored with him "the mostly unattended question of the history and role of

innovation in contemporary African-American writing" and to "discuss the origins and aesthetics

of their own experimentalism in the context of their development as artists" (Gladman 3). Here,

the attendees would have heard firsthand from Giscombe about his attempt to develop through

his poetry an experimental, avant-garde black arts form based in "complexity and contradiction"

(Alexander, "Discussion" 111). In other essays and dialogues resulting from this conference,

poets and writers explain that Giscombe is "reconfiguring the empty heart of America" (Thomas

57) as one of several black surrealist poets. In this "Discussion," Will Alexander celebrates

surrealist poetry for its ability to "enable unlimited range to roam" where "language becomes an

organic weapon," and thus where poets like he and Giscombe begin to "shift the human field

with a new liberty of expression" (Alexander 68). Here in *tripwire*, Giscombe's peers locate his

origin and place him in the "heart of America" with "range to roam" and with a charge to "shift

the human field." Giscombe's own contribution to the journal is equally indebted to spatial

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[10] Giscombe converses directly with some of these critics that follow in this section. "As Alan Gilbert has suggested to me," Giscombe writes, "there's a centerless quality to the North American railway system that I find important as extensive fact and reference" ("Philly Talks 18" 68). Of Gilbert, he raises the same point in a separate essay, reiterating that "The railroad's centerless (as Alan Gilbert has suggested) which is how it gives off beauty. And it describes the geography it traverses" ("On a Line…" 184). And Giscombe includes a quote from Elizabeth Hatmaker as the conclusion of the penultimate section in *Ohio Railroads*: "Inevitably, the location cannot escape being named by (and for) the subject (even the marginalized one) any more than the subject can escape being named by the location" (50).

organization, with each expounded-upon thought located by a particular place—"Paradise Palms Cafe, University of Hawai'i at Manoa," "Essex Hotel lobby, San Francisco," and "Shortlidge Rd., Penn State campus, University Park, PA" (69, 70, 73).

Seemingly apart from spatiality, Elizabeth Hatmaker, a former colleague of Giscombe at Illinois State University, situates Giscombe within the tradition of the lyric, broadly defined as "a short poem in which a single speaker expresses an emotional state or process of thought" (Barton and Hudson 96, cited in Hatmaker 87). Yet Hatmaker then connects the lyric's solitary speaker with questions about subjectivity, the complexities of which Giscombe's "geographic poetry" brings to life through "the fracturing, silencing and naming involved in making maps. …for Giscombe, the wish remains that, through the map, the subject might court a different type of transcendence. Geography works to invite escapes, a driving to a 'periphery,' yet it also works to offer comfort and grounding in what seems to be an infinite and multi-faceted world" (97-98). Giscombe then, in both *tripwire* and Hatmaker's article, is a poet bilocated in the center and the periphery, one whose "complexity and contradiction" allow him to bring his avant garde wandering to the heart(land) of America and dislocate its center, shifting the field to its boundaries. Giscombe develops these concepts in his early collections, *Here* and *Giscome Road*, and charts the deeper course in the later ones, *Prairie Style* and *Ohio Railroads*.

The closest someone comes to calling Giscombe's poetry a deep map is by naming it "poetic cartography," a term from Alan Gilbert and Peter Hudson, and one which could be the cousin of poetic deep mapping. Hudson calls *Giscome Road* "a poetic cartography of the fictions of place" (234), while Gilbert expounds upon the term, purporting that Giscombe's "poetic cartography" is a metaphor for the "constantly mutating effort to organize information provisionally," which occurs as a response to the "expansive networks and constellations" of

meaning forming in the current Information Age (*Another Future* 6). In this sort of poetry,

"notions of place and person are so crisscrossed with multiple histories and identities that they

can never be as circumscribed as a map might indicate, which is a useful corrective to those

who'd like to stake a territorial claim based on a myth of origins—whether mythic, religious,

ethnic, or nation-based" (6). Gilbert is right to recognize the cartographic efforts Giscombe

undertakes, which trace the histories and identities of places and people along the railroad

corridor. And it would be accurate to say that this provisional network of relationships cut off at

the pass any mythic territorial claims. But Giscombe hopes to do more. As we shall see in his

two most recent collections of poetry, Giscombe is not issuing a corrective to future myth-

makers; he is unearthing the foundational aspects of the railroad—its tracks and ties and

memories that discursively locate the railspace in the American consciousness—and in doing so,

reterritorializes the tracks as a railspace formed by racial locality, memory, and labor. This is

what a deep map can add to a surficial poetic cartography.[11]

The Deep Map

As coined by William Least Heat-Moon and executed in his text *PrairyErth: A Deep

Map*, the deep map is an exercise in deliberation, research, empathy, ethnography, and local

history. With methods that will echo in Giscombe's poetry, a deep cartographer mapping out the

"cultural recovery" of a place will "define the coordinates and the boundaries of the land… by

dividing it into the arbitrary fragments of the grid, as if it were an archaeological site," where

"individual stories and collective histories are all firmly grounded in the …soil" (Schiavini 95,

99). This map charts both the "horizontal, synchronic reality of the present, narrated and mapped

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[11] As touched upon in this project's introduction, I have opted to allude here to Trevor Harris's idea of "surficial thin maps" and seek to move away from the negative connotation of the word "superficial" (31). As the term suggests, surficiality is a space best understood by its surfaces. Harris contrasts this type of space with the place best understood by a deep map, digging into the territory for understanding, rather than reading its surface.

by the inhabitants in their encounters with the author; and a multi-layered, vertical geography of the past that the traveler has to unveil, recollecting stories of people and communities long dead and gone" (Schiavini 97). Thus the deep map traces the coordinated and detailed exploration of the territory and its constituent people and places across its landscape, through its history, and into its land. With such a splayed-out range, the map encourages open exploration of the topos as a network of divergent paths as opposed to the linear path of a standard narrative. This process of mapping is alluring to postmodern and digital humanities scholars due to its embrace of "multiplicity, simultaneity, complexity, and subjectivity." In the deep map, the reader does "not find the grand narrative but rather a spatially facilitated understanding of society and culture embodied by a fragmented, provisional, and contingent argument with multiple voices and multiple stories. The deep map offers a way to integrate these multiple voices, views, and memories, allowing them to be seen and examined at various scales" (Bodenhamer et al, 5). Heat-Moon's original deep map not only introduces the term and develops these concepts; it also more specifically reveals how the railspace of the tracks can be charted in a deep map, thus serving as a framework for reading Giscombe's attempts at the same efforts through his poetry.[12]

Originally published in 1991, Heat-Moon's *PrairyErth* digs deep into the history of and people who populate Kansas's 778 square-mile Chase County, located in the middle of the Flint Hills. Rather than acknowledge and philosophize about the "vacuousness" of the Kansas prairie, Heat-Moon prefaces his book by explaining, "I'm only in search of what *is* here...I'm in quest of the land and what informs it, and I'm here because of shadows in me, loomings about threats to America that are alive here too, but things I hope will show more clearly in the spareness of this

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[12] For further similarities between the Spatial Turn, deep mapping, and the discursive construction of railspace, see Harris page 31. Harris sources Heat-Moon's inspiration for the deep map in de Certeau, Yi Fu Tuan, and the Situationist International movement of Guy Debord. The alignment of these thinkers and movements has been explored in earlier chapters.

county" (10-11). Heat-Moon himself is not from the county, but he claims the prairie as home, being born, raised, and currently living in Missouri. He pulls on his Osage ancestry with his first (and most well-known) book, *Blue Highways*, which charted a course across the United States via sideroads.[13] In *PrairyErth*, rather than range across the continent on a soul-searching quest, he drills down into Chase County "in quest of the land." Heat-Moon's text, particularly its sub-section in Chapter Six dedicated to the tracks that cut through the county, provides a framework for and demonstration of the de/reterritorializing effect the deep map has on the railspace of the tracks, which resonates in Giscombe's later poetry. This framework, in part, involves the biological alignment of ethnic laborers as a part of the rails, the way the rails cartographically delimit lived experience, and the role of the surficial map as a spark for memory. The first geographies and paths of a space to reconstruct are the ones formed by its inhabitants (Schiavini 97); this is where Fidel Ybarra fits in and from where Giscombe eventually originates his poems.

In chapter six of *PrairyErth*, Heat-Moon visits Matfield Green, a town in the middle-south of Chase County. As in each chapter of the book, chapter six begins with numerous epigraphs (six pages-worth) in a section Heat-Moon calls, "From the Commonplace Book" (215). Here, introducing the chapter's discussion of the railroad, Heat-Moon quotes several relatively obscure authors who write about the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (ATSF) Railway.[14] Heat-Moon's most well-known railroad-affiliated quote of the chapter's preface comes from *Walden*, where Henry David Thoreau observes that "We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us...Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each is a man, an Irishman, or a Yankee man. The rails are laid on them, and they are covered

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[13] Heat-Moon is also half European and was born "William Trogdon," eventually taking the "Heat-Moon" name of his father (*Blue Highways* 4).
[14] James H. Ducker, Jennie Small Owen, Merle Armitage, Albert Kimsey Owen, and Arthur Stilwell.

with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them" (qtd. in Heat-Moon 215).[15] With his invocation

of *Walden* Heat-Moon establishes the railroad as a system virtually built upon its laborers,

particularly laborers in the ethnic minority. The dual meaning of "sleepers"—in addition to

meaning people who are asleep, "sleepers" is also another name for railroad ties—conceptually

links the laborer and their product. Heat-Moon explores this physiological connection more

deeply in one section of the chapter, entitled "*En las Casitas*."[16] In this section of *PrairyErth*

Heat-Moon speaks to Fidel Ybarra, a Mexican American migrant who recently retired from a 44-

year career as a section hand and now lives in Chase County with his wife, Teresa. *"En las

Casitas"* centers on Fidel and how the retiree remembers his labor and life along the tracks.

Fidel lived in las Casitas for 31 years as a section hand, where, despite the lack of running water

and electricity, there were some benefits:

> [The] *Santa Fe didn't charge us nothing to live there, and in the winter the*
>
> *company sent in a car of old track ties and pieces of depots and boxcars, and*
>
> *we'd unload it and chop the wood up for our stove, but the place was still cold.*
>
> *… Then in the summer, when the reefer [refrigerator] cars come* [sic] *through*
>
> *and throwed* [sic] *off the old ice on the siding, we broke it up and put it in our ice*

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[15] The quote from *Walden* continues with an indictment of the treatment of the laborers and a veiled warning: "They are sound sleepers, I assure you. And every few years a new lot is laid down and run over; so that, if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon. And when they run over a man that is walking in his sleep, a supernumerary sleeper in the wrong position, and wake him up, they suddenly stop the cars, and make a hue and cry about it, as if this were an exception. I am glad to know that it takes a gang of men for every five miles to keep the sleepers down and level in their beds as it is, for this is a sign that they may sometime get up again" (85). Despite his frequent unsympathetic treatment of his Irish neighbors—who live in shanties along the Fitchburgh Railroad tracks that cut through Walden Pond—Thoreau believes in the power of their labor and comes to "identify closely" with them, as they "gave him most cause for hope" (Walls 7).

[16] Literally, "In the Little Houses," though Heat-Moon explains that these are the "company houses" of the railroad for section hands and trackmen in the county. Others interviewed by Heat-Moon call them "Mexican shanties" (230-231).

box. And one day thirty-six reefers of potatoes derailed at Gladstone. (232, author's emphasis)

What Fidel and Teresa describe is the inextricable link that the railroad has in the biological lives of its workers beyond the workday. The railroad repurposes its refuse into materials to sustain its workers, even if that sustenance is meager.[17] The railroad ties that Fidel once laid down for the railroad and the boxcars, ice, and potatoes that traveled upon them eventually returned to him as fuel. Free rent ensured that the workers would not stray far from the tracks, a benefit to the ATSF and seemingly to the laborers, even if "*The tracks were so close that the engines shook the house, and cinders blew in, and sometimes pieces broke off trains and crashed by the houses: Fidel's little brother got hit by a loose wheel cover*" (234, author's emphasis). The proximity of the tracks to the workers' residences meant that the workers experienced cinder-filled air and railroad accidents even when they were not on the clock. The reverberations of the trains were felt, were a part of, their homes; the vibrations became part of their physical make-up. The relationship between the laborers and the tracks goes beyond symbiosis. The same fuel builds and powers both; they both feel the train's vibrations; they both are in essence controlled by the ATSF. The laborers lie in the corridor as sleepers, underneath and supporting the rails.

Heat-Moon asks Fidel to explain where these casitas were, and Fidel locates them by drawing a map from scratch on "two sheets of typing paper precisely taped end to end like a scroll" (233). The map is the focus of the rest of the scene, section, and chapter, outlining Fidel's lived experience along the tracks and localizing his memories of laboring upon them. The section hand is a dedicated and meticulous cartographer. Heat-Moon watches as Fidel "lays a yardstick on [the paper] and draws twin parallel lines across the top that are train tracks and

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[17] Fidel does say that he eventually requests electricity and propane stoves and supposes that if he were to have requested an electric well pump, he would have gotten that too.

then freehands in curving parallels that are the diverging routes, and he begins talking as he draws in sidings, bridges, … the section hands' houses there (putting roofs on each one). He labels every item and gives measurements and distances, even the mileposts" (233). Fidel draws the railroad as the feature of the map around which all other features orient. The exactness of the map depends upon the railroad mileposts and the yardstick-straight railroad tracks with which he starts. Even the familiarity with the divergent tracks that allows him to freehand their paths is informed by the regularity of the parallel lines at the top and the knowledge that railroad tracks always remain parallel throughout. As the map fills in, Heat-Moon describes it as "Artless and accurate but for its scale, it is a portrait of sixty years spent along the skinny rail corridors of the county, but it is a trackman's picture: bridges without rivers, curves without trees, villages only sidings with labels like trackside signs...And he draws on and turns it into a picture, chart, chronicle, handbook" (234). Toward the end of Heat-Moon's visit, the author notices that Fidel

> is telling all of this while he keeps fixed to the map, and as he speaks, he draws in the ties of his tracks, a couple hundred little hash marks. At first, I see them as tallies of wrongs, but when he keeps making them even after the topic changes, keeps laying down those little sleepers, I think: of course, the most important element in a trackman's work is the crosstie—that piece holding the railroad together, the predicate between subject and object, the linking between soil and rail. A trackman's days go by battling ties; as feet are to a walker, so ties are to a train. (235-36)

Fidel draws an otherwise featureless map, one wholly dependent upon the tracks for context and orientation. The rails are the first thing that Fidel draws and the last thing he details, despite the map being largely devoid of trees, rivers, or any non-rail distinguishing features. The railroad

shapes Fidel's entire experience in his life, on his map. The ties, or sleepers, the items most closely linked through language and labor with the section hand, are "the most important element" to Fidel and act as hundreds of little stitches to connect the rails to the soil. Fidel's map transforms into a "picture, chart, chronicle, handbook" with the stitching together of the land and rails. Fidel's chronicle is a map outlined by the railroad and connected to his memory through his labor.

Mapping is particularly effective at unearthing Fidel's memories along the rails. When Heat-Moon asks Fidel a question,

> He draws and loses himself in the map, and he forgets to speak, sometimes only nodding an answer, sometimes writing it as part of the drawing.… I watch his large hands, hands for a spike maul, labor their history onto the map, and I ask whether he has driven a spike in every mile of track in the county, and he pauses and calculates and says, *Way more than that*, and he pens in the laborers' quarters at Matfield, and says, *I could take you out and show you just about every place I drove a spike*, and the idea is that it was a hard task, the kind of work you remember. He says a mile of track has 3,200 ties (we figure 300,000 in the county) and that he's done something to every one including replacing many of them." (233-234, author's emphasis)

Fidel answers Heat-Moon's questions by mapping his memories onto the page as a trackman would use a maul to drive railroad spikes, which is to say, laboriously. Fidel's history, his own memory (of "the kind of work you remember") is spiked into every other foot of railroad track in the county. Mapping the railroad ties is itself a form of labor for Fidel and one that sparks memories that span the breadth and depth of the county. These effects of a deep mapping of the

railroad—revealing the biological connection of ethnic laborers and the rails and the railroad as cartographic boundary and catalyst for memory—will resurface in Giscombe's later poetry.

Connections and Resistances

Only the deep map can capture Fidel's experience on the tracks and reveal the laborer's foundational role in the construction of the railspace of the right of way. It would be difficult for a prose narrative to capture the "complex reality" of "lived existence" (Bodenhamer 17); what is instead required is "a spatial narrative that acknowledges how engaged human agents build spatially framed identities and aspirations out of actions, behaviors, imagination, and identity….This narrative must also accommodate time and contingency" (Bodenhamer 20).[18] Giscombe's texts, particularly *Prairie Style* and *Ohio Railroads*, posit a spatial poetics that acknowledge the same premises set by Bodenhamer's conceptual spatial narrative and traces its map of human agency with the same building blocks of "actions, behaviors, imagination, and identity" that "accommodate time and contingency."

Bodenhamer is most interested in applying the deep map to the particular place, the specific location that would otherwise resist exploration through a surficial map. He warns that "we cannot casually impute local consequences, for instance, to behaviors or events in play across a region or nation" (23) and reiterates the limitation of the deep map to work in local places, where verticality can be more completely diagrammed.   Like Bodenhamer, Giscombe maintains a "poetics of locality" that privileges the local at the expense of the general (Hutchison 108). Respecting Giscombe's place-based poetics and his concentration on the local, I

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[18] The collection of essays in Bodenhamer et. al.'s *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives* are predominantly concerned with the deep map as a phenomenon of the digital humanities, most particularly as developed through Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Still, the introduction written by Bodenhamer and cited here applies to Heat-Moon's original concept—the "actions, behaviors, imagination, and identity" captured within *PrairyErth* shape Chase County more profoundly and show more complexity than a surficial map could of its landscape.

acknowledge the problem of using a collection like *Ohio Railroads* as a paradigm of the polysensorial and stratigraphic right of way railspace of the tracks. It is difficult to argue for the extrapolation of totalizing theories about railspace with a text based in local places. Still, Giscombe's engagement with Dayton—insofar as it uses the railroad as its structural principle— suggests how railspace, particularly that of the tracks/right of way in middle America, cuts through time and delimits/is delimited by African Americans' and ethnic minorities' experiences and labor. In *PrairyErth*, Heat-Moon watches as Fidel creates maps on paper and chronicles Fidel's memory of his labor upon the tracks. The trackman's presence is felt in every crosstie. Giscombe's poems, rather than revealing the ethnic and/or racial labor on the tracks, demarcates racial—namely African American—locality in Dayton and across the inland prairie.   Just as *PraryErth* "subverts the cultural geography generally associated with the United States" and "constructs a diachronic, open landscape that is the result of many different strata of times and cultures" (Schiavini 109-110), so too does Giscombe in his poetic deep maps define Dayton by its grid of railroad tracks and dig into the soil bed of the railroad corridor to unearth the "individual stories and collective histories" of African Americans in the region. He traces the "horizontal, synchronic reality of the present" through a detailed description of how the railroad cuts through the city, noting its embankments, crossings, bridges, and tunnels. And he explores the "vertical geography" of Dayton's past through nodes of racial memory that collect at specific places along the tracks and rail networks, such as the train bridge where he dreams of his mother's death and his father's migratory path from Saint Louis to Birmingham to Liscum Drive in Dayton. In both Heat-Moon and Giscombe, "The deep map is then a vertical open space that generates an open text" (Schiavini 110). Giscombe plays within this "open text" and develops a

poetic style tied to a "railroad sense" and its sensitivity to racial memory and locality.   He hones

this sense within *Prairie Style* and later employs in the deep map of *Ohio Railroads*.

Giscombe's poetic form has changed over the years. The verses in *Here* (1994) and

Giscome Road (1998) are rhythmic, containing short and/or variably sized enjambed lines and

line breaks that serve as pauses in breath. Hutchison explains that in *Here*, "Giscombe's

idiosyncratic alignment, capitalization, shorthand, and spacing draw attention to key phrases and

line breaks, while his enjambments often work to great ironic effect" (111). Ten years later in

Prairie Style (2008), Giscombe transitions to prose poetry that is "Rooted along the bottom of

the page like a TV ticker" (Zawacki). The collection maintains Giscombe's rhythmic cadence,

and there is intentionality in the justification of lines, which magnifies the "ironic effect" of the

enjambments of each poem.[19] But the justified typesetting makes each poem look like a uniform

block of prose.[20] Zawacki purports that through this uniformity, "the prose poems of *Prairie*

Style participate in the repetitious, geophysical flatness of our inland Midwest; in the low-toned,

humble hum of African-American song." Ultimately, with the publication of *Ohio Railroads*

(2014), Giscombe abandons the already-tenuous relationship to poetic verse by doing away with

justified typesetting. The formatted page of *Prairie Style* pushed text to the bottom third of each

page; in *Ohio Railroads* Giscombe allows what he has called his "prose pieces" to range across

each page from top to bottom. Writing in a more prosaic style allows Giscombe to adopt the

historian's mantle of veracity, despite what Zawacki calls its "associative" quality. Just as

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[19] A minor example of Giscombe's playful intention behind enjambed words occurs at the end of the book, where he describes the prairie appearing suddenly. He says, "The trees gave way—no surprise, it was fur-/ther that we'd imagined" ("Prairie Style" 81). The "fur" indicated at the end of the line alludes to the metaphor of the fox to which Giscombe returns throughout *Prairie Style*.

[20] When quoting *Prairie Style*, I have maintained the line spacing due to this justified alignment, respecting Giscombe's intentionality with the size of the book, its formatting, and the shape of the poem on the page.

Fidel's details turn his map into a "chronicle, handbook" that encapsulates Chase County and informs the reader how to operate within it so too does Giscombe's detailed prose, filled with historical facts and data and maps, become the same type of guidebook for Dayton. Reading *Ohio Railroads* as a prosaic guidebook allows the reader to encounter the geographies and memories Giscombe describes at face value, without stopping to consider the relation between thoughts.

Giscombe develops his poetic style and form from *Here* to *Ohio Railroads*, and his themes follow this same developmental path. Giscombe develops and workshops themes in *Prairie Style* and in the essays collected in *Border Towns* that then bloom in *Ohio Railroads*. To understand this thematic recall across *Giscome Road*'s different sections, Rebecca Frank invokes Neil Fraistat's idea of "contexture." As defined by Fraistat, "contexture" is "the contextuality provided for each poem by the larger frame within which it is placed, the intertextuality among poems so placed, and the resultant texture of resonance and meanings" (qtd. in Frank 62). Frank uses this concept to show how Giscombe contexturally uses "interruption and displacement through…line and visual elements [which] forces the reader to make the interconnections, and disconnections, between individual experiences and places found in separated sections and lines" (Frank 62-63).[21] I propose that Giscombe operates contexturally not just inside the text from one section to another but also across *Prairie Style*, his collected *Border Towns* essays, and *Ohio Railroads*.

Through a contextural assemblage of themes, Giscombe develops three tools for his poetic deep map of the networked railspace of tracks that cuts across Ohio and the inland-

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[21] As part of his research for *Giscome Road*, Giscombe made a series of trips to British Columbia, interviewing people and exploring the places named after John Robert Giscome, a nineteenth century Jamaican explorer who may or may not be the poet's ancestor.

American prairie: railroad sense, racial memory, and racial locality, boundaries, and borders. These cartographic tools directly correlate to the aforementioned aspects of the deep map framework: the biological connection between the tracks and its laborers finds purchase in the experience of railroad sense; the conceit of the rails as a catalyst for memory develops through Giscombe's dreams; the tracks as delimiting lived experience informs how Giscombe writes about racial locality. These themes are co-related and ultimately triangulate in the deep map, locating the unrevealed African American experience along the tracks.

Railroad Sense

At its most literal core, railroad sense is Giscombe's term for being aware of a train's arrival before you see it, "a premonition, arriving as if out of nowhere. Or an intuition just this side of evidence — before the proof pulls into the station" (Zawacki). Giscombe begins to shape the concept by way of demonstration within the "INLAND" section of *Prairie Style*, the second of the book and one that he introduces simply as "a group of poems / about downstate Illinois" (9). To do so, Giscombe invokes the fox in the section's first poem, entitled "Far." The fox is inland's "simple fact, widespread and local and observable" (11). By choosing to use each of these descriptors—"fact," "widespread," "local," "observable"—Giscombe equates it to the train. He later re-connects the train and the factual by bluntly stating, "Facts make a train, trunk to tail" ("Lazy Man's Load" 52). Giscombe continues this connection in the next stanza with a demonstration of how railroad sense works:

> It's that this far inland the appearance of a fox is more reference than
>
> metaphor. Or the appearance is a demonstration. Sudden appear-
>
> ance, big like an impulse; or the watcher gains a gradual awareness—
>
> in the field, taking shape, and finally, familiar. The line of sight's fairly

-/-

clear leaving imagination little to supply. It's a fact to remember,

though, seeing the fox and where or, at night, hearing foxes (and

where). The fox appearing, coming into view, as if to meet the speaker

(11-12).[22]

Ironically, the fox may appear inland as a point of reference, but its operation in the poem is a

metaphor for the train. Its appearance is spatially coded as a "reference," that is, something that

provides spatial context; the sight of a fox locates the "watcher" inland. Like the train, the fox

appears suddenly or gradually from a knowable location along a clear line of sight. As a sudden

phenomenon, the fox/train is "big like an impulse." It affects the watcher like an uncontrollable

and natural urge and evokes a reciprocal response.[23] As a gradual transition from haziness on the

horizon to clarity in the open field, the fox/train is familiar, a fact that shares an intimate

connection to the watcher. In either case, this feeling or fact is something to commit to memory,

"to remember." And not just the fact itself, but its location, located by seeing or hearing. This is

how the railroad sense operates—as an awareness and memory of the location of the fact, fox, or

train and a trained sensitivity to the expectation that, whether suddenly or gradually, it will

arrive. This sense prepares Giscombe, his poetic subjects, and his readers for the deep mapping

of memory and locality that he undertakes in *Ohio Railroads*.

In *Prairie Style*'s "Fever," Giscombe sources the railroad sense in racially informed

history, locality, and identity and in doing so, recalls the biological connection between rail and

laborer that Heat-Moon and Fidel Ybarra together discover in *PrairyErth*. The poem describes

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[22] "-/-" denotes a page break.
[23] Moving forward, I will use the "watcher" to represent Giscombe's readers. The term is intentional, as a keen railroad sense should make the audience watchful, that is, actively anticipating the arrival of something from a distance away.

Giscombe's oscillation of focus on the prairie. He describes it as a "spiral inward" before doubling back and offering a different metaphor, the "trek across as if in a wagon or on / Amtrak—perpetual stretch from range to image, from splay to toe- / hold" (21). The look inward generates Giscombe's railroad sense and the "perpetual stretch" from general to the specific that it anticipates. With the shift of focus along this stretch, Giscombe calls attention to "The point of origin, the point of fade. Fielding the question. A train / trails its own noise" (22). Using railroad sense, Giscombe remembers to anticipate and remember an object's location and velocity. By combining points of "origin" and "fade" the poem brings to mind the image of the speaker looking down the tracks one way and then another, moving their head from side to side. In the sense of this image, the unstated question that is fielded in such a scene becomes, "where do you come from?" or "where are you going? or perhaps, "which is which?" Giscombe warns that the train "trails its own noise," showing that the train's intangible signs and indicators herald its manifestation. Likewise, identity heralds the arrival of the individual, and by sensitizing oneself to its indicators, one can use railroad sense to distinguish the aforementioned questions from one another.

The range of the prairie contains these questions and demands a nuanced method to acknowledge and explore difference and identity, concepts that come naturally to the poet, as he later explains, "I've been inclined to want juxtaposition to do its job" ("Lazy Man's Load" 52). But first, in "Fever," Giscombe happens upon the prairie itself, the open field where "juxtaposition's lacking," in the same way as he might sense the arrival of a train, describing it is "As though I were talking and suddenly there / was the great hesitancy of the prairies" (22). Within this "hesitancy," "music appears" and "does the talking," with the speaker's clothing

"just banging away on / the skin" (22), calling attention to the speaker's skin and music's tactile

effect on it. This music generates the epiphany of the poem's last stanza:

> Inland, one needs something more racial, say bigger, than mountains.
>
> Before, I'd always come, as if from nowhere, to places. Trek's out of
>
> Afrikaans but has entered, as they say, our vocabulary; I've always had
>
> a penchant for the place around speech, voice being suddenly absent
>
> in the heart of song, for the flattest part of heat. (22)

Whereas a mountain range is a land mass against which juxtaposition is easy, the inland prairie is

mountainless, flat, and utterly devoid of geologic distinctions or differences. Instead, something

"bigger," or more formidable, than mountains— namely, racial history and locality and

identity—is needed as a reference point for juxtaposition or to trace origins, to answer the fielded

question(s): "where do you come from?" "where are you going?" "which is which?" The

inextricable link between race and memory is the "noise" that precedes its own train (that is, its

own location, its own identity). The tracks that cut across the inland prairie represent or

demonstrate this inevitability; symbolically, they chart a path along which identity travels from

and to location; actually, they chart a path and enable the train's access to and through the

prairie. Railroad sense is the awareness of a train's approach before it suddenly is upon you, but

it is also the understanding that this is how identity, particularly racial identity, works as well. It

comes upon you as a feeling, an impulse, but it is also, as will be revealed with the final poem of

Prairie Style, as the proverbial "elephant in the room," ponderously ambling in the center of the

street.

Giscombe most clearly articulates what railroad sense is at the end of both *Prairie Style*

and *Ohio Railroads*, where he lists some of the paradoxical characteristics of railroad sense—

anticipation but for something tending toward "suddenness"; "sourcelessness" yet logistically traceable down the tracks (Giscombe *Ohio Railroads* 51). The last of six poems entitled "Prairie Style" in the titular collection realizes railroad sense on the prairie. Or rather, the speaker uses their railroad sense to perceive the prairie. The poem in full is as follows: "The prairie appeared suddenly, like it was a miracle or a fortification. / Trace to predicament. The trees gave way—no surprise but it was fur- / ther than we'd imagined. Servantless, shoreless, nothing to it when it / met the horizon" (81). The speaker senses the prairie's sudden appearance from just a "trace" on the horizon to the manifest "predicament" of how to perceive its shapeless "nothing"-ness without any geologic juxtaposing distinctions nor without it claiming mastery over anyone (and thus "servantless"). With characteristic muted humor generated through enjambment, Giscombe alludes to the fox (and thus to the train) when he explains its anticipated appearance, noting that it was "no surprise but it was fur-." At the conclusion of *Prairie Style* then, Giscombe encapsulates one final aspect of "prairie style: the act of expecting a sudden arrival of something large and unadorned and, as raised earlier, requiring "something more racial, say bigger, than mountains" to comprehend its operations.

Giscombe doubles down on the demonstration of size as it pertains to railroad sense at the end of *Ohio Railroads*. Giscombe parks his mother's old Camry along the side of the tracks near the railroad bridge he dreams of in the days following her death. Sitting in close proximity to the railroad tracks, Giscombe cannot help but anticipate a train's appearance, and when it eventually comes, he explains, "I felt its presence in the air before I heard it, though the difference is rather fine" (51). He continues on, finally giving name to the sensation with a question and a musing (and an amusing) answer:

"When does railroad sense begin? Perhaps it's sourceless, or a particular kind of

sourcelessness. Perhaps it is a degree of inevitability in which location is a prime

factor, though certainly not the only factor. …Or railroad sense begins with a

train in the street like an elephant wandering there: a little dirty, a little sweet

smelling, the tang of slowness." (51-52)

Giscombe segues to explain the railroad phrase "elephant-style," which means that there are two

locomotives facing the same way pulling an extra-large load of freight. He ends the section and

the book with an explanation of one time he saw such a train and writes it down in his journal: "I

remarked that the train was going fast and that the two GE engines were 'coupled elephant-

style,' a phrase coming to me instantly" (52). The phrase coming to Giscombe "instantly" is one

last experience of railroad sense, where the phrase comes upon his memory like a train—

suddenly, but with a "degree of inevitability." Perhaps it was there all along, the elephant in the

street that has been there the whole time (inhabiting a "particular kind of sourcelessness") and

gone unacknowledged for so long that it almost seems rude to point it out. And so railroad sense

can also be the watchers admitting that there is something in front of them now worth

acknowledging—the train or the fact of racial distinction that is always already there, whether

lying in wait or being pointedly ignored.

Railroad sense prepares the watcher to be sensitive to the fact that a train can approach at

any time on the tracks, whether it appears suddenly or "with the tang of slowness." One can

encounter or collide with memory along the tracks in the same ways. As Giscombe describes

through his experiences around Dayton's "Mound Street" (*Ohio Railroads* 36), some locations

are more prone than others to danger or to being charged with history (particularly, with racial

history). In Section Four of *Ohio Railroads* Giscombe describes the way the railroad tracks

curve through "black Dayton" by "crossing all streets at grade and diagonally" (36). The tracks

and the danger created by their diagonal cut across the neighborhood's populated streets spark

two memories: the first, a memory Giscombe has of being a child and watching the trains cross

Mound Street while his father and his father's barber discuss politics; the second, a memory of

his time as a railroad engineer who passed through similarly dangerous crossings. The location

of Mound Street's railroad tracks generates both memories, with Giscombe interrupting the first

memory to note that "the track was two blocks south of the shop's plate glass windows" and the

second to describe them as the type of tracks "that came right on top of each other, following one

another as points on a curve" (36). These memories are inextricably linked to racial history,

which Giscombe relays directly afterward in a new paragraph: "Mound Street was in the part of

Dayton named, first, Mexico and then Miami City. The street was named for the burial mound,

'since gone,' at its corner with West Fifth Street" (36). In the sentences that follow, the history

lesson dilates to encompass southwest Ohio and a 1755 map of "New France, or Canada,"

contracts back to 2008 and the "'gentrifying'" Mound Street, then follows the tracks westerly

into Madison Township and then Trotwood, which will be discussed in more detail below. The

tracks chart the path along which Giscombe's racial history travels. The tasks at hand are to

sensitize oneself to this impulsive experience with a honed railroad sense and activate it along

the railroad network when encountering locations with residual racial memory. As indicated by

Giscombe's inexhaustibly focused and refocused repetitious process, most locations along the

tracks contain this residue, should investigators care to look. Each place that Giscombe visits in

Ohio Railroads is infused with racial memory; it is inescapable and yet only uncovered when

approached indirectly. Like sensing a train and waiting for its arrival, Giscombe senses the

racial memory of railspace and prepares himself for its sudden appearance. The poet relays

racial memory to his reader through "associative prose" that unearths memory through connotative meaning, wordplay, and a genealogy of placenames and proper names.

<u>Railroad Sense in Practice—Proper Names and Placenames</u>

Giscombe demonstrates through Section Seven of *Ohio Railroads* what a keen railroad sense can detect beyond the physical tracks. Railroad sense generates a sensitivity to racial memory and locality, and as such, the section gestures toward these two other processes used by Giscombe through the deep cartographic tools of onomastics (that is, the study of proper names) and the etymology of placenames. Giscombe runs through a manic collection of historical figures—Tecumseh, Lucifer, General Custer, and Jesus. With each person and location, Giscombe invokes the phenomenon of being caught unaware by something like a force of nature—e.g., the thunder, the train, the panther. Giscombe connects these people and the aforementioned forces through poetic onomastic stratigraphy, which creatively unearths and translates proper names that retain a shared root history. Giscombe connects Lucifer and Tecumseh with their shared meaning: "shooting star"; he connects Lucifer and Jesus by their paradoxical but shared recognition as "the morning star" or the "son of the morning star"; Tecumseh and General Custer share a *nom de guerre*, as they are known respectively as "panther-lying-in-wait" and "creeping panther"; Custer and Lucifer shared the characteristics of Venus as the star "appeared out of nowhere and was seemingly everywhere" (50). Giscombe ends with a quote from Elizabeth Hatmaker, who notes that "Inevitably, the location cannot escape being named by (and for) the subject (even the marginalized one) any more than the subject can escape being named by the location" (50). Hatmaker's quote merges onomastics with placenames and opens up Giscombe's poetry further to the effects of the latter in the deep map. While placenames feature prominently on many surficial maps, they also hint at more

profound meaning of these places and "provide valuable insight into the ways in which humans experience the world and appropriate images of the landscape to describe, interpret, and communicate their experiences of the physical and social environment" (Harris 34). This is particularly pertinent to Giscombe and his use of placenames and onomastics to till the right of way railspace and unearth forgotten/repressed racial historical dimensions of Dayton. By interweaving interpretive proper names and placenames and unearthing historical and discursive resonances between ostensibly polarized people and places, Giscombe imagines the ways in which pluralized histories of a space "help to shape individual racial consciousness" (Hutchison 113).

It is worth pausing to check this reading against another scholar who critiques Giscombe's invocation of placenames, if only to stake out a defined territory for this chapter's argument. Steven Goldsmith, another of Giscombe's peers on the faculty at University of California Berkeley, purports that "rather than bringing Dayton's forgotten past to life it"—"it" being Giscombe's poetic style, which Goldsmith calls "mere materialism"[24]—heaps up names, details, and anecdotes in order to foreground the environmental build-up that surrounded, shaped, and (though subject to decay itself) outlasted human presence. The movement in this book is always from persons to material processes and large inorganic structures." As such, "the administered and infrastructural world of *Ohio Railroads* becomes a layered archive of inert entanglements: all that remains of its human history is a palimpsest of names. Dayton is a ghost town without even the ghosts to animate it." Goldsmith argues that Giscombe's work in this

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[24] Goldsmith equates "mere materialism" to Giscombe's railroad sense and claims that it "can only be recorded by diminishing sensibility and adopting a more mechanical sensitivity, like that of a camera taking in tracks and sky. History of this kind is not interiorized as affect. It is entirely exterior—the accumulation, friction, and deterioration of surfaces." My own reading runs counter to Goldsmith's. Rather than "diminishing sensibility," the railroad sense demands its heightened form, and history is both interior and stratigraphic, rather than "entirely exterior" and comprised of "surfaces."

collection is an exercise in "extreme objectivity," but I do not share his undercurrent of pessimism at the prospect of retrieving historical memory. Goldsmith claims that *Ohio Railroads* "summons the names of those who… are not resuscitated through memory, testimony, and sympathy and are instead made to appear… flatter and emptier and irretrievable… That is how each historical name works in *Ohio Railroads*: it disinters the dead only to rebury them." I would counter that the names that Giscombe invokes here are used to de/reterritorialize the tracks and right of way in Ohio (and specifically Dayton), and in these reclamatory processes, the names are retrieved and reinvigorated with new purpose. Thus rather than Goldsmith's lament for Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "disappearance into a name, his becoming as paper-thin as a map crossed by railroad lines," Giscombe actually invokes Dunbar to reclaim the space and re-infuse it with deictic meaning. In other words, Dunbar is part of the context through which the reader understands Dayton. Dunbar is Dayton's tether to a particular time, place, and feeling. In this light, Dunbar is not "disinterred" so much as his name is tilled from the hard ground that has become historically calcified and crusted over its rich stratigraphic composition.

Placenames and proper names highlight locations across the railspace of the tracks where there is a demand for a heightened railroad sense. With this sensitivity also comes the ability to impulsively unearth racial memory that lies sedimented in the railspace. Articulating the connection between impulse and memory then becomes vital for the continuation of Giscombe's project.

Impulse and Memory

In tying impulse and memory together through the train, Giscombe shows how railroad sense can attune the individual to a stratigraphic understanding of the railspace and of themselves. Throughout *Prairie Style*, Giscombe writes that impulse and memory are both train-

like in that they are imposing and that they that arrive swiftly from a predetermined location. In "Far," the fox appears "big like an impulse," which as discussed above is Giscombe's demonstration of one way that railroad sense perceives the suddenly approaching train/fact/prairie. The "big"-ness of impulse also alludes to the suggestion that "something racial" is "bigger" than mountains. The impulse arrives as a train does, seemingly sourceless and sudden and along a path which, like railroad tracks, has been laid out well in advance to anticipate, indicate, and smooth the impulse's (and train's) arrival.

Despite the train's scheduled arrival, those waiting for it nevertheless experience a sense of shock at its size and velocity. The train's sheer speed gives it the illusion of appearing out of nowhere, though with a trained sensitivity to its signs, one can better understand its origins. Impulse and memory work in the same way. As an "intuition this side of evidence" (Zawacki), railroad sense recognizes impulse as a natural instinct, something better felt than explained. "Argument" extends the ineffability of impulse into the miraculous. And the end of the final "Prairie Style" poem in the eponymous collection, Giscombe calls the prairie a miracle, and the "miracle's an impulse, 'an impulsive act'; / a story trails its own noise" (41). Like hearing a train before seeing it, the "noise" of the story—i.e., its context, its causes, its effects—prepare the listener for the story's telling. The view of the prairie comes up suddenly and thus seemingly miraculous in its appearance. But the prairie and the train that runs through it are preceded by their own history and context, which can prepare the reader for their arrival, through railroad sense.

Railroad sense makes one aware of impulse, but it can also trigger memory. In an early poem about Dayton, "Home Avenue," Giscombe proposes that memory is an amplification of impulse: "Memory's ever- / changing, it's the more peevish side of impulse" (75). Both share

qualities of the train—imposing, ostensibly sourceless, and appearing suddenly—but memory is transient and more easily agitated or triggered. Just as the map sparks Fidel's memory in *PrairyErth*, so too does the railspace of the tracks that Giscombe experiences trigger racial memory and act as a base and boundary from where to mobilize a discursive alternative and/or a resistance to recorded history. The poet recognizes that "History is not only erased by maps, but by language, which is manipulated to try to cover up the presence of Black or mixed-race people" (Frank 67). If it is also true that "Recorded texts and maps are passed on and continue to solidify this erasure" of counter-narrative histories (Frank 70), then Giscombe's poetic deep map of railspace dually triggers and traces these elided counter-narratives of racial history.

Giscombe achieves this in part by unearthing these histories through "the associative prose of *Ohio Railroads*," which "diagrams the city's network of railroad lines, to meditate on the multilayered history—national, local, familial, and, above all, racial—of Giscombe's childhood and teenage town" (Zawacki). Giscombe's own "local, familiar, and… racial" memories of his parents in *Ohio Railroads* demonstrate how memory is triggered when in proximity to the tracks. The memories of his parents merge and make their way into a recurring dream the poet has about his mother falling from a railroad bridge. Section 1 begins with this dream of his "mother's death falling, indistinguishable from rain, on a railroad bridge at the eastern end of Dayton's downtown business district" (7). The railroad bridge is a "monument of boundary" for the city (7) and for Giscombe's familial history as well, as the image recurs throughout *Ohio Railroads*, as if the poet cannot move past it. The bridge also serves as a boundary for Dayton's racial history as well, as it stands "between downtown and the tough white neighborhoods beyond downtown, east of it," while historically "black people lived west of the Great Miami River" (7). From his vantage point on the bridge, Giscombe moves through

Dayton's geographic grid and chronology, navigating along the tracks as they hang over the city along an elevated structure. Foreshadowing the overarching nature of this motif, Giscombe ends the section by noting that "it's necessary as well to see the whole structure—the elevation across which the tracks are laid and the cement walls beneath that, at either side of it—as a single bridge across the whole of downtown. The span of East Third Street," where he dreams of his mother's falling death, "is only the final moment in that single bridge" (9). The "moment" of his mother's death is preceded by her own racial history, which Giscombe relays to the reader as a memory he recalls at this moment.[25] This racial memory is part of the bridge, which itself is part of the railroad and part of the city. The poet's memories of the entire city follow this process; he stands in the presence of the tracks, recognizes their shape, and anticipates the train or memory to come. Giscombe's own memory is "peevish" in this way; the tracks irritate and activate his railroad sense. As a method of perception, railroad sense also serves to sensitize the individual to the facts, impulses, and racial histories that are "moments" built into the railspace. These memories and dreams de-/reterritorialize the railspace that triggers them.

While a keen railroad sense makes the watcher sensitive to the subtle changes in air pressure and noise that hint at the arrival of a train, it is also itself a catalyst for the remembrance and reconstitution of racial memory. The learned feeling of anticipation when waiting alongside the tracks triggers the same feeling about impulse and memory. Impulse is "something else, a thing to bear up under or to recall / having been carried along by; or it's a racial memory" ("Lazy Man's Load" 51). Impulse, and the awareness of it, allows Giscombe to "recall" his own memories and dreams around the tracks. The poet goes further, expanding the concept to include

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[25] "…in Ann Arbor she had lived in a residence hall and some of the white women there, her fellow graduate students, asked her to help them in their petition to force the handful of black students to eat together consistently, to take each meal at the same cafeteria table, not realizing that she was black" (7).

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the multiplicity of histories present around the general railspace of Ohio railroads and that which cuts through the inland prairie. In an echo of the geocritical readings of earlier chapters, the railspace of the tracks is comprised of these strata of racial memory and intertextually informs a new discourse created by their illumination.

Racial Borders, Range, and Locality

Giscombe is attracted to the boundary-forming capability of the tracks and the way that they circumscribe racial experience and memory, whether in the city or on the prairie. Just as Fidel's hand-drawn tracks delimit and orient the trackman's lived experience in Chase County, so too does Giscombe's "poetry of gaps, edges, and marginality" help the poet as he "navigates the social, political, and geographical border spaces he encounters, and the shifting sets of positions this forces him to adopt" (Gilbert 88). The poet investigates the effects of this circumscription of borders on the individual by "making use of knowledge about the geographical situation: where one is situated in relation to geographic entities (streets, rivers and bridges, embankments, sides of quite real tracks) and coming to terms with that: a poetic of situation(s), reference, notation, placement" (Giscombe "873 Words" 4). Within this sort of geo-poetics, the individual orients themself by their proximity to and form of the border. Memory forms throughout this orientation process, represented by the shape of the explored space. Giscombe describes this scenario in the first section of *Prairie Style* in a short poem titled "Cry Me a River." At its end, he enjoins the reader to

> ment say that the shape of a region or some distinct area of a city
>
> could stand in for memory and that it—the shape—is a specific value
>
> because it's apparent and public, and that way achieves an almost

    nameless contour.[26] (7)

The very shape of a city or region subsumes memory, and by understanding and valuing its

surficial "apparent and public" shape, one can also understand and orient oneself to its history.

This shape betrays its history as it is delimited by geographic borders; for Giscombe, railroad

tracks most clearly outline this shape, particularly because this railspace network is racial at its

core. Giscombe explains that the rail network "is profoundly racial as well—railroads divide and

define cities. Note that a tenet of urban sociology is the idea of the 'natural boundary'—

neighborhoods are created by (and their separateness is maintained by) rivers, hills, etc., but also

by railroads, hence the phrase, 'wrong side of the tracks.' So a railroad, in town, is itself a natural

boundary or has that value or tends to have that value" ("*Harriet Blog*" 156). The "natural

boundary" divides the city into neighborhoods and invites distinctions and value judgements

based on the division. Of these "border areas" Giscombe opines on "Swaths of town, the

neighborhood over the tracks, '[w]ay over on my far side of the river,' Back-of-the-Yards, 'the

problem of the color line.' It's no overstatement to note that color does inform all the categories:

the experience of the border has its origins in and takes its shape from color" (ix-x). Giscombe's

poetry is based upon mapping this railspace and exploring its border areas, both up close and as

they come into view when approaching them from a distance, and exploring the questions that

this map generates: "Where do we live? And who is this 'we'? What's the range of assumptions

behind the question? Who's included? Who's excluded?" Giscombe sources these questions to

his interest in "range, in how variation takes place over a geographic space—I'm thinking of

populations—human and otherwise—and customs and identifications and, God knows,

landscape" ("*Harriet Blog*" 157).

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[26] The "ment" that starts the first line is the enjambment of "argu-ment" from the line before it. I have opted to keep it here to preserve the justified line spacing of the poem.

While Giscombe delimits his own racial memory with the tracks and demonstrates an interest in the range as it displays variation across the prairie, the poet's "stubborn engagement with specific localities" (Zawacki) calls him back to the local site to excavate racial memory. The oscillation from border to range to local and back again was laid out in the aforementioned "Mound Street" excerpt of *Ohio Railroads*, where Giscombe "uses trains, race, and occult geographies to exploit the tension between center and edge, between proper and improper locations" (Hutchison 113). But Giscombe also shows here how the concept of the borderland is present in the local as well. Racial ("improper") localities are marginalized spaces, as indicated when Giscombe implores the reader to "Let the 'spare' dark-skinned men at the marges of lots on the near / north side be location's finale" ("Lazy Man's Load" 52). If the local resides on the periphery of history and memory, then "attention to the local will reveal struggles often times taken for granted, ignored, forgotten, and overlooked," and as such, "The local is the site not of a singular resistance, but of many resistances" (Gilbert 82). In unearthing the histories of the "marges," Giscombe gives voice to these polyphonic forms of resistance against centralization and generalization. From the periphery and with his discursively constructed railspace, Giscombe "displace[s] the notion of a cultural or geographic center," where the railroad symbolizes the center as "a power snaking through the landscape, it's no longer a static center surrounded by peripheries, but a dynamic and active process. This increases the reach of a now-dispersed center, but also leaves gaps and edges where it can be briefly eluded. And in these gaps and at these edges oppositional practices—including poetry—can be arrayed against its power" (Gilbert 82). This power is both symbolic and actual for Giscombe, as he notes in an ostensible non sequitur in *Ohio Railroads,* "A train is defined by the Northeast Operating Rules Advisory Committee (NORAC) as being '[an] engine with or without cars'" (40). Giscombe is

not content to leave these "gaps and edges" as unspoken remnants in the wake of a roaming central "engine." Instead, he opens these spaces to better hear the voices and memories and histories of those left in its wake.

Giscombe's measured description of a "RAILROAD CROSSING" sign exemplifies how he imagines the creation of edges and gaps in railspace. In a recurring dream he has during the year of his mother's death, Giscombe approaches a railroad crossing near West Third Street. At the crossing, he concentrates on the sign, explaining, "A crossbucks, or crossbuck sign, consists of two white arms that form an X—on the arm that extends from the lower left to the upper right is printed the word CROSSING and on the other arm is the word RAILROAD, which is broken into two words—RAIL and ROAD—by its intersection with the unbroken word—CROSSING" (39). The sign itself is literally an X that marks the spot—a spot of importance, of memory, of warning. The "unbroken" "CROSSING" itself literally breaks the "RAILROAD" into two "by its intersection." It interrupts the roaming center of the train to call attention to the tracks and to trigger the pedestrian to activate their railroad sense in order to make themself aware of the possibility of a train's sudden arrival. Giscombe's triggered railroad sense causes him to bring the dream into reality, remembering that "the dream was, in essence, a memory," and the memory was of a scene Giscombe saw while riding the bus every day (39). He goes on to explain that "Railroad crossings like the one I'd recalled with such clarity on waking from the dream described above" are located all across the West Third Street tracks (39). He visually/structurally aligns the crossing with the "rough" housing project at Arlington Court (40), explaining that "The project's gone now and the site has been leveled into a blank space" (39). This new racial locality "had been a thing of visual moment" (39), and it is defined and triggered by the railroad tracks and its symbolic and actual gaps and edges.

A microcosm of the power of the tracks to delimit racial locality and trigger racial memory in its gaps and edges occurs in Section 4 of *Ohio Railroads*, leading up to, through, and following the aforementioned "Mound Street" scene. Through the way the section describes the railroad tracks as they loom above, cut through, and extend beyond the West End of Dayton (and the gaps of locality it creates along the way) and the symbolism with which he infuses the railroad and its signs, Giscombe develops resistance as it takes the form of a multiplicity of localities along the network of railspace. Giscombe introduces the imposing nature of the tracks by saying, "The old Pennsylvania line was the most formidable of the tracks on the West Side; that is, it covered the most ground, it traveled through the greatest number of neighborhoods, and its gate towers—gone since the 1980s—were anachronistic heralds" (34-35). The length of the tracks of the Pennsylvania railroad and its connection to neighborhoods across the community make it a "formidable" presence across Dayton's West Side, what Gilbert calls a "dynamic and active" center whose edges and gaps, created by both notable and quotidian railroad markers, invite "oppositional practices," such as the stratigraphy of railspace practiced by Giscombe in his poetic cartography. In this way, the railroad's heraldic towers not only discourage trespassing due to their intimidating stature but also announce the train's arrival and open a gap in the line where Giscombe can begin to localize memory.

This process begins with Giscombe interrupting the list of "formidable" features of the tracks to note that the imposing gate towers have been "gone since 1980." Other outsized features create edges as well. Heading west, Giscombe describes an abandoned caboose in 2008 that perches on an unused section of track and that unofficially marks the entrance into the village of Trotwood. He interrupts this description to note the anachronism of this welcome, since "Cabooses disappeared from U.S. and Canadian railroads in the early 1990s" (38).

Trotwood was defined as one of the "white areas" in the 1950s and 1960s and then "a black or largely black suburb" by 2008 (38). Giscombe delimits the town's area by the caboose and railroad station (boarded up in the 1960s but transformed into a welcome center by 2008) before noting the West Side expansion along "its own natural boundaries—Wolf Creek and the railroad—through the 1970s and 1980s" (38). Giscombe points out how the etymology of the street changes at the city limit, and "changes there" from being named after Dayton's black mayor into "Wolf Creek Pike," derived from the name of a white nineteenth century immigrant family—the Wolfs (38). Giscombe explores the changing color line through the gaps created by the caboose, the station-turned-welcome center, and the edge alongside the area's "natural boundaries." By inexhaustibly jumping through time, Giscombe stitches together dilapidation from the past with present elision and localizes resistance in the form of racial memory.

The compulsive leap from one time to another or one name to another occurs again along Mound Street, where Giscombe notes that "Mound Street was in the part of Dayton named, first, Mexico and then Miami City" (36) and above during Giscombe's onomastics lesson about Tecumseh, General Custer, Jesus, and Lucifer. "Location's what you come to; it's the low point, it usually repeats," says Giscombe in "Downstate" (*Prairie Style* 3), and through a repetitive tracing of rail-side locations through time, Giscombe develops a multiplicity of resistances to the centralizing force of history. These railspace resistances manifest as a "texture of resonance and meaning" that "structurally reflects the displacement of Black experience in history and geography that Giscombe navigates through his physical and textual journey" (Frank 63).[27] As mentioned earlier, at the end of *Ohio Railroads* Giscombe muses that railroad sense is "a degree

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[27] Frank particularly observes this process in *Giscome Road* but, as *Ohio Railroads* retains Giscombe's penchant for a poetic "texture of resonance and meaning," its reflection on racial, specifically African American, locality is retained as well.

of inevitability in which location is a prime factor, though certainly not the only factor."[28] As "a prime factor" of railroad sense, locations repeatedly punctuate and, particularly with regard to African American locality, highlight the margins of the networked railspace of the tracks wherefrom "resonance and meaning" reverberate. Like the gate towers that stand along the West Side of Dayton, the tracks and its gaps and edges of locality serve as "anachronistic heralds" of the train and the memories that impulsively appear along the railspace.

Giscombe begins *Ohio Railroads* by tracing the "monument"-al railroad bridge that spans Dayton and continues the path of this "formidable" border of railspace as it heads west. All the while, Giscombe is interested in how racial locality operates under, through, and alongside the "natural boundary" of the tracks. These boundaries create a shape of memory that is geographically manifest, within which local peripheral nodes proliferate and continually resist centralization, or rather, continually re-center the "gaps and edges" of memory along the margins. In this way, the "Geographical and historical narratives are both made and deconstructed through the figure of the text" (Frank 85). Put another way, Giscombe's deep-cartographic poetry in *Prairie Style* and *Ohio Railroads* reterritorializes the railspace of the tracks as a network rich in racial locality and memory. The local nodes along the networked railspace are sites of "micro-geography," where "everyday space[s] of racial interaction and exclusion" "re-script" railspace as "an activist space" (Berte 225). Within this "activist" railspace, "spaces and spatial codes" and Giscombe's articulated "natural boundaries" continue to circumscribe individual action, but there is now also the opposing "potential of challenging and reconstructing those spaces in order to challenge the parameters of identity" (Berte 226). At

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[28] Other "factors" with which to confirm the inevitability of the train but that lie beyond this chapter would be its schedule and its literally loco-motive nature.

the edge of the prairie, Giscombe performs an act of bilocation and memorization to reconstruct his own racial identity and demonstrate how the individual might operate as a figure of resistance along the localized margins while still being inscribed within it.

Two poems in the middle of the "Inland" section of *Prairie Style* take up this figure and situate the individual on the prairie and along the side of the tracks in search of self. Giscombe meditates upon the prairie through a conversation between the two short poems. The first, "Mnemonic Geography," aligns the poet and the prairie as a demonstration of the type of device used to aid in memorizing its geography. Giscombe places the second poem, "Afro-Prairie," on the opposite page as an answer to the first and in juxtaposition to the "ambivalence," "hesitation," and lack of "racial variation" shown there (30). Each only takes up approximately one-third of their respective pages, with "Mnemonic Geography" containing eight lines and "Afro-Prairie" containing seven, though with the latter's spacing, the poems share an identical shape. "Mnemonic Geography" describes an inland space that the poet "can memorize and recite, section and number," and as such, the inland prairie is "pronounceable, certain that way" (30). Giscombe's "Penchant… for the flattest part of heat" repeats here ("Fever" 22), as the poet observes that "A / quantity of heat polishes the road" and that "inland" is "the flat me, polished to overstatement… edgeless and partial to nothing" (30). Giscombe writes an equation that links the prairie's level geography with indecision, apathy, and homogeneity, stating that "hesitation— my ambivalence / —takes the place of racial variation, makes the high places straight. / No misgivings, but the continent itself" (30). "Afro-Prairie" shows a speaker who experiences the un-local, flat, "edge-less" continent directly, warning at the start that it is "Tempting for the voice to locate its noise, to speak of or from. Every- / body wants to be the singer but here's the continent" (31). Its next line stands alone, separated with spacing to show that the prairie is

"Fielding the question, Do you like good music?" (31). The continent fields the question

figuratively but also literally, as it places the question in the field/in the prairie. Earlier, the

poem "Fever" invokes an open-ended version of the phrase, "fielding the question," where it

presumably means, "where do you come from?" The articulated question of "do you like good

music?" is thus connected "contexturally" to the question of locational origin.[29] The

prairie/continent takes up the question of "do you like good music" in this poem as a rhetorical

question of location, answered in part by its title, "Afro-Prairie." Giscombe concludes the short

poem with its longest stanza:

> Open love. In a recurring dream about the prairie, a thin hedge—
>
> along some railroad embankment—in which there's a gap to step
>
> through again and again, for me to step through, out onto the view it-
>
> self. Not the literary ballad, articulated, but onto the continent.

The Afro-Prairie, woven by black memory, is a railspace of "Open Love," where there is a

perpetually opened gap along the railroad embankment—a site of racial locality created along an

edge of railspace—through which Giscombe's speaker can step onto the prairie itself without

needing to be articulated or "overstated." He can simply exist in the railspace as the sourceless

experience of "flat heat" toward which the speaker feels an affinity in other poems in the

collection. But in this existence, the speaker retains his racial self, as suggested by the

intentional enjambment of "the view it- / self." "It" and "self" are split onto two separate lines,

doubling the meaning to suggest that the speaker can step onto "the view itself," and in doing so

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[29] In an instance of trans-contexture, Giscombe here alludes to the 1967 soul song, "Sweet Soul Music," co-written by Arthur Conley and Otis Reading and sung by the former. The song is an homage to soul singers, and it names Lou Rawls, Wilson Pickett, and James Brown, among others. By linking the singer to the voice that is tempted to "locate its noise, to speak of or from," Giscombe distinguishes it from the "continent," which does not locate its noise but rather literally "fields" Conley's question. "Do you like good music?" is placed onto the "continent" and becomes rhetorical, answered by the "open love" of the afro-prairie.

marks a line of distinction between "it" (the view) and "self" (the speaker). Here then, the juxtaposition is not mountain-like or between individual singers fighting for a voice. Instead, the juxtaposition is demonstrated by the juxtaposition of two poems facing one another. Both elide or eschew difference, but one—"Mnemonic Geography"—foregrounds an ambivalence that replaces "racial variation" and the other—"Afro-Prairie"—embraces the racial, individual element and thus revealing the "open love" and "good music" of the prairie that one person can experience over and over again in a gap next to the railroad embankment. This juxtaposition is based on "something more racial, say bigger, than mountains" that replaces geographic/geologic distinction.

Giscombe suggests that this "something more racial" is the identity of the black speaker, rooted in their history and location. Giscombe writes that location is "what you come to; it's the low point, it usually repeats"; location is "the reply, the obvious statement about origin" ("Downstate" *Prairie Style* 3); location is "where you decide what you saw" ("Whatever Keeps You Out of Hell" 50), and it is the "finale" where "dark-skinned men at the marges" reside ("Lazy Man's Load" 52).   This reiterative, conclusive, and clear answer of identity can be found as the speaker "step[s] / through again and again" the embankment gap "onto the view it- / self." The speaker is now situated on the continent, on the prairie, as a black man whose "origin" and "finale" are on the "marges" of the prairie. If there is a difference between the two, he does not feel compelled to articulate it.

Giscombe writes of racial locality arising from and delimited by networked tracks of railspace. He enjoins his readers to hone a railroad sense that develops a sensitivity to the tracks, not just to anticipate the eventually oncoming train but also to search for the edges and borders

and gaps that indicate stratigraphic racial memory. By taking a more active approach in seeking out the marginalized voices along the tracks, Giscombe aims to bring people of color up from the embankment "onto the view it- / self" and make clearly visible their presence on the "continent." These tools and unearthed histories are essential parts of the poetic "deep map" that Giscombe plots across the Ohio rail network and the inland prairie. They and their resulting charted racial histories, memories, and localities re-shape the railspace of the tracks and amplify the voices that herald their arrival.

Conclusion

Penn Station, Toward Geopraxis

Pittsburgh's Penn Station crouches behind a parking lot just beyond Pittsburgh's Cultural District, as Liberty Ave incorporates Grant Street along its north-eastern trajectory into the Strip District.[1] The current station is part of only two remaining routes: the Pennsylvanian, which travels from Pittsburgh to New York City through Philadelphia, and the Capitol Limited, which runs from Chicago to Washington D.C. Above the station sits the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway, an express line reserved for buses that follows the railroad right-of-way through the city's easterly neighborhoods and extends into Wilkinsburg and Swissvale. While Penn Station modestly welcomes approximately 130,000 riders annually ("Pittsburgh PA – Union Station…"), the P1/P2 Busway routes remain the most popular services of the Port Authority of Allegheny County. The route has an average daily ridership of nearly 12,000 people ("Port Authority of Allegheny County…" 25). Perched between the current Penn Station and the Busway is The Pennsylvanian, an apartment complex with rich strata of railspace that redevelopment efforts and time have compacted.

The Pennsylvanian sits on the site of the former Union depot, "a large, four-story building" with lower levels for ticket offices, business offices, and waiting rooms and with upper floors operated by the upscale Keystone Hotel Company, "one of the finest houses in the city" (Martin 105-106).[2] Striking laborers and their sympathizers—including the local police who refused or were unable to disperse the crowd and instead joined it—burned down the depot and much of the railroad's rolling stock during the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, with damage

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[1] The station was once named Union Station, though that typically designates a station that serves more than one railroad company. As such, with the Pennsylvania Railroad (and later, Amtrak) maintaining sole use of the facility, it makes sense to refer to it as not a "union" station but as Penn Station.

[2] This would amount to nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in 2020.

estimated up to $10 million (Martin 118-120).[3] For the next two decades, the Pennsylvania

Railroad operated in a temporary, unremarkable train shed of "crushing dullness" as what James

D. Van Trump calls "architectural penance" for the riots and destruction of the Union depot

(112).

In 1898, the Pennsylvania Railroad hired Daniel Burnham, the architect of Chicago's

spectacular 1893 World's Fair, to design an equally spectacular station to be built on the site of

the destroyed depot. Burnham designed the building in the American Beaux-Arts style,

reflecting the same design features of the World's Fair, which is to say, using materials like

terracotta and marble to display the "huge, ornate, passionately exuberant, the somewhat-

overblown flower of American imperial patriotism" (Van Trump 120). The building, which

continues to stand in 2020, features two signature flourishes: the grand concourse and the

rotunda. The concourse is large, nearly 11,000 square feet, and was "devoted entirely to public

purposes" when it opened in 1902 ("The New Pennsylvania Station…" 341). Along its sides for

the length of the building, "occupying substantially all the available room," were a barber shop,

men's and women's public restrooms, a dining room, and a lunch room ("The New Pennsylvania

Station…" 341). The upper floors of the building were offices for various railroad companies,

including but not limited to the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Allegheny Valley Railroad, and the

Pittsburg, Fort Wayne, & Chicago Railroad ("The New Pennsylvania Station…" 339). The

massive domed rotunda was designed as a functional cab stop, with a curved cobblestone

driveway leading up to the elevated entrance that sits above Grant Street. Four arches support

the rotunda, and each corner pavilion of the arches names a city affiliated with the Pennsylvania

Railroad—Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and "Pittsburg," a spelling choice that dates the

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[3] Among other reasons, the strike was caused by the Pennsylvania Railroad's orders to simultaneously increase productivity, decrease worker pay, and lay off nearly half of its labor force (Martin 77).

construction of the building to the limited time when the city went without the "h." The sky-lit

rotunda, like the building it precedes, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Their

inclusion in the Register is due to efforts from the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

to rescue the building from "urban renewal" efforts in the 1960s (Houser).

By the mid-1980s, with declining ridership and lack of upkeep, Penn Station was

noticeably waning in capital, both financial and cultural. Writing in 1983, Van Trump observes:

> The new sheds are clean and quiet, and the trains glide in and out with a minimum
> of noise. One is very conscious of the streamlined atmosphere. One is even more
> aware of the omnipotence of modern machinery in the new ticket sales and
> service bureau which has become the heart of the station. Located at one end of
> the main waiting room, it seems, with its huge canopy, to be a cave of light carved
> out of the former stately and shadowy reaches of the great hall. Above, the
> skylight is blacked out, the Beaux-Arts cartouches decay, and under the new pool
> of mechanical light, a diminished group of travelers wait. (231)

According to an article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette dated May 25, 1978, the lack of traffic and

interest in the building caused the United States General Services Administration to purchase the

building in the late 1970s and mull several development efforts, including converting it into a

federal office building, a new city hall, a senior living facility, or artists' residences. Appended

as an afterthought the article notes, "Last fall Amtrak proposed that it be modernized and

continued as a railroad station" (Moyle 2). Ultimately, each proposal was discarded in favor of

private development.

The refurbished building—now called "The Pennsylvanian"—was constructed between

1986 and 1988. The $20 million-plus renovation was in part made digestible for the developer,

Historic Landmarks for Living of Philadelphia, thanks to federal tax breaks to developers of sites listed on the Federal Register of Historic Places and to an agreement with Amtrak that split the cost of the new rail station in a basement-level annex, provided that Amtrak relinquish its leasing rights it had for operations in the building ("Rail station renovation…," Fisher 5). This latter allowance was necessary for the new developers to maintain control of The Pennsylvanian, and it is the reason that the grand concourse is closed off to the public.

The construction of The Pennsylvanian got off to an inauspicious start. Under the threat of strike, the general contractor, Tom Mistick and Sons, Inc., and labor leaders came to a late-night agreement on Sunday, November 3, 1986 to use union labor on the project. Despite the agreement, the next day, 45,000 union members across more than 28 building and construction trade unions flooded the streets of Pittsburgh for a planned march in protest of non-union work at the site (Gigler A1).[4] *The Pittsburgh Press* describes the event as "one of the largest demonstrations of trade union solidarity ever staged in Pittsburgh" and references the site's contentious labor history, noting that "The main target of the protest was the renovation project at the old Penn Station, the scene of one of the bloodiest and more destructive union confrontations in labor history—the railroad strike of 1877" (Gigler A1, A8). This time, despite laborers not having a permit for the march, the police had the circumspection to allow it to continue, lest its attempted dispersal "'incite a riot,'" in the words of Glenn Cannon, Pittsburgh's Public Safety Director (McKay, "Union marchers…" 20). The Chief of Police, City Council

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[4] The march went forth despite the late-night agreement simply because it was too late to cancel, according to the Pittsburgh Building Trades Council president. The march was a prescient demonstration; 18 months later, on May 23, 1988, protesters again took to the streets to spoil the grand opening of The Pennsylvanian. Again the developers and Mistick were accused of using predominantly non-union labor to complete the project and was accused by the Pittsburgh Building Trades Union of "'undermin[ing] the prevailing scale of wages.'" (McKinnon 4).

President, and City Controller all marched with laborers, in an echo of the public support enjoyed by railroad strikers in 1877.[5]

Today, "The Pennsylvanian," describes itself as "Downtown Pittsburgh's premier apartment residence," which "inspire[s] a modern yet luxuriously historic feel" in a "mingling of eras" in each of its 241 units ("The Pennsylvanian"). In a gesture to its origin, The Pennsylvanian has adopted the Pennsylvania Railroad logo—"PRR," with a slightly enlarged middle initial—as its own. On tours of the apartments, leasing agents will take prospective renters to high-end, two-story lofts in former Pennsylvania Railroad boardrooms and corner offices. From this vantage point, the agent will point out the covered rail yard and the original archways of the windows, which were maintained even when the windows themselves were replaced. The former grand concourse is now "The Grand Hall," which The Pennsylvanian markets alongside "The Rotunda" as an events space for wedding ceremonies or cocktail hours. When The Grand Hall is not being used for events, it lies dormant and is closed to the public. Pedestrians are similarly discouraged from loitering in The Rotunda, and its cobble stones cannot support too much automotive traffic, due to the renovated parking garage that lies underneath.

Despite discouraging public use, the railspace maintains its spectacular aura, and politicians continue to avail themselves of its symbolic and spectacular capabilities. President-elect Joe Biden visited Penn Station on his "Build Back Better Express" Whistle Stop Tour on September 30, 2020. In front of a select crowd of union members, Biden alluded to the strong history of labor organization in Pittsburgh, affirming that "The ironworkers, steelworkers—they built this town and the beautiful bridges that make Pittsburgh famous," and he aligned himself

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[5] Of course, in 1986, the Chief of Police would have also had the effect of calming rising tensions from the head of the march. The refusal of police in 1877 to cross the picket line and their possible role in exacerbating violence had the opposite effect.

with the crowd by saying, "I'm a bright guy, I married a member of a union" ("Joe Biden Express rolls into Western Pennsylvania…").

Competing factions of capitalists, planners, laborers, politicians, and conservationists have shaped Penn Station's railspace. The Union depot of the mid-nineteenth century was the epicenter of labor and capital for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Striking laborers and rioters destroyed the depot in 1877, deterritorializing the railspace from PRR ownership. After a brief interlude, Daniel Burnham re-built (re-territorializes) the railspace for the PRR as a spectacular Union Station. The PPR's own failures, the national waning influence of the railroad, and the temptation for large scale urban redevelopment caused the Station to teeter on the verge of a second eradication. The Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation rescued the Station as part of the Foundation's belief that historic preservation can be "a tool for renewing communities, creating pride among residents, and achieving sustainable economic development" ("About—History"). In the midst of intense labor demonstrations, the building's new ownership renovated the Station into a private development—The Pennsylvanian—and built an annex for the train station on the periphery of the railspace. A geocritical analysis reads the railspace of Penn Station through this assemblage of viewpoints.

Penn Station's railspace is not only seen; it is felt through all the senses. With a polysensorial understanding of the railspace one would notice that the silence and lack of activity felt by Van Trump in 1983 were only temporarily filled with the sounds of construction. Upon its competition, the restored splendor of the rotunda and the grand concourse have filled the railspace with visual vibrancy unmatched by other senses. The rotunda sees limited traffic, pedestrian or automotive, and the closed-to-the-public concourse remains silent and largely unoccupied, save for the occasional wedding reception.

Geocriticism unearths buried history and demarcates the efforts to deterritorialize and re-territorialize railspace. One can chart a through-line of labor activism through this stratigraphic research. Laborers built the depot, razed the depot, built the spectacle, demonstrated against its redevelopment, renovated The Pennsylvanian, again demonstrated against its celebratory launch, and are woven into modern political campaign narratives like Biden's "Build Back Better," which use Penn Station's railspace as a Whistle Stop Tour stage.

These multifocal, polysensorial, and stratigraphic discourses shape the railspace itself, in as much as the railspace shapes the aforementioned capitalists, planners, laborers, politicians, and conservationists. Geocriticism reveals these hidden intertextual contours of Penn Station, particularly as a railspace of privatized spectacular nostalgia wielded by urban developers and cultural caretakers. Just as the celebrated construction of the U.P. Trail threatened to consecrate the transcontinental railroad into a symbol for Manifest Destiny, so too has Penn Station been removed from common use and separated into the sphere of symbolism. It took the wildness and profanity of the Hell on Wheels to return the transcontinental railroad terminus to common use. Thankfully, Penn Station offers an opportunity to practice playful profanation on a less destructive scale.

Geocriticism can also point to a path forward through unexplored spatial gaps. Developers, architects, and placemaking planners could embrace the polyphony of voices that speak a space into existence by incorporating community input into early plans. Public space could be created with an awareness of the tactile, vestibulary, olfactory, and gustatory experience of its users. The space's history as shaped by power relations and buried memory can be illuminated to reconcile past transgressions with contemporary development. Many of these ideas assuredly are already in practice by other names. To unify them under the label of

something like "geopraxis" would allude to the debt its owes to geocriticism. Most importantly, geopraxis would be founded on the fact that discourse shapes the space at-hand. How might the voices of labor be amplified in The Rotunda? What forms might public activation in The Grand Hall take? Playful profanation has the ability to re-invigorate these railspaces and rescue them from their roles as nostalgic gestures for private parties and Instagram posts. More generally, discourse charted through geocriticism and presented through geopraxis can open up space to dynamic and public recreation. This is the potential for railspaces like Penn Station and for spaces well beyond the tracks.

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