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Interrogating American Subculture:
The Hobo Figure and Negotiations of Invisibility

by

John Lennon

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Doctor of Arts)

in

The English Department

Lehigh University

May 2005

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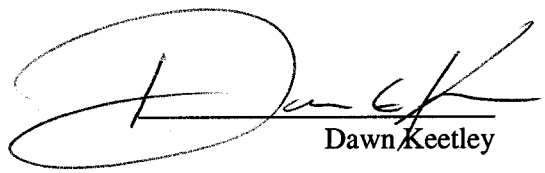
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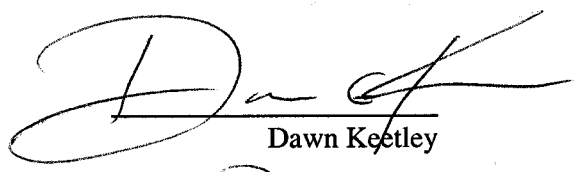
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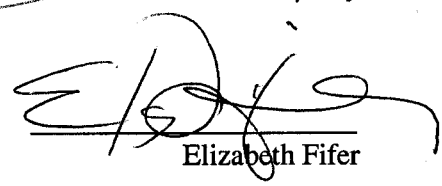
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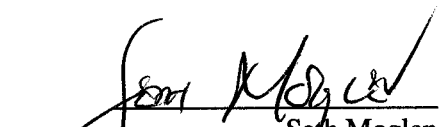

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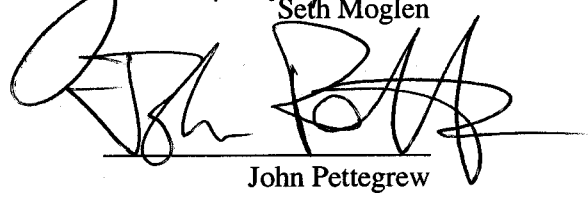
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Abstract

Interrogating American Subculture: The Hobo Figure and Negotiations of Invisibility focuses on a vital community in American culture: the hobo. My project is expansive and interdisciplinary, following the manifestations of the hobo figure through diverse literary and historical texts, including treatments of the hobo by Jack London, John Dos Passos, and Jack Kerouac, the political manifestoes of the I.W.W. and T.A.Z, and numerous long-forgotten, non-canonical hobo autobiographies. I have also conducted field research and personal interviews, leading to the first scholarly treatment of contemporary rail riders and writers, Eddy Joe Cotton and Jessica Hahn. Challenging the assumption that the hobo figure is simply an abstract sign of national economic distress, my project asserts the transgressive nature of the hobo's boxcar journey across the American landscape. Resisting continual attempts by the federal government as well as traditional community groups to locate and define the American populace in terms of geographically and socially specific places, twentieth-century hobos, using their invisibility to create autonomous spaces, forge a distinctive political identity that situates individual freedom and pleasure at its center. This dissertation is an examination of the hobo subculture that is an integral part of American cultural history and literature but yet has been, like the hobos themselves, misrepresented.

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Introduction

Outside there's a boxcar waiting...

--the pixies

Outside the window of my apartment in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, stands the old hulking body of the Bethlehem Steel Company. Rusting along the Lehigh River, its corroding vestiges still possess a mighty, almost breathtaking, presence in the Lehigh Valley. Walking over the Fahey bridge in the early morning, with the sun rising slowly behind The Steel, it is hard for me not to think back to a bygone era when the valley prospered and the now smokeless furnaces were coughing up billows of smoke and ash. At one time in this country's history, if it was steel, it most likely came from Bethlehem. But the furnaces have grown cold. As the production of steel left for cheaper manufacturing plants overseas, life-long union workers watched as their shiny steel plant dulled into a rusty red.

As the steel plant decays and everyone from politicians to former workers argues about how to remember the history of The Steel, there is one part of the plant that shakes alive throughout the day: the old rail lines that navigate around the aged buildings. The train whistle's piercing cry is heard (or due to its ubiquitousness, not heard) throughout the day and night; trains rumble down the tracks heading towards yards in Binghamton, New York, or Hershey, Pennsylvania, and all points beyond. Rail lines are still the veins in this country's body and although they are not thought about too often, they are essential to its well-being. Rail workers still make and remake their cars, bulls (railroad police) still patrol the yards, and millions of dollars of material goods are daily being transported throughout the country. And if you stand on the Fahey bridge in the early morning hours as the trains wait in

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a yard right outside the Bethlehem Steel Company, there is a small chance that you will see a head pop out of a boxcar, looking left and right, before quickly receding back into its shadows.

It seems appropriate to begin this short abstract of my dissertation with this image of a head emerging from the shadows of a boxcar next to the decaying body of The Steel. Both, seemingly, are relics from a previous era and both are in the middle of intense discussions on how to remember these "artifacts." But unlike the old furnaces, rooted in thousands of pounds of concrete, the hobo is alive and refuses to be a passive site for others to interpret. While the steel mill crumbles from vandals and time, men and women are still moving and hiding, catching rides on the fly or getting off and running for the weeds. And although academics, railroad companies, common sense, and even certain rail riders themselves treat the hobo subculture as part of this country's past, neither the term nor the individual is dead. The hobo is a perennial figure ensconced in the cultural fabric of this country's memory. From *The New York Times* op-ed pieces at the end of the nineteenth century calling for housewives to leave tempting arsenic-lased pies on the windowsills in order to cut down on the "army of thieving tramps" seen around rail-towns to a recurring comic figure on *The Simpsons* in the waning years of the twentieth century, the hobo figure has been in the periphery of public debate and popular cultural sensibilities for a long time. There is something about the hobo that resonates with many socio-economic cross-sections of the American populace. Part of this connection is that we are always fascinated (and frightened) by that which we do not know, and the hobo subculture has always been one that is shrouded in secrecy. Simply, hobos live an illegal lifestyle and therefore it behooves them to stay out of the spotlight. While many people have romantic dreams of riding the rails or have heard stories about relatives who rode the trains in previous eras, the whole subculture is still

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mysterious: men and women who live their lives in the shadows of boxcars will always be ineffable to those who are on the outside attempting to look in. This does not mean, however, that the hobo has been left alone. Seen as either a danger or a buffoon, legislation and popular representations have attempted, from the introduction of the transcontinental railroad to the present day, to define and regulate the movements of the hobo. The result of placing limits on the hobo has been a revisioning and manipulation of the figure, reimagining "him" (and the hobo is seen as a strictly male figure) in strict, culturally safe depictions of heterosexual male frontiersmen icons.

No matter how precious or revered, though, icons, when scrutinized, will reveal cracks in their facades—and somewhere between the dangerous criminal and the lazy buffoon lies a figure of great importance to the understanding of the formation and expression of subcultural identity. My dissertation explores these cracks where a more nuanced understanding of the hobo can be found. Realizing, however, that the hobo subculture is based on a separation from the normative culture, I have focused my search on one central aspect that is crucial to the identity formation of the hobo: the cultural and political ramifications of the act of becoming invisible by hopping a freight train. For it is at the moment when flesh becomes intertwined with steel and hobos become part of the iron horse that they embody both their resistance to the normative culture as well as a particular kind of parasitic freedom. My dissertation, then, focuses upon these moments of illegality and examines them within the context of two opposing impulses present within the hobo subculture: a philosophy of personal autonomy and a commitment to working-class political organizations.

Hobos have been extremely successful at becoming invisible, so much so that even the derivation of the term is disguised. During the late nineteenth century when increasing

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numbers of rail riders were seen hanging around train yards or in the belly of boxcars, there were lawful and unlawful attempts to define and regulate these unknown wanderers who appeared in towns, dirty and hungry, looking for work or hand-outs. And, as is the case with most subcultures, a hierarchy of terms was formed by those inside and outside the community to differentiate types of travelers who were found on the road. *Hobos* referred to men who wandered looking for work; *tramps* referred to men who traveled for travel's sake; and *bums* referred to men who never wandered and never worked but stayed as the "homeguard" in cities throughout the country. Even though there are many—in articles, books and conversations—who swear by this hierarchy, it is, nevertheless, suspect. For many laborers who were traveling for work did, in fact, beg for money when times became tough. And others who had wanderlust and traveled for the sheer rush of it did work when their money was low and they needed to eat. And for those who were unwilling to ride trains to other towns, they too moved, creating paths and spaces as they made their way to their destinations in their own particular towns or cities. Even the term *hobo*, which has been gendered male by those critics in the first half of the twentieth century who denied that even a small number of women were traveling from coast-to-coast by trains, has also come under fire in recent years with autobiographies and public documents telling a different tale and revealing previous gendered understandings of the term to be sexist.

The term hobo is, therefore, a constantly changing term and the different homeless categories bleed into each other. My dissertation refuses to consider the term hobo in a rigid or fixed manner. Rather, *Interrogating American Subculture* places the term under scrutiny and analyzes the social and political struggles and consequences that result when the term hobo is either adopted by, or placed upon, individuals. While other critics have judged the hobo subculture in terms of its "successes" and "failures" as related to working class political

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organizations, this dissertation is different: Instead of analyzing this subculture as a historical movement, I examine its *movements*. Theoretically focusing on the transient body, along with allowing space for the hobo's own voices allows for a new understanding of the politics of resistance and bodily manipulations as experienced and employed by subcultures.

Research for my dissertation began with a question: Is resistance characterized by observable displays of direct confrontation or can it be invisible and ephemeral? Although analyses of goals and destinations offer much insight about subcultural resistance, my thoughts have drifted instead to the in-between—to what is created when individuals detach themselves from recognized and organized places and attempt to construct autonomous spaces that reflect their social and political identity. *Interrogating American Subculture* is, therefore, essentially about the manipulations of movement and visibility, locating hobos' resistance in their transient bodies and negotiations of invisibility.

The American hobo's continuous ability to stay in motion, hidden from the stabilizing organizations that attempt to place her/him both geographically and socially, constitutes an essential site of subcultural resistance in American society. Using critical methods derived from literary studies to analyze cultural narratives by and about the hobo figure, I focus on the physical body in motion as the location of resistance. The theoretical basis for this analysis is Michel de Certeau's philosophical understanding that the body is both delimited and articulated by societal laws and regulations. Building from this, I show how the negotiation of invisibility is an ideological tool manipulated by the individual to free and express her/his own body. My dissertation shows, moreover, how resistance is much more that just a theoretical abstraction; indeed, it is a lived experience, with life-and-death ramifications, fought in the everyday realm of the train yards, jungle fires and squats, past and present, in towns and cities throughout the United States.

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Narrating the story of this marginalized yet essential community through the use of canonical literature, political tracts, hobo autobiographies, zines, philosophical treatises, and personal interviews and observations, I challenge the common assumption that the hobo's cultural meaning in the United States can be read only in her/his affiliations with established political organizations. Rather, we must uncover and analyze the fundamentally individualistic nature of the hobo lifestyle and the ways in which the ability of hobos to control the visibility of their own bodies is at the root of their subcultural power.

My first chapter, "Theories of the Railroad Frontier and the Issue of Space," introduces the theoretical framework for my dissertation as a whole. Using de Certeau's premise of the fluidity of "space" as opposed to the rigidity of "place" and Michel Foucault's ruminations about individual resistance, I analyze the railroad—the actual lines of metal placed in the earth along with the physical train cars themselves—as well as the hobo's construction of their own autonomous spaces as they steal rides on the trains. Separating themselves from those who figuratively travel up and down the socio-economic ladders of success, hobos physically travel *horizontally*, finding their subcultural power in their ability to stay in motion. Indeed, they actively create individualized "spaces" within the dominant culture's "places." Using primary sources reflecting both national and individual reactions to the transcontinental railroad at the end of the 19th century—specifically such diverse literary texts as Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* and James Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, cultural analyses by Leo Marx, Frederick Jackson Turner, Richard Slotkin, and bell hooks, and analysis of homeless practices by Talmadge Wright—I delineate how the hobo's body was an immediate source of resistance and aggravation, and I relate the consequential censuring of this body when the law could both see and catch her/him.

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Once I have established my theoretical paradigm, I then move to an analysis of the hobo subculture as it has been seen throughout its history. Although the hobos' labor was needed in the early part of the twentieth century, they were also seen as morally and economically bankrupt and thus they needed to be able to become invisible when they weren't working as harvest hands. But as their numbers decreased and they became less of a threat, cultural memory has re-imagined the hobo, removing the menacing angles and rounding the figure into a sympathetic and humorous character. Examining hobo autobiographies, I trace the way that hobos have allowed themselves to become more visible and "safe," with self-depictions of themselves as nationalistic "gentlemen of the road." Concentrating specifically on the annual hobo convention held in Britt, Iowa, and the attempts by the town leaders and many of the hobos themselves to fit the hobo into transparent spheres of checked masculinity, I discuss the battle that has resulted over the term "hobo." Using Michel Bakhtin's theories of the carnivelesque, and relying on my own personal observations of the convention, I show that the attempts to standardize and control the term is never absolute; new meanings of the word are created through the unregulated and rowdy physical actions of the current-day rail-riders during this convention.

After establishing the broad range of hobo figures in autobiographical depictions as well as canonical American literature, in my next two chapters, I continue to focus on the act of hopping trains as a catalyst for my discussion of individual autonomy as compared to a class-based solidarity. Two main texts serve as the center of my analysis: Jack London's autobiographical account in *The Road* and John Dos Passos's Mac character in the *USA* trilogy. Placing London's descriptions of his self-interested involvement with Jacob Coxey's Industrial Army alongside varied hobo autobiographies and historical accounts of the 1894 March on Washington, I analyze the hobo's ethos of individuality. While many hobos

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temporarily join radical political organizations that fit their particular world views, they will not remain visible long enough to succumb to sustained group solidarity and action. This thesis is seen quite clearly in Dos Passos's major hobo character, Mac, from the *USA* trilogy. Focusing on the author's use of movement as central to his early novels, I show how Mac's involvement with the International Workers of the World was not based on the union's philosophy; rather, it was based on the hobo mentality of travel. Historicizing the IWW's attempts to structure and organize the "army of tramps" for the union's purposes of front-line agitation, I show how any organizational structure is antithetical to the hobo's individuality. I then explore a few spaces where hobos did ground themselves politically for a time in ways that did not intrude on their autonomy: the Hobo Colleges, the Dil Pickle Club, and The College of Complexes. Mixing the play of Dadaism with anarchic education, hobos entering these welcoming spaces found their individuality celebrated with no attempts to harness the lifestyle for other purposes.

Following my discussion of the hobo population in the early part of the twentieth century, my next two chapters move to an examination of the community in the1990s in order to explore how the subculture's ethos and resistive stances have evolved and changed during a time in which the lifestyle is supposedly "done and been." Focusing on the autobiographies as well as multiple personal interviews with two rail-riders who had very different gendered and community experiences hopping trains during this decade—Eddy Joe Cotton and Jessica Hahn—I discuss how they embody major impulses in the hobo subculture: the former looking backward to the glory years of rail riding and the latter existing in and for the moment with no concerns to the past.

Spending most of his time with older male train hoppers, Cotton connects his current day experiences on the road with fatherly "gentlemen of the road" hobo figures of the past,

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portraying the train-hopping culture in many ways that parallel the image promoted by the Britt Hobo Convention. With little mention of younger rail riders in his text, Cotton concentrates on father-son relationships and normative heterosexual bonding as he hops trains across the United States. Analyzing the published works and personal journals of Jessica Hahn, along with various zines, chapbooks, and films of other modern day riders, I show, however, that other rail riders eschew the culturally acceptable versions of the hobo figure and instead use the iron road as a space to break free from these hegemonic constructions. Using the political manifesto of Hakem Bey's *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (TAZ), which expounds the politics of invisibility, along with numerous personal interviews that I have conducted with rail riders, I consider how contemporary riders are still using their bodies as sites of resistance. I focus on the act of squatting as a contemporary use of invisibility that, while intimately connected to the act of hopping trains, is at the same time a more deliberate articulation of an anti-privatized, anti-capitalist ideology. Unlike Eddy Joe Cotton, Hahn, and other punk/squatter rail riders are not concerned with past representations of the hobo figure and instead are more interested in (re)creating their own space in this still viable and ever-changing subculture.

Much like its subject matter, *Interrogating American Subculture* is a collection of journeys along many wonderful roads. It has allowed me to stretch across departments—English, History, American studies and Philosophy—in order to use to appropriate critical lenses to analyze this elusive subculture. It has taken me to rail yards on the east and west coast to interview train riders, to Britt, Iowa, and Pennsburg, Pennsylvania, to participate in hobo conventions, and to archival research of *The Hobo News* in the New York Public Library and more informal zine libraries in squats around Manhattan in order to access primary sources and personal experiences. These journeys taken as a whole have turned into

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an interdisciplinary dissertation focusing on a subculture that manipulates its movements to stay invisible and yet, at the same time, to exert its powerful resistive stance.

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Chapter I

Theories of the Railroad Frontier and the Issue of Space

"A whole history remains to be written of spaces—
which at the same time be the history of powers"
Michel Foucault[1]

Between the Central Pacific's Jupiter and the Union Pacific's Engine Number 119, a Golden Spike is driven into the track at Promontory Point, Utah on May 10, 1869, allowing for the first time in history a railroad track to span the length of a continent. Four years after the surrender of Lee and the defeat of the South in the Civil War, the Golden Spike Event is hailed as a symbolic moment for a country desperate to be unified and move forward as both a country and a world power. The Eighth Wonder of the World is deemed by an astonished public as the "most important event of modern times," changing, forever, the way that the United States views itself (Athearn 48). The railroad is progress and with it, the United States became perched to move forward at speeds previously unknown; what was a dream in the first half of the nineteenth century now became a reality as the Iron Horse brought mail, capitalists, dreamers, entertainers, prospectors and farmers, who, for the price of a ticket, could travel from New York City to San Francisco in fewer than seven days for a grand total of 70 dollars (Ambrose 369).[2]

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[1] Foucault, Michael. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings* 1972-1977, ed. Gordon, Colin, 149.

[2] In the summer of 1869, a first class ticket was 150 dollars, while 70 dollars would get a person a seat in the third, or emigrant, class. First class offered the relative comforts of a Pullman sleeping car while the third class ticket bought place on a bench (Ambrose 369). Like most advances in technology that are supposed to be classless and for the masses, the railroad is based very much on the hierarchy of the classes—seventy dollars, no matter what the century, is still hard to scrape up for a large selection of the population. Besides class, railroad cars, like most places in nineteenth century United States, were also segregated by race and sex. See James Ely's *Railroads and American Law* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2001) and

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The transcontinental railroad is an achievement that not only allows for corn harvested in Mason City, Iowa, to reach street sellers in Queens, New York, it also splintered and changed a concept that was once thought of as whole: time. As technology advanced, units of time became more distinct and regimented. Railroads published schedules; passengers knew the exact time that a train was scheduled to depart from one station and to arrive at another terminal. Business transactions, family vacations and board meetings were therefore dependant on the time when a train whistle blew announcing its presence in a certain locale. Time, therefore, also became more regulated and consistent throughout the United States.

At first, private railroad companies resisted and kept their own time. "In the stations used by several different lines, there were clocks showing different times; three of these in Buffalo, six in Pittsburg" (Scivelbusch 44). This was obviously chaotic and led to much confusion and, more importantly, to a loss of money for the railroad companies. The concept of "Standard Time" was therefore developed and the country was cut up and divided into four time zones, no longer allowing localities to keep their own time. Careers and fortunes became increasingly dependent on the speed of the locomotive. As the time needed to do things diminished due to the quickness of the railroad, time became more rigid and under the control of a central—instead of local—force. As Stephen Ambrose writes of the locomotive generally and the transcontinental railroad specifically, in *Nothing Like It in the World*, "[w]ith it man conquered space and time." Ambrose is not alone in these feelings. In Germany, Heinrich Heine who saw the

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Barbara Young Welke's, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920* (Cambridge UP, 2001).

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railroad in the nineteenth century as a "providential event" wrote, "[s]pace is killed by the railways, and we are left with time alone" (as quoted in Scivelbusch 37). And while I think Ambrose and Heine are correct in the fact that space was transformed, I am not, however, comfortable with their terms of "conquered" and "killed." Space, as this dissertation will show, is not so easily destroyed because it belongs to the political realm as well as the physical one. Even though space can be transformed and controlled to a certain extent, it is, by definition, never completely under the command of the dominant forces. Space is much more complex than these men anticipated and can be created by those who exert their subversive power in a hostile environment.

Technology, however, did have an effect on the spatial practices in the United States. As time became standardized, space also became more controlled and ordered. What was "wild" and "undiscovered"—spaces that were "unknown" or "uncontrolled"—were now under increasing control by the citizens who settled in towns and villages, citizens who were subject to the laws and regulations of the larger State. Less than a decade after the historic May afternoon in Utah, Fredrick Jackson Turner was proclaiming before the American Historical Association that "four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history" (Turner 38). For Turner, the ordering and cultivation of space defined chapters of history and the closing of the frontier led to an end of the initial period of historical time within the United States.

This connection between space and time had been predicted early on with the introduction of the steam train. In 1844, a reporter from the *Cincinnati Enquirer* wrote,

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"Steam is annihilating space . . . . Traveling is changed from an isolated pilgrimage to a kind of triumphal procession" (as quoted in Marx 196). Technology made progress visible and the train—most especially, the transcontinental line—was a visible manifestation of the disappearance of the frontier. For example, in 1830, there were 73 miles of track laid in the United States; in 1840, 3,328 miles; in 1850, 8,879 miles; and in 1860 there were 30,636 miles, and this, the "triumphal procession," led to the connection and interaction of people and products between coasts (Marx 215). Spaces that were once Henry Nash Smith's untouched "Virgin Land" were now being penetrated by the train in a regulated and precisely timed fashion; the wild and unstable frontier had given way to scheduled time and a fixed certainty.

As clearly seen in Richard Slotkin's trilogy of studies about the frontier myth, the frontier—both as a geographical line as well as a mental make-up—has been key to the settlement of the United States.[3] The Frontier Thesis—based on Turner's hypothesis—is "divided into two realms: 'The Metropolis,' the civilization center; and the 'Wilderness' into which the heroic energies of the Metropolis are projected. The 'Frontier' is the ever advancing line that is the interface between the two realms" (Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 41). The Frontier is conceived as a borderland area, a space between the place of the civilized person and the place of the "savage." It is a transforming space where the pioneer leaves behind his civilized ways and adopts the nature of the savage in order to conquer the wild areas of nature and make them into civilized, specific, mapable *places*. The frontier borderland area is a space that allows the pioneer to transform and adapt to

[3] Richard Slotkin's trilogy, *Regeneration Through Violence* (1973), *The Fatal Environment* (1985), and *Gunfighter Nation* (1992), deals wonderfully with this borderland area between space and time and the myths of the frontier.

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the unfamiliar and exotic, a freedom that he does not have in the regulated and ordered places of civilization. It is, to use bell hooks terminology, "eating the other," satisfying the dominant culture members' cravings to experience the exotic without the danger of any real change on the part of the exploiters; a space to swallow and learn another's culture but with enough digestion to leave the exploiter never essentially changed.[4] This consumption of the "other" allows for a regeneration through violence (to use Slotkin's terminology), through contact with exotic, dangerous locales, and thus allowing the exploiters "to progress" both individually and as a collective organization. As the spaces become conquered, they are transformed into places where rules and authority are established and the freedom to experience the "other" becomes regulated and tempered—the exotic thus becomes mundane.

This intimate connecting of places—the "wilderness" (or as Marx writes "nature"), and the Metropolis—could be a source of great anxiety for many who thought of these two places as disconnected.[5] Places that were once separated by time and distance—the city and the wilderness—were now being joined together; what had been

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[4] hooks rightly shows that "eating the other" is a desire to be radically changed in some way with this encounter with the "Other." To experience the exotic as a rite of passage in order to grow is a quality that many white males of privilege desire and expect; the frontier is a way for many to experience first hand the "savage" and to be changed by her/him. But the goal, of course, is to change and grow within a hierarchal socio-economic class—not to become, in essence, the "Other;" or a permanent "savage"—privilege should never be abandoned forever for the "lower" status. For the purpose of this discussion, hooks shows how the transformative space can be appealing to the exploiter but it also causes anxiety and the change that is attempted is, therefore, one of acquisition and not of fundamental change.

[5] The frontier thesis has been in some disfavor—for good reasons—but has not been abandoned. While most scholars now discuss the theoretical frontier in terms of 'borderland' areas—Gloria Anzadua's wonderful book *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (1987) is one of many examples. There is much use for developing and improving upon the frontier thesis, as Richard Slotkin's trilogy and William Cronon's *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (1992), can attest to its merits.

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once separate was now becoming parts of the same whole.[6] The city, as the center of creative destruction, is a place that is always in the process of change as it constantly reinvents itself, embodying both the good and the bad of technological and social progress. And while nature might be "out there," and a more abstract concept than the city, it is still a place to go, to explore, to grow, and to find oneself. It might not be as minutely mapped as the blocks of a city but it is still a destination, a place. There has always been a psychological as well as physical distance between these two spheres and one of the rights of passage for many a young man—using this gendered model—was to leave the confines of the city that makes men "soft" and travel a dangerous and lonely road to the rejuvenating place of Nature.[7] But then, through the development of technology and the increasing ubiquity of the railroad, the two separate spheres were suddenly no longer so far apart. In the 1839 *Quarterly Review*, for example, the railroad was heralded as having the potential to destroy space altogether, and in an overly optimistic prediction, the author gushed, "[a]s distances were annihilated, the surface of our country would, as it were, shrivel in size until it becomes not much bigger than one immense city" (as quoted in Schivelbusch, 22). But not everyone was able to deal so easily with these large changes.

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[6] These feelings of excitement/fear were not exclusive to the United States. As Heinrich Heine wrote of the possibility of a transcontinental railroad in Europe, "[j]ust imagine what will happen when the lines to Belgium and Germany are completed and connected up with their railways! I feel as if the mountains and forests of all countries were advancing on Paris. Even now, I can smell the German linden trees; the North Sea's breakers are rolling against my door" (as quoted in Schivelbusch 37). And while this was exhilarating to discuss and anticipate, it also brought about much anxiety—what would the railroad do to the idea of a bordered nation state?

[7] A perfect example of a person who experienced this rite of passage would be Theodore Roosevelt who, as Richard Slotkin examines in detail in *Gunfighter Nation*, was the poster boy for the rejuvenating powers of nature that can save a young man from the stifling and effeminizing confines of cities (29-62). It was only when he was able to conquer his fear of the rough road (and as Slotkin rightly points out, his effeminate qualities) by transforming himself through his journey, does he become the overtly masculine hero that he is known for today.

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Leo Marx, in *The Machine in the Garden*, for example, describes Nathaniel Hawthorne as "the writer sitting in his green retreat dutifully attaching words to natural facts, trying to tap the flow of thought and feeling and then suddenly, the startling shriek of the train whistle bearing upon him, forcing him to acknowledge the existence of a reality to the pastoral dream" (14-15). Here Marx is writing of a man who understands places (both nature and the city) but is feeling anxious and jarred by the fact that the space/borderland in-between is collapsing. What is strange and terrifying about the sound of the train's whistle in nature is that the place of nature is being interrupted by the place of the city, a place that "is the story of busy men, citizens from the hot street who have come to spend the day in the country village" (13). The time that it takes to travel in-between places—the rejuvenating experience and rite of passage of being in motion—has diminished considerably as the machine has become fully entrenched in the garden. As Page Smith summarizes: "[a]ll that was best and worst in America seemed caught up in the railroad mania" (89).

This ordering of time and space was jarring and as both Marx and Slotkin note, there was an immediate need by the cultural producers of the time to deal with the anxiety that the forced introduction of the railroad created in the people. Simply, the railroads were the conduit that would allow for civilization to replace the wilderness, and the government handed out large and cheap land grants to the companies in hope of populating and cultivating the land. Smith reports:

> One of the most important functions of the railroads was to fill out, so to speak, the remaining states or the territories that would become states. In almost every instance railroads preceded and were essential to statehood. When Wyoming, Utah, Okalahoma, New Mexico and

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> Arizona became states, they each had more then 1,000 miles of railroad running through them and a total of 23,000 miles. (99)

At first, this progression-minded rhetoric seemed to work. Hawthorne, after first admitting his surprise at the piercing whistle, sings praises for the machine that will bring prosperity to the land. Slotkin explains how the railroad barons, to alleviate the tension and anxiety caused by the railroad, helped to successfully force the introduction of the Iron Horse to fit (albeit awkwardly) into the social mythology of the pioneers: "The suggestion that the railroad itself is the model of pioneer enterprise in the region likewise suggests an industrial definition of the size of success—a very different model from that offered by Boone or even Judge Cooper (*F. E.* 215). While the pioneers of the day traversed the wild regions of the country with their intelligence, breeding, and courage (along with a weapon or two), the building of the railroads was a more multifaceted affair involving many levels of the government, numerous businessmen, thousands of workers and large sums of money. The frontiersman who had transformed himself within the spaces of the borderlands had been replaced by the enterprising businessman who was firmly situated in the places of society and had the power and money to have other people lay down tracks across the county. To support the myth of the American pioneer spirit, however, and to allay the fears of those who were afraid of the change that new technology was bringing, the civilization versus nature narrative was evoked. "Just as the farm is superior to and replaces the wilderness, so too the railroad represents a further development of civilized power which always takes the form of establishing human control over nature, to construct pathways not carved by rivers or the tracks of beasts and hunters" (*Regeneration Through Violence* 215). The railroad, therefore, in the popular

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rhetoric of the day, was deemed a continuation of the American progressive character.[8] The "annihilation" of space, the controlling of time, and the colonizing mark of civilization upon "savage" land was to be lauded from coast to coast with the transcontinental railroad seen as not only a way to allow the U.S. to progress within its borders but it was also heralded as an initial step to connect the United States with Asia. The *Quarterly Review* understood the railroad as a type of utopian fix-all that would produce "the gradual annihilation, approaching almost final distinction, of that space and those distances which have hitherto been supposed unalterably to separate the various nations of the globe" (as quoted in Schivelbusch 34). Space was deemed unpredictable and therefore the transcontinental railroad, which brought places closer together, was praised as a technological marvel with possibilities that seemed unimaginable a few short years before. Abraham Lincoln, who at age twenty-three made the railroad the central issue in his campaign for the Illinois State Legislator, promised that, "no other improvement . . . can equal in utility the railroad" (Ambrose 26). Lincoln understood the value of the transcontinental railroad and its creation was a goal for him for his entire political career. He was elected president on a platform that declared, "[t]hat a railroad to the Pacific Ocean is imperatively demanded by the interests of the whole country; that the Federal Government ought to render immediate and efficient aid in its construction" (Ely 51). And although an assassin's bullet stopped him from seeing the completion of the line, it was reported widely and with pride that it was the "Lincoln Pullman" that brought his coffin back from Washington to Illinois (Ambrose 26-27).

[8] The railroad was still not welcomed by all, of course. For a great fictional interpretation of the negative effect of the destruction that the railroad introduced to communities and families, see Frank Norris' powerful book *The Octopus: A Story of California* (1964).

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THE *PLACE* OF THE PASSENGER

The railroad line represents an invasion of place over space. Michel de Certeau, in a chapter entitled "Railway Navigation and Incarceration" from his influential book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, shows that inside the railroad car is a place of order where everything is in its proper and right place. It is "traveling incarceration" where the "unchanging traveler is pigeonholed, numbered and regulated in the grid of the railway car" (111). As the passenger hands his ticket to the conductor, his movements are controlled and ordered in this closed environment. He has been assigned a place to sit, to order lunch, to smoke a cigarette, to relieve himself: the price of a ticket allows him to perform certain bodily functions in logically organized and designated places. For the most part, though, he sits, immobile, and looks out the glass pane at other immobile objects—cows staring dumbly in fields, mountain peaks covered in snow, streetlamps illuminating the night sky. Like him, these objects are still, silent, and fixed.

As de Certeau explains, neither the objects nor the passenger move, they are both fixed points. Rather, "vision alone continually undoes and remakes the relationships between these fixed elements" (112). Both the passenger and the objects outside of his window remain immobile. The changes in his vision and the amount that he can see, understand and process of the scenery outside of his window is therefore dependent on the machine's speed; the faster the train moves, the more his vision becomes blurred. Inside this module of "panoptic and classifying power," he is a rational cell traveling within a rational cell and passing recognizable places—places that have been scouted and

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mapped and, after much consideration, time and money, deemed most appropriate for the building of that particular track (111). This planning is what Henri Lefebvre refers to as "representations of space," or the organizing and manipulating of spaces by those who have the power to create places (33).[9] "Representations of space" are ways of looking at space and controlling it, thereby constituting what de Certeau would define as an ordered place. Strategies are designed by the railroad organizers only after much planning and negotiating to decide what space should come under their control.[10] Strategies, as de Certeau explains, are intimately aligned with this issue of place since they are:

> the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve those as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc) can be managed. (38)

Strategies are formed from bases of power and are used to manage and control objects; they are masteries of "places through sight" (36). By dividing and bordering space, those who are therefore able to use strategies may identify and manipulate any object within their scope of vision. And depending on the situation, the object does not even know (or care) that s/he is being managed or controlled. The passengers, by paying for a ticket, have entered into a contract and agree to be managed by the railroad companies who have

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[9] For a further discussion of Henri Lefebvre and the differences between "spatial practice," "representations of space" and "representational space," see his major philosophical and encompassing work, *The Production of Space* (1992).

[10] This is, of course, a highly complex set of negotiations and dealings involving class, race and gender ideologies. While Stephen Ambrose understands the building of the line and the "Big Four" who were predominately involved in the building process in a mostly positive light, see John Robinson's book *The Octopus: A History of Corruption, Conspiracies, Extortion* for a scalding look at how the "Big Four" ruined California.

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both the "will and power" to own the land that those tracks cover. They rely on the operators to take them on their journey and while they may not even know how they are getting there, they believe in their binding contract (the ticket) that the New York to Chicago express will somehow get them to Chicago in time for their meeting.

Once the tracks were laid down, spaces were transformed into places; what once was wild and dangerous frontier land suddenly became precious and expensive property. "One-horse" towns that were small grew into major trading areas when planners decided to have a depot in a particular location; prosperous towns became abandoned ghost towns when railroad tracks turned away from their main streets. Anxious citizens and town leaders knew that their livelihoods were dependent on where the tracks were placed and the railroad companies understood clearly the power that they had:

> Towns not on railroad lines, struggling to survive, not uncommonly concluded that their only hope for prosperity was to prevail on a railroad to run a spur to town thereby connecting it to the great national networks or rails. Railroads often "auctioned off" a lifesaving spur line to the town that made the highest bid; towns not infrequently bankrupted themselves to win a railroad line that, it was hoped, would make them flourishing cities, only to find their hopes defeated and their future bleaker than ever. (Smith 101)

When lines of iron are placed in the ground, they define, categorize and regulate the environment—something that the passenger is oblivious to when he sits in the seat that is assigned to him.

Looking out the glass windowpane that frames the world in a whirl of flying colors, the passenger is part of an environment that is controlled; the temperature is regulated, the noise level dependent on his fellow passengers but, like him, their behavior is under surveillance and deemed appropriate or not so that "every being is

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placed [in the car] like a piece of printer's type on a page arraigned in military order" (de Certeau 111). Immobile, the level of his needs and wants met, he looks out the window and can find pleasure (whether consciously or not) in the lack of effort it takes to be a controlled subject in a mobile regulated system. This order and regulation is the power of place. As de Certeau states:

> A Place (lieu) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships or coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A Place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. (117)

There is much pleasure that can be derived from being in a stable environment even if that pleasure is based on the need to follow the proper rules laid out for him. Sitting in his proper position, his spot is defined and stable; his role, for example, might be that of passenger number 42 on the New York City to Chicago "red-eye" express and that role is strictly monitored by conductors and his fellow passengers. If he breaks his contract—for example, if he lights a cigarette in a no-smoking section—then he can be removed from the environment and suffer the penalties. As passengers, we rely on this order as we play the passive role. When there is a break or rupture in the order in this "social contract," we realize the amount we depend on others to follow their prescribed roles. Traveling through neighborhoods that we might feel afraid to walk through, we feel a sense of safety because we are surrounded by the train. We are no longer active worrying about our safety but passive, feeling safe that order will prevail. Whether it is the fast speed with which we travel through the areas of our fear or the feeling of invincibility

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riding in such a large and powerful machine, there is a cushion that comforts us within a train.[11] That is why when that order is disrupted, the anxiety and betrayal we feel is of such great magnitude.

While I was traveling on a train in Portugal from a beach town to downtown Lisbon, a group of twenty or so youths boarded the train at a suburban stop. As the train passed by a certain spot, they began attacking the passengers, stealing jewelry and watches, and terrorizing certain minority groups, all in the time it took to arrive at the next stop when, on cue, they all at ran out of the car. When the train began moving again, no one knew what to do; for the most part, we sat in our seats and stared straight in front of us. We did nothing, remaining immobile while waiting for the train to arrive at our particular destinations. It was difficult to comprehend the moments of chaos that happened within the car; unable to rationalize the level of violence in a place of such order, I sat in my seat and waited for my particular destination to arrive. I never once during the trip separated myself from the role of passive passenger. As we were leaving the car, I heard one woman say, "where were the conductors?" We had followed our roles of passenger and we wondered where the agents of order upon whom we all relied upon disappeared to when the rational gave way to the irrational.

What those twenty or so youths did in the time between platforms was to create a space for themselves within the realm of place. Space exists when there is a disruption to the stability of the environment, when subjects enter into a "proper" place and use it for their own purposes—purposes not sanctioned by those who "own" the place. Be it

[11] On the flip side, however, this forced trust might account for the debilitating anxiety that some people have when flying in an airplane or riding in a railroad car. While both modes of travel are—according to statistics—significantly safer than traveling in a car, many prefer the control of driving rather than giving their trust to people (conductors/pilots) whom they do not know and cannot see.

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political soap-boxers proclaiming their manifestos on a street in Manhattan, thieves grabbing chains on a train in Portugal, or hobos stealing rides on a train headed to Chi-town, all assert their oppressed power within a regulated place and—for a time at least—make it their own space.

This creation of space results in an instability, a tear, in the order of things. It is a "practiced place" where subjects use opportunities that are presented to them in order to carve a space in which to assert their own power (de Certeau 117). It is, however, the power of the weak. Unable to use strategies, they are left in the margins, poaching off the larger powers and taking advantage of the opportunities that are presented to them; they must always live in the present using tactics to play with the law that oppresses them (37). This group of young men, while powerful for a short time, lack the power of the "proper" and had they spent too long in one place, they would have been arrested for their actions. Strategies belong to the strong (the police later commented that they would strategize on how to better protect passengers from these types of guerilla-style attacks), and the youths had to use tactics which "insinuates itself into the other's place, fragementarily" (xix). By using surprise, therefore, they were able to create chaos for a time and leave before the order was restored. This is the power that subcultures use to exert their space in a hostile and ordered environment.

THE SPACE OF THE HOBO

The hobos who travel across the country looking for work from the late nineteenth century to the present day constitute a subculture that, much like Dick

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Hebdige's punks, are "alternatively dismissed, denounced and canonized; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons" (2). The hobo is a member of an economically mobile and socially unstable subculture that carves a space within the cultures recognized and accepted places. The hobo—who is defined by the fact that she rides illegally on trains—is forever on the fringes of place. Never inside the train's regimented system, she is always on the outside. But she is also defined by that of which he is not a part; although never counted by the authorities, hobos are dependent on the trains for their movement and could not exist without them. There is an intimate link between the machine itself and the hobo, a bond that is essential and unique to the hobo and her lifestyle. Unlike the passive relationship between the passenger and the train, however, the hobo is connected in a more physical and active way.

De Certeau writes that both the passenger and the objects outside the window are immobile, fixed and silent objects. At the same time, he also makes the important observation that it is the railroad itself that is making noise:

> There is a beating of the rails, a vibrato of the windowpanes—a sort of rubbing together of spaces at the vanishing points of their frontier. *These junctions have no place.* They indicate themselves by passing cries and momentary noises. These frontiers are illegible; they can only be heard as a single stream of sounds, so continuous is the tearing off that annihilates the points through which it passes (italics mine 113).

It is the Iron Horse that cuts through the places—the towns, the valleys, the deserts—and at the "vanishing point of the frontier," the places disappear at the point of contact. While the railroad's speed and ubiquity has brought places closer together (never, though, as close as Heinrich Heine imagined) forcing much of the frontier to disappear, it is still present, and when the train is in motion and screaming across the continent, there is a

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"rubbing together of spaces" indicated by the noise and cries of the machine. The passenger, however, is oblivious—and distant—as he sits in his seat, cushioned and protected. The only sound that he hears, different from the more chaotic noise, is the vibrating of the window; he could place his hand on the pane and feel the rhythm or softly hear the click-clack, click-clack of the train on the tracks. In these places, there are only sounds. In space, however, there is noise.[12]

The hobo, sitting in the corner of the open boxcar, is in that space where there is no sound but only uncivilized noise and she is physically a part of that borderland where the frontier disappears. Hebdidge writes that "[s]ubcultures represent 'noise' (as opposed to sound) interference in the orderly sequence," and while the passenger is culturally permitted to raise his voice a bit when ordering pretzels in the bar-car, the hobo, trying to keep warm in sub-zero temperatures as the train screams through the countryside, may yell, stamp her feet, and run around in the boxcar in order to keep alive (90). For example, in Jim Tully's hobo memoir, *Beggars of Life*, he writes of a hazardous trip that nearly killed him: "The cold air numbed my muscles until a stupor fought to gain control of my brain. Silently I fought with a primitive lust for life. I pounded the roof of the car to revive the ebbing circulation of my blood. I shook my head violently, as a pugilist does to drive the effect of a grueling smash from his brain. I longed for the train to stop" (230). Unable to stop the train, Tully has to endure as much of the horrific conditions as he can. Since he is not in the place of the railroad car, he is able to take actions not

[12] For example, in a recent luxury car commercial, a sleek, shiny car is placed in the middle of a loud, chaotic construction sight. In the first frame, the car's windows are down and the noise of the mechanic world is grating and disturbing. With a flick of a switch, however, the windows rise and the noise is replaced with soft classical music. The noise belonged to the uncivilized and unsafe construction world, the sound belonged to the world of the (high-priced) civilized and ordered car environment.

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permitted to or warranted by passengers. Since the hobo cannot be heard above the roar of the engine or seen in the darkness of the night, she can use his voice to yell and hoot; she can laugh or curse; she can rip off some of the thousand mile paper.[13] By stealing a ride, she is outside of history: there is no seat assigned, no money exchanged for a ticket, no knowledge that she is even there on the train; therefore, she does not officially exist. Even though railroad engineers may even suspect that she is there (or, in many cases, turn a blind eye to the fact that they did see her), she does not count. [14] When a person exists in the spaces of society, those that are connected to places will not recognize her/him.[15] As a homeless wanderer participating in an illegal activity, the hobo does not exist. Although de Certeau writes that "history exists where there is a price to be paid," when discussing the everyday passenger on the railroad, he apparently is unaware of those who are outside of history and who cannot afford or do not wish to pay the price to "ride the cushions" (113). History exists only in areas that can be seen. Spaces of darkness need to be illuminated and realigned into the accepted hegemonic discourse of the time by the culture's regulators. Space is dangerous to the established order precisely because the actions taking place are unseen and therefore not able to be regulated. As Michel

[13] Thousand mile paper is the rough brown paper that railroad companies line their cars with in order to protect both the merchandise and the car from damage. Hobos tear this paper off the walls and use it for insulation in the cold weather.

[14] The Dutch have a word, *gedogen*, that perfectly sums up this policy of not seeing that which is before ones eyes. Many hobo texts do refer to kind workers who offer help to 'bos by telling them when and where a train is leaving and warning them when a yard is "hot" and a bull is close.

[15] An example of how a homeless person is outside/not counted by history can be found in the wake of September 11, 2001 and the 'official' counting of the dead from the World Trade Center. As a *Village Voice* article first reported, the homeless men and women who were living in the subway station underneath the World Trade Center when the planes hit will never be known or remembered among the dead. Outside of history, there will be no memorial, no memory of them; their names will not be read along with the other victims of the terrorist attacks. This lack of remembering those who are outside history may also be seen in the countless "tramp graves" that are found along the railroad tracks of the United States. Having no form of identification and no recognizable next of kin, many 'bos were buried just a few feet from the tracks in unmarked graves by railroad workers or townspeople after they were found dead.

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Foucault shows when applying the theory of the Panoptican, there is much advantage in keeping people under the constant, albeit illusionary, gaze of the State rather than plunging subcultures into the dark where they can gather strength in secrecy. In established places people can be seen and therefore there is "a power through transparency, subjection through illumination" (162). But what Jeremy Bentham never anticipated when he revolutionized surveillance and the prison system, which Foucault is quick to point out, is that some subjects would resist this gaze and would seek to create spaces not monitored by cultural forces. Not everyone is passive and "there would always be ways of slipping through their net" (162). The hobo is not a passive figure and resists the gaze by stepping outside of official history. Unlike the passenger who is always under the gaze of established authority, the hobo exists in the space of noise and movement of the frontier. And although the distance between points has been diminished by the speed of the locomotive, there is still the moment of contact, the "rubbing of spaces" created by the train's movement that is unobservable and outside of history. As the hobo holds on to the train for dear life at that moment of contact, it can be argued that she herself becomes part of the Iron Horse. Unlike the everyday passenger who is cushioned and protected, the hobo, intimately intertwined with the machine, is therefore a *producer of space.*

Even though de Certeau states that "the machine is the *premium mobile*, the solitary god from which all action proceeds," he could be describing the hobo herself as she becomes part of the machine that cuts through the landscape (113). One of the most dangerous ways of stealing a ride and thus the one that hobo autobiographies brag about

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the most was "riding the rods."[16] Kenneth Allsop, author of a history of the hobo, describes this perilous way of traveling:

> Beneath the old boxcar—not on today's streamlined models—the iron frame was underbraced by gunnels, or iron bars, running lengthwise eighteen inches below the belly of the car, leaving a space into which a reasonably slim hobo (and they were seldom fat) could sidle and so be borne, stretched flat on his back like a kipper on a grill, cradled between the thundering wheels and a few inches above the sleepers and spraying cinders. (159)

The hobo would find a piece of wood or board and make an improvised seat a few inches above the gravel. If the hobo fell asleep, or slipped, or if an angry engineer with a grudge threw a bolt under the car (where it then became a lethal weapon to knock the hobo off his perch), certain death was to follow.[17] It was extremely dangerous because the distance between the hobo and the machine was non-existent; arms and legs intertwined with bolts and steel. A J. Carrel Lucas drawing clearly shows this intermingling of steel and flesh: the hobos are laying flat on their stomach with the wind blowing fiercely in their faces (although somehow one of the hobos has his hat on!).[18] They are only inches away from the wheels of the train, their bodies seemingly engulfed by the machine itself. These hobos are not passive, though, and the hobo closest to the viewer's eye has his

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[16] Most of the railroads cars have been modified and this is no longer an option for rail riders.

[17] This is seen in the very popular movie *Emperor of the North* (1973) in which Ernest Borgnine plays the sadistic bull who tries to throw the adventurous hobo (Lee Marvin) off of his train. Jack London in his hobo memoir, *The Road*, also has a good description of how hostile train crews would get unwanted riders off their trains. "The "shack" (brakeman) takes a coupling-pin and a length of bell-cord to the platform in front of the truck in which the tramp is riding. The shack fastens the coupling-pin to the bell-cord, drops the former down between the platforms, and pays out the latter. The coupling-pin strikes the ties between the rails, rebounds against the bottom of the car, and again strikes the ties. The shack plays it back and forth, now to this side, now to the other, lets it out a bit and hauls it in a bit, giving his weapon opportunity for every variety of impact and rebound. Every blow of that flying coupling-pin is freighted with death, and at sixty miles an hour it beats a veritable tattoo of death. The next day the remains of that tramp are gathered up along the right of way, and a line in the local paper mentions the unknown man, undoubtedly a tramp, assumably drunk, who had probably fallen asleep on the track."

[18] See Appendix One.

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head strongly stuck out into the wind, his arm forming a sideways 'L' with his palm flat on the steel and his elbow almost connected to the wheel. With his look of determination and forcefulness, he seems as if he is propelling the train forward. He is not being carried by the train; rather, he is *moving with* the train. While this could be considered a romantic reading, the factual picture does seem to corroborate this reading.[19] There is no protection from the elements and the hobo's arm is literally a couple of inches from the rails. Any movement—either by him or the train—that separates him from the machine would mean certain death. As the machine enters the "disappearing frontier," so too enters the hobo into that space.

Although "riding the rods" is the most dangerous area on a train that a hobo could fit herself, any place on the train can be transformed into space by the hobo. While it would take pages to account for all of the places that have been transformed into spaces by hobos, a quick partial description should suffice:

> He rode on the iron plate, yet another toehold in the 'guts,' or lower berth, of a steam car. He rode the "death woods," the couplings themselves—the whipple trees or swingletrees—and the bumpers. He burrowed in the coal of the engineer tender. He rode among the sheep and cattle of the livestock cars. He rode in open gondolas piled with granite. He rode on the top deck, the boardwalk along the center of boxcars, and, if that was loaded in harvest time, he rode on the garb irons and the ladder on the side. He rode 'possum belly on the tool or supply box under a car. He rode the toe path, the narrow looking platform bolted on the walls of some rattlers. He rode the footrail at the rear end of the tankers. He even rode, if desperate to be on his way, under the headlight on the pilot or cowcatcher, the grilled scoop that projected afore the front wheels to clear obstructions from the line. (160)

[19] See Appendix Two.

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The train whistle blows as smoke emits from the Iron Horse and the wheels begin to turn. The hobo, jumping from his hiding spot, grabs hold of the handlebars and swings herself into whatever space that she can create in order to get himself to another destination. It is through this action that she locates her source of subcultural freedom and power within the dominant culture's regimented order. Although de Certeau's major thesis in *The Practice of Everyday Life* is that average, everyday people offer resistance within the constricting environments of society, the hobo, by intermingling with the train itself, goes one step further: by creating a space outside the gaze of authority and coupling herself with the machine that is creating space at the moment of contact in-between places, the hobo is existing in a realm that the everyday passenger can never be a part of in the ordered environment of the railroad car.

The hobo's power, therefore, exists when the train is in motion and breaking through the frontiers, allowing her to be intimately connected to a force of such magnitude and strength. Indeed, there is a distinct power to a moving train unlike anything else I have ever experienced.[20] When I went to the National Hobo convention in Britt, Iowa, I stayed in the jungle that was located a few hundred yards from the railroad tracks. Sometime early in the morning, I woke to the sound of the train roaring past my tent. In my confusion, I woke up startled and, because the sound was so loud and powerful, I was convinced that the train was soon to bear down upon me. Fumbling out of my tent, I crawled out on my hands and knees and looked up at this machine roaring past. It was, to use an often misused phrase, *awesome*. Its strength, its muscle,

[20] A jungle is simply defined as "an encampment where hobos stayed for brief periods before moving on. (Moon 196). Jungles are usually found near train tracks and a water source and far enough from a town to be unobtrusive but close enough so that a hobo could easily walk into town looking for work or asking for a handout.

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its loudness, its beauty was magnificent. Gaining my senses, I looked around and saw a few hobos staring at the machine as well. Some waved, some whooped, some just stared but all, it seemed to me, were in awe of the train.

It is when the hobo is physically and intimately connected to the train by her illegal riding that she has the most freedom and—even though death or maiming is just a slip away—control. The train is thousands of pounds strong and traveling at fast speeds; the hobo, if seen as all, is a blur. Unlike passenger number 42 on the New York City to Chicago "red-eye" express, the hobo, unseen and therefore outside of history, has control because she is invisible and part of the "noise" of the machine. It is only when the whistle sounds and the engine dies in the terminal does the power of the hobo and the train disappear; "[i]n the mobile world of the train station, the immobile machine suddenly seems monumental and almost incongruous in its mute, idol-like inertia, a sort of god-undone" (de Certeau 114). Back in a place that is regimented, ordered and under surveillance, the hobo has to worry about being seen and, more importantly, the consequences of being caught without a ticket in the train yard. With the metal god no longer spitting smoke and sparks, the hobo must untangle herself from the machine and slink along the tracks until she can find a safe haven in the hidden jungles on the outskirts of town.

This slinking and hiding of the hobo as well as the unique power that she has can be seen in a passage from Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), a fictionalized, historical work about the North Carolina race riot of 1898. One of the main characters, Dr. William Miller, after being thrown out of the "Whites Only" railroad car

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and forced into the colored section, looks out the window and spots Josh Green, a large African American man who has snuck aboard and hidden himself on the train.

> As the train came to a standstill, a huge negro, covered thickly with dust, crawled off one of the rear trucks unobserved, and ran round the rear end of the car to a watering-trough by a neighboring well . . .[h]e threw himself down by the trough, drank long and deep, and plunging his head into the water, shook himself like a wet dog, and crept back furtively to his dangerous perch. (59)

Dr. Miller, an educated man who has received favorable press and prestige in the North and in Europe for his surgical operations, is returning to Wilmington, North Carolina, to open a hospital when he meets his former mentor, the renowned Dr. Burns. A few hours into the trip, however, the conductor informs both parties that they will have to separate and that Miller will have to move into the "colored" car—for in the ordered environment of the railroad system, only some members of certain races can sit in particular cars. When the two object, the conductor warns, "I could simply switch this car off the next siding, transfer the white passengers to another, and leave you and your friend in possession until you were arrested and fined or imprisoned" (55). The law of surveillance and of order cannot be bucked and Miller submits to the rules and regulations of the railroad company (which are the rules and regulations of the larger State of Virginia) and he thus moves to the car that is designated for him.[21]

This scene perfectly represents both the power and the limitations of the hobo. Josh Green, an uneducated man of quick temper and fearless action who had been

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[21] The practice of racial segregation on Southern lines varied greatly—there was an economic cost on the part of the companies for having to connect extra cars for African American passengers—but as James Ely writes in *Railroads and American Law*, "[i]n the late 19th century, southern states began to impose formal racial segregation on many aspects of public life" including railroad cars (139). See pages 138-143 for further details.

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employed as a dock-worker for Miller's father, is not under the same laws as Dr. Miller. Stealing a ride and avoiding the gaze of the agents of the law, his body is not regulated in the same way as Miller's body. Miller, in fact, is forced to surrender to the white conductor his own personal dignity. And while Miller—who spots Josh from his seat in the train—passes judgment on the dirty hobo and concludes, "Blessed are the meek . . . for they shall inherit the earth" (62), Josh is, in fact, being more pro-active and resistant to the oppressive powers than the doctor who passively follows the rules that governs him. While Miller calls Josh meek, it is this dusty, parched hobo who in a race-sensitive place of the railroad car is able to remain unobserved and uncounted while the train is in motion. Josh, therefore, creates a space that allows him to ride "in-between" the law and, therefore, outside of history. It is a dangerous space, one that causes him to exclaim, "I kind er 'lowed I was gone a dozen times, ez it wuz" (62), but it allows him to fulfill his goals of getting to where he wants to go. Due to his willingness to travel in-between and therefore place himself outside of the law, Josh is able to travel by creating his particular space on the train.

This is the power of the subculture. John Fiske, a popular cultural critic, states that "[t]here is a power in resisting power, there is a power in maintaining one's social identity in opposition to that proposed by the dominant ideology, there is a power in asserting one's own subcultural values against the dominant ones." It is the power of a subordinated class of people, who, because of their (lack of) social position, can be, for a time at least, outside of the reaches of the law. The passenger can receive pleasure from the lack of effort that it takes to be a controlled subject in the railroad car because "pleasure results from the production of meanings of the world and the self that are felt to

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serve the interests of the reader rather than those of the dominant" (19). The hobo, on the other hand, once she defines herself as a hobo and her (contrary) relationship to the powers that his very existence is in opposition to, can receive pleasure from the freedom that exists when poaching off the dominant, mainstream cultures. It is a fleeting power that exists mainly when the train is in motion and she is in the act of stealing from the normative cultures, when she is uncounted and outside of history, when flesh and steel become one, and places turn to spaces. Only then does the subversive power of the hobo manifest itself. It is a power that exerts itself in moments—"what it wins it cannot keep"— and this power continually succumbs to the hegemonic forces (de Certeau 37). Regardless, though, it is a power that shows the cracks—spaces—that can be created by a subordinated sub-culture.

The Hobo's Position in the Homeless Hierarchy

To understand the hobo, therefore, a careful analysis of the shifting and unstable power dynamics of this subculture is needed. Much of the subversive power of the hobo, rests squarely on her ability to remain invisible. Hobos are one set of members of the homeless population and to analyze the specific subcultural power of the hobo, we will need to first take a step back and analyze the larger homeless body. Homeless bodies are illegal bodies and when they are seen they are subjected to censure. In the skid rows of cities where the "home-guard" can be found, the public's gaze can rest squarely on the

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bodies of these homeless men and women. Talmadge Wright, in his book *Out of Place*, explores the dangers and the consequences when the homeless are recognized and seen by the public. Their physical bodies are scrutinized by the gaze of the authorities:

> The policing of poor bodies by the cop on the beat, the social worker, the advocate, or the academic policy maker is informed by theoretical and ideological assumptions that presuppose normative notions of poverty, family, work, property and power of maintaining the status quo. (1-2)

In the contested landscapes that exist in the urban areas throughout the country, homeless bodies, which exert an "out of placeness," are subject to the controlling gaze of the agents of order that look and qualify them in relations to set norms. With the law on their side, they are also able to exert a force upon them. The gaze, as critics such as Laura Mulvey, Mary Anne Doane and Jane Gaines have shown in their feminist readings of film, is a way to see and to control the boundaries and actions of the subject that is being scrutinized; it is a way to trap a subject and consume its image in a non-threatening manner.[22] But while an erotic pleasure may result from gazing and consuming images on the big screen, the visibility of homeless men and women may cause feelings of restlessness in the voyeur. Whether there are feelings of anger, pity, hatred or sympathy, homeless bodies, when they are observed, are subject to being consumed and acted upon. In urban settings where homeless bodies are seen sitting on street benches, sleeping in cardboard tents or pushing shopping carts down streets, they become objects of study and, both legally and illegally, the subjects of a physical response.

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[22] See, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," "Film and Masquerade," and "White Privilege and Looking Relations;" respectively in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, edited by Patricicia Erens.

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Homeless women and men do not have any claim to private places; they exist always in the public sphere. But their very physical presence, however, anticipates their transformative power. While a park bench may be designed by city planners as a place to sit, talk and enjoy the parameters of pseudo-nature in its controlled environment, a homeless woman may transform that bench into a space to sleep. With no bed or place to rest in the private sphere, she makes the public place a private space that is contrary to public norms and is deemed illegal by the normative cultures. The homeless, because they do not have the private sphere, must make the public one into their own space. As Jack London writes about the homeless and their ubiquity in the public sphere in his essay "The Road," "[w]e have met him [the homeless wanderer] in the park, always occupying the best benches; on the overland and summer excursions; at the springs and at the seaside: In short we have met him everywhere, even desecrating the sanctity of our back stoop, where he ate the crumbs off our table" (Etulain 70). And, as their numbers grow, the homeless can seemingly be everywhere appropriating objects and infusing new meanings into them that were not intended. Strategies, therefore, must be conceived by those in power to deal with the "problem."

As Dick Hebdidge writes in *Subculture,* "the way that commodities are used in subculture mark the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations" (103). By using the park bench in a way that is not intended (and in this case, illegal), the woman is stating her position in a homeless subculture.[23] Whether consciously or not, she is using

[23] While many people use park benches as places to sleep, the homeless body, who may also have other signifying practices that can be read by the general public as "homeless," is subject to censure because there is no private sphere to hide from "the cop on the beat, the social worker, the advocate, or the academic policy." Unable, when asked to move from the bench to go to her own private sphere, the

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what Umberto Eco describes as a type of "semiotic guerilla warfare," showing her status as a "bricoleur" who has appropriated the signifier—bench : sit—and transformed it fit her own needs—bench : sleep (as quoted in Hebdidge 105). There is, therefore, a power for the homeless in using places for their own particular pleasure despite it being forbidden by the law. By sleeping on the park bench for extremely practical purposes, the woman is taking political action through her visibility: by being seen, her body is now the focal point for the lawmaker's gaze in the on-going discussion about "what should be done with the homeless." This power to shock and disturb (or anger) is a real political power. It is a restive politics to the ordered and regulated places by the use of her body. But as with the youths on the train in Portugal, therefore, her power is fleeting. Her actions may be done for completely practical purposes in the realm of the everyday but it is the illegal act that forces actions by those in power to reclaim the bench. Since she is able to be seen lying on the park bench, the State has more power and from this position can act upon the bodies of the homeless.[24] Since these subcultural acts of transformation are performed in the public sphere, they subject the homeless man and woman to censure because homeless bodies are squarely in the gaze of the normative cultures who are able to pass judgment upon them.

In Patrick Suskin's *The Pigeon* (1988), Jonathan Noel, a bank teller who has trouble dealing with his unimaginative life, envies for a time the life of a homeless man whom he sees drinking and relaxing on the same block for years. What intrigues Jonathan

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homeless woman is therefore exposed and constantly under the gaze of hegemonic forces that are able to act upon her body.

[24] It is, of course, not only the State that acts on the body of the homeless. Teenagers with gasoline and matches in their hands, for example, also have more power and because of the visibility of the woman, also have a target.

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the most is that the man "always exuded an infuriating self-assurance and self-satisfaction, an exasperating, publicly displayed aura of freedom" (60). But Jonathan lost his envy when, one day, heading to the post office he:

> stopped automatically to look at the clochard not because he missed him as a person but because the focal part of this still life of bottle, bag and box was absent. He spotted him on the far side of the street, squatting between two parked cars, and watched the man relieve himself: He was crouching beside the curb with his trousers pulled down to his knees, his rear turned toward Jonathan, totally exposed. People were passing by, anyone could see it: a pasty white rear end bridled with blue smudges and reddish scabby spots . . . And from this scruffy rear end a jet of brown, soupy liquid, of monstrous force and quantity, spurted onto the pavement to form a puddle, a pond, that sloshed about his shoes, and the splash was flung high and low over his soiled socks, thighs, trousers, shirt, everything. (60-61)

Every day, when Jonathan gazes at the homeless man as he walks past him, he sees what he wants to see; he controls the clochard's identity to be one of freedom and non-suffering: something that Jonathan, as an extremely uptight member of the petite bourgeoisie, desires.[25] But Jonathan, who is wondering if his life has any meaning, decides from the moment when he stares at the homeless man between two parked cars, that his life, in fact, does have meaning because "it safe-guarded him from bearing his rear end in public and shitting in the street" (63). It is important to note that this passage is about gazing: Jonathan "looks" for the clochard, "spots" him and sees him "totally exposed," where "anyone can see" his private act. While Jonathan has a distaste of defecation (noted throughout the book), he is most upset about the fact that people could see a person performing a private act in a public place. The act "demanded, for it to be at all bearable, the radical absence of other people . . . . And the man who did not have this

[25] The word clochard is translated to "tramp" from French.

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. . . . was the most miserable and pitiable of men, and freedom just silly talk" (63-64).

Freedom, while a romantic dream, is also a dream with set borders that narrowly confines the scope of its definition and is intimately connected to the norms set in the hegemonic culture. By gazing at this homeless man and seeing this personal act in a public place, Jonathan "had come to the realization that the essence of human freedom consisted in the possession of a shared toilet and that this essential freedom was at his disposal, he was immediately seized with a profound satisfaction" (65). Jonathan believes that his life—which consists of standing for decades on the front steps of the bank and opening the door every morning for the president who doesn't even know his name—has more freedom than the clochard's precisely because he does not have to live his life under the constant gaze of the public.

The unease felt by Jonathan is also seen by Paul Theroux, the prolific travel writer.[26] While traveling throughout India, he enters a railroad station and is surprised and disturbed by "the village" that is present inside. Although thousands of passengers are entering and leaving the train station daily, a community of homeless men, women and children are living amongst the commuters; they are stationary objects in the chaotic movements of the terminal. This disturbs Theroux:

> I didn't feel as if I had any right to watch people bathing under a low faucet—naked among the incoming tide of office workers; men sleeping late on their charpoys or tucking up their turbans . . .Hard work, poor pleasures, and the scrimmage of appetite. This village has no walls. (26)

[26] Some of his books which deal with his travels on the railroad includes, *The Old Patagonian Express* (1979), *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1985), and *Riding the Iron Monster* (1988).

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Again, it is the visibility of private moments in public places that so disturbs a member of a privileged culture. Theroux, who as a travel writer is constantly searching to discover the inner secrets of all those whom he meets, is "shocked" by the visibility and the "lack of walls" that should have been put up by the homeless (or placed there by others) to shield themselves from the public gaze. Ironically, a man, who spends his energy making people reveal secrets of their personal lives, is so disturbed by the nakedness of the homeless bodies that "the shock of this exposure made [him] hurry away" (25).

When Theroux is connected intimately through his gaze to the homeless bodies, he is so uneasy that he must flee the train station. But although he writes that he turns away from these homeless men, women and children because he does not feel as if he "had the right" to look at these private moments, he is not being entirely truthful. At other times in his journey, he takes much pleasure in being the voyeur. While traveling by train through Yugoslavia, he looks out at the world through the framing of the windowpane and feels very comfortable staring at some distinctly private moments:

> The train passes on—that's the beauty of a train, this heedless movement—but it passes on to more of the same . . . . children were calling to their friends, a man was dropping his bike and running back for a look, and farther along a man pissing against a fence was straining to see the horse. The scene was composed like a Flemish painting in which the pissing man was a vivid detail. The train, the window frame holding the scene for moments, made it a picture. The man at the fence flicks the last droplets from his penis and, tucking it in baggy pants, begins to sprint; the picture is complete. (16)

Much of this chapter that is entitled "Looking out the Window at Yugoslavia" is a list of what he sees while laying down inside the train and looking out his window, and he

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dutifully records all of these stolen moments for the reader. A man urinating is a "vivid detail" but unlike Jonathan, Theroux is not stationary and has some distance from the act. He can therefore enjoy the scene as he romanticizes the lives of the people he has gazed upon outside his window but will never know. While in the railroad station in India, he shares the place with the homeless bodies and is shocked that they were performing acts in the public sphere. But while traveling as a passenger in a train, he is separated from the actions through a glass window and he feels comfortable, framing and recording what he sees, since he is no longer an intimate part of the action. Even the title of this chapter shows the distance that Theroux desires—he is looking *at* Yugoslavia as he cuts across the country in a train; he is still not a part of the country but an outsider gazing at and recording the scenery that passes. Private acts in public spaces are allowed and can even be entertainment for the voyeur—but only as long as there is some distance and safety to make the consuming palatable and with relatively little anxiety.

Private acts, however, when there is no distance between the homeless body and the observer, may be seen as a threat. In India, for example, there are signs in the train stations that say, "TICKETLESS TRAVEL IS A SOCIAL EVIL" and in many train and bus stations across the United States, no one is allowed in the depot who does not have a ticket (Theroux 25).[27] "By their very presence homeless persons communicate their out-of-place status. This control of urban spaces, a highly political creation is a means by which the privileged render the very poor invisible. For local governments, people without an established home are to be installed in shelters, in their place out of sight"

[27] This scrutiny of bodies within public places like bus stations and train depots has increased exponentially since the attacks on US soil in September 11, 2001. As will be discussed below, these attacks have made travel for hobos, who may be spotted by agents as possible terrorist, more difficult in the years after these attacks.

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(Wright 40). The punishment, therefore, for living continuously in public places is to be made invisible in state sanctioned places—city shelters or jails. In a more individual way, Jonathan makes the clochard invisible by refusing to look at him and taking a different path to work. Homeless bodies are disturbing for the privileged to see and their active creation of spaces is therefore made illegal. Their bodies are forced outside the public's gaze (although securely fixed by the State's gaze) and are sent to places; places that are functional and ordered where there are specific, organized areas for all inmates/residents to sleep, to eat, and to defecate. Or as Foucault states succinctly, "[i]n the name of health and cleanliness, all sorts of spatial arraignments are subjected to control" (149). Bodies, therefore, when they are deemed too visible, are made invisible and forced to disappear into places of order and correction where they are relieved of their individual ability to create personalized spaces.

The formation of spaces is a resistance to such places, a redefining of borders; it is an act that shows the malleability of what seems to be fixed entities and therefore should be viewed as a resistance political action. While members of the privileged cultures may gaze on the homeless bodies and see only passive subjects, their actions are, in fact, creative actions that exert their own subcultural identity:

> When the very poor redefine urban space in a manner that meets their needs, their actions are often explained by authorities as "survival" mechanisms or as creative "deviant" adaptations, not as resistance or opposition to a bleak situation. . . The use of the term survival and adaptation to describe homeless behaviors fits well with the dominant social imaginary where the urban poor are conceived as passive agents, merely reacting to their immediate situation; the reality is that homeless actions can include both survival and opposition, adaptation and resistance. (Wright 6)

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By understanding the homeless as passive subjects trying only to survive—or gazing upon them and interpreting their bodies through romantic, self-serving notions of freedom—these privileged cultures are able to envision and imagine the homeless in neutral, non-active, non-resisting bodies.

The homeless in the United States have always been a visual testimony to the fact that not everyone in the capitalist system succeeds. And while we may have presidents who refuse to acknowledge that the United States is a class-based society, and the popular media portrays an ever growing middle class even while the population increasingly becomes more socio-economically polarized, the homeless, whose bodies are a physical testimony to those who are left behind in society, are therefore made invisible in the public domain.[28] One successful way to make a counter-culture invisible is to romanticize it so any subversive qualities are realigned with the hegemonic forces. Being a constant reminder to the inefficiencies of an institutional system, the privileged cultures must promote certain safe meanings that can be derived by these homeless bodies while denying others that may cause anxieties. Enter the hobo figure. Although homeless bodies lying in doorways in every city across the country may be distressing, the Norman Rockwell image of the hobo is culturally pleasing. This type of ideological manipulation can be seen with the way that the hobo has been transformed and made into a "safe" figure.

One specific way that the popular media has sanitized the hobo is to disconnect him from the complex and messy issue of homelessness in general. And many hobos—

[28] George Bush, in 1998 said, "[Class is] for European democracies or something else—it isn't for the United States of America. We are not to be divided by class," (George, "A case for Dukakis," *The Washington Post*, Nov 13, 1988).

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due to the negative connotations that are associated with homeless—are happy to agree. Steam Train Maury Graham, probably the most well-known living hobo, explains the difference between himself and the general homeless population by stating to a reporter that, "[t]he homeless are dependant people who need help. Hoboes had homes and left them for life on the road, to get close to nature and live off the land" (August 11, 1990 *The Times*). Texas Madman, a hobo who still travels full time as of 2002, states adamantly, "I want to make one thing clear. I am NOT homeless. I have a home-a big and beautiful one. In fact, you are sitting on it right now. Under your feet is my bed and over your head is my roof. Granted, the bed may have lumps in it and the roof leaks from time to time, but I wouldn't think of trading this home for any other" (Moon, as quoted on the back cover). While further discussion about the reasons that many older hobos are adamant about their image and how their lifestyle is portrayed is warranted, by their very nature hobos are part of this homeless class. It is imperative to explore the need by both the hobos and the public to separate this specific lifestyle from the more general category of homelessness.

One reading is that although the homeless are still reviled and mistreated in present day society, coerced out of sight under laws of the State, the hobo, who has seemingly mostly disappeared from the Iron Road, is treated with (a type of) respect.[29] As the numbers of hobos dwindled and the threat of the hobo lessened, especially after World War II when his presence on the railroad was no longer a common sight, his

[29] During the Guiliani administration, for example, there had been a huge debate over the forced placement of homeless individuals within New York City shelters. Although the rhetoric from the administration was that they were "saving lives," questions of civil liberties arose. Many homeless men and women felt that it was safer on the streets than in the shelters and they refused to go. Since they did not have any private place to go to, however, the law forced them to go to the shelters. See *The Saint of Fort Washington* (Hunter 1993) for an interesting portrayal of a forced placement in the city shelters.

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popularity grew and the hobo figure is now a quirky eccentric figure seen as either a comic, freedom-loving caricature or as a hard-living individualistic member of the working poor. He is, however, no longer dangerous. The hobo is seen by most as dead, and with his death, the safe revisionist memorializing can begin.

The death knell of the hobo, however, has been ringing for many years. Nels Anderson in his autobiography *The American Hobo* (1975) wrote that the hobo was "already vanishing about 1920" (preface). Many others, who place the hobo figure in the midst of the frontier myth, felt that the Hobo would disappear along with the frontier and in 1929 hobos were said to be bound for extinction, "like the buffalo herds before them" (Allsop 45). Jeff Davis, a self-proclaimed "Emperor of the Road" who was a popular hobo authority and leader of a loose hobo union, named both "Hobos of America, Inc." and "Knights of the Road, Air & Seven Seas," claimed that "real" hobos had disappeared before World War II (Graham 157). The Association of American Railroads placed the hobo's disappearance in the 1950s when railroad companies moved from using steam locomotives to mostly diesel locomotives; the hobo was an anachronistic figure in the modern age and technology was leaving him on the side of the tracks watching the trains speed by. The Mobile, Alabama, the Gulf, and Ohio railroads all reported that, "[m]odern railroading in the United States does not lend itself to the benefit of the old time transient who used to ride from one town to another or follow the harvest each year. This is the thing of the past" (Allsop 42-43).

Kenneth Allsop, author of *Hard Travellin'*, one of the first scholarly books written exclusively on the hobo figure, understands that the reason for the perceived death of the hobo is two-fold: the mass-production of the car with its consequential rise

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of the "rubber tramps," and the "slimming" of the hundreds of privately owned railroad companies to a few major conglomerates (43). Steam Train Maury Graham, who has spent most of the 70's to the present day trying to record and educate people on 'bos, stated simply about the number of Hobos still alive, "Few are left" and he does not think that the new train riders, for the most part, have what it takes to be "gentlemen of the road" (80). With each new decade, however, the hobo is once again proclaimed dead. In 1993, a book entitled of *The Last Great American Hobo* pronounced that Montana Blackie was the "last" of the dying breed. Ted Conover, a journalist who in the early 1980's spent time traveling the rails with various hobos around the United States, wrote in the Preface to the 2001 edition to *Rolling Nowhere* that in the twenty years since the recording of his book, "the world of hoboes with road names who cooked in jungles with "gunboats" (coffee cans) is a thing of the past" (xix).

Although the particular date of the death of the hobo seems misguided—especially since people such as Texas Madman are still hopping trains and avoiding bulls—the memorializing of the hobo has been a constant, almost as long as hobos have been catching trains on the sly. For example, in the 1940s, Ben Benson who had been traveling since 1898 and who wrote a book about a hobo jaunt on which he traveled from coast to coast with less than a dollar in his pockets, wrote in *The Hobo News* to all young men thinking about living their life on the road, "If this was the beginning of the century I was talking to you boys: I would advise you all to hit the road. For many men and boys had the right stuff—sometimes called the American Rugged Individualism—made good. But, I regret to say, "Them days are gone forever!" For Benson, who believed that traveling the rails for a few years made boys become well-rounded men (the equivalent of

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the bourgeoisie's notion of back-packing around Europe), this particular rite of passage, in his opinion, was lost forever in the United States. Much like the closing of the frontier, the "end" of the hobo was lamented by those who saw the Iron Road as a rite of passage and the hobo's death was a closing of an important era in the history of the United States. Even as thousands of men and women are still secretly hopping trains and riding across the country, the hobo, as a figure, has become embedded as a well known figure of Americana.

So how does a subculture remember these days that is "gone forever?" What ways does the normative society promote certain aspects of the subculture that was once deemed dangerous? And, most interestingly, how does the subculture AND the hegemonic culture *together* remember and promote the hobo? Simple. Find an open space and have a convention.

REMEMBERING THE HOBO: BRITT, IOWA

From August 5-11, 2002, a hundred or so men and women converged on a small town in Britt, Iowa, where they set up camp in a boxcar or on grass next to the railroad tracks and, sharing food and drinks, reacquainted themselves with friends and former traveling companions as well as the townspeople who (for the most part) welcomed them "home" every year. The hobos had once again arrived. As the first week of April signals baseball season for many Americans, the second week of August is a time for Britt residents to open their town to these men and women whose lifestyle is very much contrary to the accepted codes of behavior for this small, family-oriented, blue-collar

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town of 2,500. The 102nd Annual Hobo Convention both remembered and (re)created the hobo: history lessons were taught to the uninitiated in songs and stories, rules of jungle etiquette were passed out along with the beer, campfire philosophy was expounded, and townsfolk and hobos mingled on the streets of the town and around the jungle fire. During the sometimes surreal festivities, men and women with such descriptive names as Texas Madman, Road kill, Adman, Redbird Express, Buck-up Ken, Frog, Derail and Lady Nightingale were found riding on the hobo float waving and throwing candy to locals. They ordered the hobo breakfast (there was also a vegetarian version!) in the Hobo House Restaurant, and they answered the questions of inquiring tourists outside of the Hobo museum, discussing freely their views of life on the Iron Road (whether they actually ever stole a ride from a railroad company or not). In a country that shuns the homeless and, for the most part, refuses to see the thousands upon thousands who are living on U.S. streets daily, Britt residents donate land and resources to these homeless wanderers and make them the core celebrities for a three-day party that attracts thousands of people to the town every year. As Papa Smurf said of the 100th year anniversary of the convention in Britt in 2000, "The whole thing is a bit of a carnival."

The convention began as a type of joke in 1900. As the legend goes, three Chicago hobos hoping to celebrate the centennial with a convention were looking for a town that could accept and appreciate an annual gathering of Tourist Union No. 63—this was the name by which some Northern hobos called themselves as a joke.[30] They had

[30] Although I have been unable to find any information to concretely support this theory, it does seem to me that this Tourist Union No. 63 was formed as a tongue-in-cheek response to the fact that many hobos felt pressure from the International Workers of the World (IWW) to join its union. The IWW was the only union to actively try to recruit and help organize migrant workers. Although beneficial to some, other 'bos, who considered themselves a-political or deeply "American" and despised the anarchist agitators, did not

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published a newspaper called *Tourists Union Journal* and had a few small conventions in previous years (Graham 18). The mayor and businessmen of Britt, hoping for some outside revenue to boost the local economy and put their town on the map, were happy to bring the hobos to Iowa. Newspaper reporters from the Midwest—including *The Chicago Tribune*, *The St. Louis Times-Dispatch*, *The St. Paul's Pioneer Press*—as well as papers from as far away as the East Coast such as *The Boston Globe* all sent reporters to cover this unique event. When they arrived in Britt and toured the town's major attractions (such exciting places as the cemetery, the grain elevator, the local bar), watched the small town festivities (footraces, a barbeque) and saw the election of Admiral Dewey and Philip Red as president and vice president respectively, the reporters realized that they had been hoodwinked. They had traveled long distances in order to cover what was essentially a small-town fair. But while the local papers described the event as a "burlesque," the other reporters decided that they would report the festivities as an "event" and treated it with a respected sobriety (Smyth). The hobo convention that could have just been passed off as a mid-western joke became "real" news.

Sitting over their morning coffee, readers in the first year of the new centennial may not have been so surprised by the happenings in Britt. The hobo figure was a staple in the popular culture of the time and readers were acquainted to reading about this tramp

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look so favorably on the Wobblies. For example, Drummond Mansfield in "Memories of the Road" tells the story of one "bindlestiff" who was asked if "carried the red card." When he said that he didn't, he found himself violently thrown off the moving train. Other hobo texts also speak of the displeasure of some bos who resented having to pay for the card in order to ride the trains—something that seemed like the antithesis to being a hobo. Forming their own union (that had no dues, no meetings and no written agenda) can be seen as one way to voice this displeasure. See Chapter three for a detailed analysis of the hobo and the IWW.

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figure.[31] He was represented in one of two stereotypical ways: the comic buffoon and the menacing predator. Depending on the section of the newspaper, therefore, readers would be conditioned either to laugh at or fear this figure. For example, in the late 1800's, the tramp was a popular comic character in such magazines as *Puck* and *Life*. Immigrants coming from England and other places in Europe were already familiar with this figure, and when they settled in this country, they brought these characters with them. Tom Browne's "Weary Willie and Tired Tim" (who were a tramp version of Laurel and Hardy) as well as Fredrick Burr Opper's Irish tramp "Happy Hooligan" (whose caricature was a precursor to Chaplin's famous Tramp figure) were popular with American audiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[32] Tim Creswell, explaining the popularity of the tramp figure, understands it as a way for the popular masses to laugh at this character from a "position of social superiority . . . . a laughter aimed at correction and humiliation" (143). These characters were buffoons and the reader, it can be assumed, was not meant to identify with the characters but to laugh at them and, in the case of Wearie Willie especially, to understand that to be lazy in the New World would only lead to failure (and possible physical harm).

If the reader turned from the funnies to the "serious" news, however, a very different hobo figure would appear. This figure was dangerous and needed to be dealt

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[31] While hobos defined themselves in very strict terms and separated themselves from other classes of the homeless, common understanding interchangeably used the words "tramp" and "hobo" to mean the same thing.

[32] Tim Cresswell in *The Tramp in America* (2001) states that, "The misadventures of Happy Hooligan are clear precursors for Chaplin's tramp, centered, as they are, on the tramp's two defining characteristics, bodily mobility and work" (141). Creswell rightly points out though, that Chaplin's tramp is much more complex than the figure of Happy Hooligan; while readers laughed at Hooligan's misadventures from a position of moral and social authority, Chaplin's tramp highlighted the societal problems that the readers could identify and relate to their own lives.

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with immediately. The front page of *The New York Times* emphatically asked on August 8, 1875, "What shall we do with Tramps?" The hobo was both a physical and symbolic threat to many in the privileged cultures. "He is becoming too frequent, too troublesome and even too dangerous to be ignored," the article states, and there was a feeling in this article and in the myriad of editorials and commentaries written about this subject during the late nineteenth century that the tramp (and the hobo as a subset of this category) was becoming too common a sight. Even more frightening to the normative cultures, there were no obvious answers:

> There is perhaps no problem in social sciences that is just now more pressing, and none, perhaps, more perplexing than what to do with the great and increasing *army* of mendicants who wander from city to town and from town to city, getting shelter, food and raiment by public or private charity and their own thieving fingers, and who from their mode of life, have gained the name of 'tramps.' (italics mine, *The New York Times* August 8, 1875)

The tramps, who are homeless bodies moving across boundaries from "city to town and from town to city," are described as an "army" of homeless dependent on the services of law-abiding citizens—and, as the term "army" implies, a force that is dangerously organized and needs to be stopped.[33] Newspapers such as the metropolitan *New York Times* and more local, rural papers place these homeless bodies in terms of opposition; they constitute a group to be feared, and, as the article states, tramps must be "snubbed and put down and out . . . [thereby] thinning out their ranks."[34]

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[33] See page 5 of this chapter and my discussion of the collapsing borders between city and town and the anxiety that this produces.

[34] This fear of the organizing ability of the dispossessed is also seen in commentaries dealing with Coxey's Industrial Army—an extremely well organized army of workers who marched to Washington in 1894. See chapter three for further details of the poor worker's March on Washington.

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there were many hobos crisscrossing the United States. Hobos would get off the trains, walk across the tracks and knock on the backdoors of houses; housewives would open the door and see dirty, starving, tired men asking them for a handout. The home, which was supposed to be the place of moral order and stable, social decency, was being invaded by the homeless.

> By their homelessness, tramps threatened one of the central images of American ideology and national mythology . . . The mother and the home combined to ensure the moral education of the young. It was the time of *Ladies Home Journal* and the rise of 'domestic science.' The masculine tramp, rootless and wandering, was thus a particularly menacing image. What was threatened was, among other things, the bodies of women and children. (Creswell 94-95)[35]

Homeless, illegal bodies who had no private sphere were coming into intimate contact with "innocent" and "pure" bodies of women and children and this dangerous crossing of private borders needed to be stopped. Newspapers and politicians cried for protection of the "weaker" sex and as Tim Creswell shows in examples of drawings from *Harper's* and *Ladies Home Journal*, the need to reinforce these borders is clearly seen as dark, burly and menacing tramps hover in the doorways of homes, threatening either young, attractive or older, motherly women (92-97).

And although it may be true that the male leaders of the towns and churches were afraid of swarthy tramps speaking to the women of the town, many might also have been worried about the friendly responses of the women to the tramps. Women were, in fact, giving handouts to hobos who knocked on their back doors. According to Steam Train

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[35] Tim Creswell in his book *The Tramp in America*, does not make the distinction between Tramp and Hobo but rather lumps them all into one category. It is my decision in this dissertation—while acknowledging the similarities and the public's response to homelessness in general—to separate these categories and define the hobo in the terms that many hobos define themselves.

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Maury Graham, there was a relationship between the hobo and the housewife, and while it may not have been always overtly friendly, it was definitely not menacing. Whether it was cooking for the hobo, "[t]here was an unwritten understanding between the hobo and the housewife that one of the pies was for him: he didn't have to ask or even indicate to her that he was taking it" or the taking of clothes of backyard clotheslines, "[t]he housewives were not necessarily pleased with this unauthorized trade, but it was mutually understood that no theft had taken place" (94-95), Steam Train writes throughout his memoir that there was in fact a cordial relationship between these two groups. It was the fear that these relationships could become more intimate that might be behind the adamant calls for a "thinning of the ranks." For example, in James Cain's depression-era melodrama, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Frank Chambers (who is constantly described as "dark skinned" and "menacing"), a drifter who becomes muscular from "socking railroad detectives" (14) has an intense and violent affair with Cora Papadakis (her maiden name was "Smith," which is both bland and has a common, "everywoman" feel to it). Nick Papadakis, who is both cheap and trusting, invites Frank to live and work in his home and this welcoming of an intruder into the private sphere eventually kills all three people. The affair begins immediately but, as it turns out, it is not Frank who is in control of the situation but rather Cora, an ambitious woman, who refuses to leave for the open road with her lover because it will only lead to "sleep[ing] in boxcars" (36). Frank's only ambition is to be coupled on the road but he is convinced to murder her husband once he falls under the "spell" of what seems to be an innocent and faithful wife. In this seedy but ultimately cautionary tale, the danger to the male authority may not just be

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from the outside drifter trying to come in but the danger might in fact be from "the lady of the house" trying to get out.

Depending on the section of the newspaper or book, therefore, the hobo was either to be laughed at as a lazy buffoon who would never succeed in an ever-changing U.S. society where a strong puritan work ethic and a healthy attitude was a necessity, or as a predatory social deviant who must be controlled and made invisible to protect the innocence of women and children. But the very fact that hobos were knocking on the back doors of houses and making their presence felt allowed for increasing resentment towards the hobos. They were not good for the moral climate of the railroad towns and, as their numbers increased, they were becoming an economic drain as well.

So how then do we read this convention in 1900? As a practical joke played out by the blue-collar citizens and businessmen of a small town? A logical response by an aggressive homeless counter-culture to the oppressive socio-economic forces in the United States at the turn of the century? As a sub-cultural reply by the hobos to define their position as heads of the homeless hierarchy and to separate themselves from all other wandering homeless? This convention might be read as having elements of all three. And if there had never been another one, then it could have been forgotten as a small footnote in the *Notes of the Weird in U.S. History*. This seems, in fact, to have been the case for a time; there was not another convention in that year or even in the following two decades. In 1933, however, the townspeople of Britt, trying to find an event that would bring revenue to their hard-hit Depression town, decided to resurrect the Hobo National Convention. And almost every year since, they have held the most

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popular and well attended hobo convention in the United States and, for that matter the world.

For the past thirty plus years, one man has made it his mission to be a part of each of these conventions and to inform the general public about the history of the hobo—Steam Train Maury Graham.[36] While there have been men who have made it their cause to make the term Hobo known—Ben Reitman, Jeff Davis, William Howe, to name a few—it is Steam Train who has been the most positively interviewed and most favorably publicized hobo. Well into his eighties and in poor health, he was still a force in the jungle of the hobo convention. With a long white beard that made him look like a hard-luck Santa Claus and a beautifully carved walking staff, it was hard not to focus on him and rumors of his whereabouts run throughout the camp at any given moment. Driven around Britt's town streets and the jungle in a golf-cart that looked very much like a discount version of the "Pope Mobile," he would get out and slowly walk to each camp, shaking hands and telling stories to everyone he met. People whom I talked to in the jungle told me that anyone who was researching hobos needed to talk to Steam-Train; even hard-living men who made up the Sinner Camp would talk about meeting Steam Train in pseudo-religious rhetoric.[37] And when I met him, I found him to be a very warm and strong man who seemed to be comfortable as the focal point of conversation. Although I only met him for a few minutes, he was able to put me at ease in a way that

[36] While Steam Train has been sick for a few of these conventions, he is definitely a part of every one; his books are for sale in the Hobo museum, his likeness (drawn by admiring fans as well as professional glossy photos), is all over Britt and his name is constantly, and almost religiously, mentioned in the jungle camps.

[37] In the jungle in Britt, there were three camps: The Saints (who did not drink and looked down on those who did), The Inbetweens (who drank moderately but did not do drugs) and The Sinners (made mostly of The Tramp family who were, mostly, although not all, hard drinkers and drug users).

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made me feel as if I had known him a long time. And although he was obviously on his way to another location, he exerted an aura that was relaxed, as if he was going to spend all day talking only to me.

Even though Steam Train has written two books in order to "set the record straight" on the history of Hobos—*Tales of the Iron Road: My Life as King of the Hobos* and *A History of the Hoboes, Tramps, and Other Vagabonds*—they are more a collection of stories than a traditional history.[38] Dates do not work out exactly and while the author constantly contradicts himself throughout his tales, none of it seems to matter to the reader. The distinction between the adventure story and a factual history has always been a thin one and *Tales of the Iron Road* plays with these distinctions. Steam Train, however, does not acknowledge this and adamantly tells the reader than he is writing the "facts" about hobos because he has read too many things that were not true. He writes at one point in his autobiography: "I must get back to other hobo facts for edification. I may wander from place to place in this book and may repeat a few facts, to impress it in your mind. I just said "facts." I've read many hobo books and found the facts missing and some badly bent. I record facts here, to the best of my knowledge of the subject" (*History* 17). Mary Paniccia Carden, in her article "The Hobo as National Hero," explains that Graham is attempting through this book "to write himself into prevalent paradigms of American identity while simultaneously stressing his difference from 'mainstream' culture" (94). He must make the reader believe him and his stories of traveling but at the same time, he cannot alienate the reader; he must make the reader

[38] The first is a memoir of his life on the road, the second is mostly a collection of stories about other hobos when he has met. Notice that even the spelling of the word Hobos changes from one book to the other emphasizing the "folksy" or "talky" quality of his books.

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want to read about his adventures but he also must allow the reader to identify with him. As Carden explains succinctly, "Vagabond narratives tend to display an impulse to justify vagabondage as both a culturally subversive and a culturally valid identity," and this tight-rope walk along the boundaries of culture/counterculture is apparent throughout Steam Train's memoir (94). For while the hobo created a space for himself while hopping freight trains on the sly, Steam Train and others like him are now more interested in finding a *place* for the hobo in the recorded history of the United States.

This move to place the hobo figure within the accepted paradigms of U.S. cultural history is apparent when analyzing the way that the author recounts some of these "facts" in *Tales of The Iron Road.* As a young man of 14, Maury Graham hops his first freight train leaving behind a dysfunctional family (his father is remarried, his "saintly" mother an invalid). Using the advice of older 'bos who dub him "Idaho," he travels during his summer vacations, receiving an education and a taste for the road—a wanderlust that he can never get rid of, he writes, in all of his years.[39] As the pioneer leaves the world of the civilized and enters the world of the savage, Graham heads for the Iron Road and finds that he fit very well among the natives. For the next few years he splits his time between hoboing and going to high school (where he became a recognized and prized amateur wrestler), until 1936 when he begins his first complete year as a full time hobo. And like a man who discovers God, Graham finds the path to "true happiness and total freedom" (98). As he writes about his rite of passage from a child into a man:

[39] For many sociologists and reformers, "wanderlust" was considered a disease that needed to be treated scientifically. Robert Park, who was the founder of the influential Chicago School, described wanderlust in quasi-scientific terms stating that, "Wanderlust, which is the most elementary expression of the romantic temperament and the romantic interest in life, has assumed for [the hobo], as for so many others, the character of vice. He has gained his freedom, but he has lost his direction" (as quoted in Creswell 69).

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> I was accepted by the 'bos as a *man* of the road, a kid no longer. I firmly considered myself one of them, a member of the Brotherhood of the 'bo, no longer tied to a home base, but belonging to a neighborhood that stretched as far as the iron road I traveled, and having a family whose members could be found in every hobo jungle that dotted the trackside everywhere in the country. (italics his *TOTIR* 98)

But like many an apostate who is convinced that he has found the path of enlightenment and will never stray, Graham succumbs to temptations that the road cannot supply him—a wife.[40] In 1938, Graham marries Wanda Matty and he realizes that, "[i]n taking unto myself a wife I had forsaken my life as a hobo" (120). He decides to settle down and takes a job in construction. Except for a brief tour of duty in the military, where he uses skills learned from his hobo lifestyle during World War II, Graham remains in his home in Toledo with his wife and children. He abandons his brotherhood and settles into a middle-class lifestyle for the next twenty five or so years.

The urge to ride the trains never leaves him, however, and by 1968, with his daughters out of the house, his wife earning a comfortable salary as a physiotherapist and "[t]he necessity of maintaining a traditional husband/father role . . . no longer relevant" (127), Graham once again decides to hit the Iron Road. He first tries as a paying customer, joining railroad restoration groups and historical societies who go on steam engine passenger trains for pleasure runs. Not surprisingly though, due to the fact that he decides to dress like a hobo—"an old and baggy dark suit that frequently had a hole or

[40] The idea of "getting a wife" is doom for the hobo. Most hobo autobiographies have this theme: to get involved with a woman requires settling down and losing freedom. Dean Stiff (pseudonym for Nels Anderson in his book, *The Milk and Honey Route*, is adamant on this subject. For while the hobo "does have his season of maximum vigor and vitality" (67), "to be matrimonially attached means to become domestically attached, to be haltered. A domesticated hobo is a doomed hobo. He can no more endure captivity than his simian ancestor, the gorilla" (149). As in most male-centered subcultures, the misogyny runs deep.

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two, a battered floppy hat and walking boots that had no laces but were held on my feet by large rubber bands"—he is refused admission to these trains (128). Graham is not to be deterred, however, and steals a ride on one of these trains—he somehow outwits thirty security guards and, after catching a passing handle going thirty miles an hour and standing on the small ledge between the cars, he travels from Elizabeth to Plainfield, New Jersey (Steam Train, to say the least, is prone to exaggeration). This trip, combined with the fact that he can no longer work as a cement mason due to a bad hip, settles in his mind that he needs to head back for the road that never stopped calling his name. Without telling his wife that he is going, he decides to "answer that call" and he will stay on the road until he heads back to Toledo to live with Wanda in the fall of 1980 (133).

If Steam Train just traveled the Iron Road anonymously, he could easily have been an inconsequential figure in hobo lore—an eccentric 'bo who could cook a mean Mulligan Stew in various jungles around the United States. But what has differentiated him from most other hobos is that he loves the spotlight. Unlike most hobos who survive by attempting to stay outside the gaze of the normative cultures—except when they need a handout or a job—Steam Train sought out publicity, walking through towns proclaiming through his dress and mannerisms that he was a hobo and, yes, he will be happy to tell anyone the history of the 'bo. And he is extremely successful at getting his face in the news; he is the perfect feel-good story to end a newscast or a great "Faces in the Crowd" piece in a newspaper. A likeable older man, Steam Train can spin a good yarn and talk about traveling with men like Slow-Motion Shorty and Fry-Pan Jack in the Depression Era and the Vietnam Era—a man who is eager to tell about a now safe, forgotten subculture and its positive link to American history. But what link does Steam

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Train tell and the media report? Why would the media—which shy away from stories about homelessness because it doesn't make good copy—report about a group of homeless wanderers?[41] What type of Hobo does Steam Train write about in his memoirs and speak about in his interviews? Why is Steam Train allowed to stay visible in the public sphere and is even applauded for actions that have caused other men to be jailed or tortured and killed by angry mobs? Does Steam Train, "whose desire to define himself both inside and outside dominant ideologies of normative identity," compromise the history of the Hobo (Carden 95)?

One way to begin to answer these questions is to analyze the way that Steam Train Maury received his name. The moniker of the hobo is not usually a self-appointed title. Rather, it is bestowed by older hobos who have acknowledged and welcomed the new person into the Brotherhood. Jacqueline K. Schmidt, who wrote a book entitled *Done and Been: Steel Rail Chronicles of American Hobos*, discusses the way that she received her moniker. Schmidt, a woman who, after meeting hobos at Britt for a research paper that she was writing, falls in love with the life. After a few Britt conventions where she makes close friends with some older 'bos and a few days after hopping a train late at night during one these conventions, she receives a congratulatory telegram at her home from "The Railriders of America" that stated:

[41] There are times when discussing the homeless is safe and palatable. Over the holidays, for example, there are always feel-good pieces on the news about celebrities who spend Thanksgiving feeding the homeless. Shots of tablecloths and turkey dinners are displayed and quick shots of homeless men and women—who are always smiling—are shown. Commentary is hardly ever made by the homeless—unless it's to say how happy they are—rather, it is the spokesperson or celebrity who uses terms such as "giving back" and other clichés when describing their presence.

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> WE RECEIVED CONFIRMATION. YOUR FIRST FREIGHT. CONGRATULATIONS. BE YE KNOWN, HENCEFORTH, AS GYPSY MOON. (33)[42]

As Gypsy Moon states, "[w]hen a young man was no longer considered a greenhorn by the older 'bos, the elders would "knight" him with a road name," and in her case, she feels that "being dubbed with a road name is an honor" (29). The naming ceremony, as seen in many naming ceremonies—from the Catholic baptism to certain Native American rituals—is an important rite of passage that shows an inclusion into a group, a welcoming by the established members to a new member. To know a person's name implies a connection with that person and to bestow a name implies that you have a stronger, deeper connection. To name someone means that a person has a certain power—an "ownership" to a certain extent—over another.

Maury Graham is also dubbed with a moniker—Idaho—by the older hobos and it is the name that he uses throughout his travels in the thirties and in the first few years when he is traveling in the late sixties. But when his name begins to appear in newspapers, he changes his name to Steam Train:

> I had always called myself Idaho, the nickname my school friends and the old hobos had called me. But when I started traveling around looking for passenger runs of the restored steam locomotives, the press began anticipating that I would show up to ride the old trains. "That steam train guy will probably be here," they would say. Finally, Hank Harvey of the *Toledo Blade* who had become acquainted with me and my travels, started referring to me in his columns as "Steam Train Maury." The name stuck; I liked it and adopted it as my own. (139)

[42] Her name is inspired by a tale told by Man-Called-John who promised that when a person sees a shooting star cross the path of the moon that the "Gypsy Moon" would cast a spell on the person giving her an "insatiable appetite to wander" (30).

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Graham, therefore, gives up the moniker that was bestowed upon him by older hobos and instead accepted the name given to him by a newspaper reporter. Although this adoption might be read in various ways, it is important to note, at the very least, that Graham is conscious of the way that he is being received by the general public when he starts riding the trains again (the very fact that he would "dress up" and wear the costume of the hobo even though it wasn't his normal attire). Once he begins generating public attention, he tries to place himself in the best position to continue to receive this attention by rejecting his more common moniker and adopting one that has more pizzazz. A name, interestingly enough, that is essentially nostalgic and backward looking. In a homeless subculture where it is important to remain invisible, Steam Train is actually named by a member of the normative culture—the newspaperman from *The Toledo Blade*—and becomes a highly recognized individual who can be seen and identified by those outside of his subculture (readers of the newspaper, viewers of the nightly news). His visibility makes him famous and as he becomes more visible, his recognition and fame increases as well. And although he gains attention traveling the country, his primary platform, and the one that brings him to national attention, is the conventions in Britt.

When Steam Train heads to his first convention in 1971, he is not impressed by what he sees. The King is sleeping in an abandoned jail that is in disrepair and most of the hobos are drinking heavily in the local bars. But what does impress Steam Train are the large crowds who "were genuinely interested in hobos, who wanted to learn more about them, wanted to be around them" (159). And he is determined to show these people "what the hobo life was *really* like" (160). For Graham it is possible to replicate an authentic hobo experience among (depending on the year) 5,000 to 20,000 tourists.

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He begins cleaning up the jungle and cooking for the hobos as well as the crowds and is well received. Consequently encouraged by all the positive response, he then begins setting his sights on the title of King of the Hobos. The next year, running on a platform to visit Veterans' hospitals across the country, he wins the coveted title. In his campaign speech, he is self-consciously bridging the gap between the hobo subculture and the normative cultures:

> If you elect me, you'll be sending me to hospitals with your prayers for those men who have so little left to look forward to. They will be getting visits from *you*. They will be receiving *your* best wishes and *your* prayers (italics his 163).

Seemingly no longer a member of a confrontational subculture, Steam Train ran on a platform in which he states that he will become an ambassador for the citizens of the country. Instead of hiding and in opposition to the normative cultures, Steam Train would actually become an (unpaid) extension of it.

Steam Train is as good as his word and in a chapter entitled, "The Reign of Steam Train," he tells of his travels during which he visits many veterans in hospitals where "TV cameras and the ever-present microphone" are also in evidence (he doesn't, however, tell how the media knew of his arrival) (169).[43] During this year, he also makes himself a regular event on newscasts, a guest of honor for the premier of the most famous of hobo movies, *Emperor of the North* (1973), and even spends a day in Congress helping to pass a bill to provide extra funds to reinstate some of the railroad police force and increase yard security.

[43] Between August of 1973 and 1974, Steam Train estimates that he made 34,000 bedside visits (*History* 9).

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Interestingly enough, it does not seem strange at all to Steam Train that the bill in Congress that "was passed immediately" (180) because of his appearance and lobbying of the members of the House is to get *more* bulls on duty. Virtually all hobo autobiographies—including Steam Train's—inevitably write of bad, sadistic bulls who viciously attack hobos when they are caught. Now, as King of the Hobos, Steam Train is trying to increase the police presence. Again, instead of being in opposition to the law, Steam Train is working intimately with the law; instead of trying to avoid the law, Steam Train, dressed in his colorful hobo attire, is waving his hands in Congress and becomes its lobbyist.

His reign as king continues, and he is elected King five times in the following years ('73, '75, '76, '78 and '81); he is even bestowed with the permanent title of King of the East for his continuing work with the veterans, as well as for his prominence as a hobo and his dedication to this subculture. The question, however, that is never asked is "what type of hobo is Steam Train promoting?" Becoming King of the Hobos changes his life and suddenly, a former cement worker with a bad hip, is a celebrity. He writes:

> Becoming the King of the Hobos produced an incredible alteration in my life. Prior to that event I had easily remained anonymous, unknown. And I like it that way. Except for my wrestling successes I had always been a 'nobody,' a person who could move about freely, without fanfare. My unusual manner of dress might occasionally cause quizzical glances, a slight smile, a disapproving shake of the head. But I had never been sought out by the general public, never looked upon as someone special to be heralded as a celebrity, written about and photographed and quoted as an authority and an expert in any category of the human experience. Suddenly all that changed . . . (*TOTIR* 168)

So while Steam Train might represent one type of hobo, he has in fact become to represent The Hobo—the one whom all newspaper reporters talk to when they are doing

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a piece on the Convention. And this definition of the hobo is a prominent one in communities outside of the hobo subculture. Sitting in a local bar in Britt during the August festivities, I talked with many locals about their feelings about hobos. Every person I talked to said the same thing—the hobos of the present are "fake" and "bums" compared to the "real" hobos like Steam Train or some of the older men. The middle-aged daughter of the owner of a bar that had been serving beers to hobos for the past forty years (she also works part time in the Hobo Museum) stated that the real hobos were "gentlemen" and "respectful" and "hard-working." The new railriders were more aggressive, more direct, and more oppositional to the law. The days of "authentic" hobos, for her, were over. Defining the hobo in such safe ways is extremely inclusive and regulating; many therefore said that with the death of Steam Train will be the (final) death of any authentic hobo and the end chapter to this American subculture.

And there seems to be a lot at stake in keeping this narrow definition of the hobo as the recognized and authentic one. All of the older 'bos at the convention, when they heard I was writing about them, were adamant about one thing: "All we ask is that you tell the truth, too many lies are written about Hobo's," Adman, the Public Relations Hobo for 2002 stated. But their Truth is the Steam Train Truth and there is something too sanitized about this version of the hobo. The hobo subculture is one that survived and flourished because it was able to stay away from the public; hobos tried to remain for the most part invisible. By staying so clearly in the harsh light of the public gaze, the hobo convention has whitewashed its transgressive nature. Although these men liked to talk about their illegal lifestyle, they downplay any illegality that they participated in (except stealing a ride from a railroad company). The hobo has stopped being primarily in

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opposition to the normative cultures and instead has become an accepted figure—one that is continually attempting to define itself both inside *and* outside normative ideologies.

After spending some time watching the events in Britt, Ted Conover was both surprised and disappointed by what he saw. Wanting to write a book about authentic hobos in '80's America—and wanting to become a part of this subculture for a time—he went to Britt to make contact with men and women who were still traveling the road. Instead, he saw King Steam Train holding court for the media: "Across the jungle, Steam Train Maury Graham ascended the boxcar ramp and executed a jig for a television camera crew. Later in the evening we would see him posing next to a bonfire, kids on his knee, for a National Geographic photographer, and autographing glossy portraits of himself boarding a train" (15). Conover, who would spend the next few months stealing rides with a variety of hobos who did not fit in with the accepted definition of Steam Train's Hobo, looked at the events in Britt as a sad joke that had nothing to do with life on the Iron Road.

Other hobos also felt that there was too much "politicking" in Britt and that the convention was more for bragging and self-aggrandizing than for meeting fellow hobos. Portland Gray said that while he did like the aging hobo, "Steam Train's got a head that's three boxcars long!" (Conover 15).[44] Iowa Blackie, a homeless poet who has written many self-published books of verse about his travels as a hobo, refused to come into the jungle in the 2002 convention and instead stayed on a bench outside the hobo museum because of "the politics." These politics can be seen when Steam Train condemned Iowa Blackie by stating, "[m]any old hoboes don't want him to run for king Hobo King,

[44] Steam Train called Portland Grey a "journeyman hobo" and "a fine singer and songwriter" (HHTV 21).

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as he doesn't live up to the standards of hoboes in cleanliness.[45] Is it possible then that bad body odor could allow Steam Train to discount Iowa Blackie as an authentic hobo? Is the definition of Hobo so narrow that lack of soap (or the unwillingness to use some on a consistent basis) could discount him?

According to Conover, the convention is not a celebration of the hobo but rather the celebration of the myth of the Hobo. The hobos who are being interviewed and shown on the nightly news programs represent:

> the footloose, vagabond, ruggedly individualistic hoboes celebrated by Whitman, Kerouac, Dos Passos, London, Steinbeck and other American writers—the hoboes that some of us, sometimes, might wish we could be. Like the illuminated "Welcome to Britt" sign, the Britt hoboes were caricatures. They replicated rather well things people like to see in hoboes—the iconoclasm, the freedom, the brotherhood of the road. (15)

The hobo figure is therefore a sanitized extension of the normative cultural values: freedom, travel and adventure are the dreams of many a man and woman but the cold nights, the drunken accidents and the boredom of waiting for a train are downplayed or not discussed at all. These are sugarcoated stories palatable enough to be offered as a segment on the news. The hobo subculture that had *The New York Times* calling for a thinning of the "army" of homeless vagrants at the beginning of the century is being applauded at the end with sanitized stories dedicated to them in such different magazines

[45] "He has attended convention [sic] for many years. A nice young man, but not a hobo for real" (*HHTV* 61). While Steam Train may not have accepted Iowa Blackie as an authentic Hobo, others have. In a Sunday, July 14, 2002 Associated Press article, Iowa Blackie, who the reporter described as having "a gray, bushy beard and long scraggly hair escaping under a greasy striped engineer's cap," spoke respectfully of the hobo lifestyle saying, "There's an honor in a being a hobo." While he did eventually win the Kingship in 1993, he also reported, however, that the convention had been a disappointment and a place for political backbiting in recent times.

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as *Bikini* and *Reader's Digest*. The hobo is no longer invisible; rather, he is given center stage and is, apparently, willing to do a jig for anyone wanting to publicize him.

So is the hobo convention, then, a harmless event, a way to sanitize a subculture and place it within the "safe" confines of the normative cultures' ideologies? Is this convention, which has been highlighted in such books as Nelson Taylor's *American Bizarro: A Guide to Freaky Festivals, Groovy Gatherings, Kooky Contests and Other Strange Happenings Across the U.S.A* just "kooky" and "freaky" and thus without any serious implications? Absolutely not. It is my contention that, in fact, these moments of the absurd are exactly the moments that do show the potential for subversive politics. This convention perfectly highlights the tensions between Steam Train's hobo who is accepted by the hegemonic culture, and the more resistive hobo who is not recognized, or, when he is, is silenced and rendered invisible. The convention allows for both types of figures to come in contact with one other. And while the convention has been a way for the type of hobo epitomized by Steam Train to take center stage, the convention itself is still described by many as a carnival. Steam Train himself states that, "Some people, and even hoboes, come to Britt and to our hobo jungle and declare, 'Hell, this is no jungle like I ever saw. It's like a three ring circus or a carnival'" (*History* 56). It is here, though, where there are potential spaces for resistance. A carnival, as any student of Michel Bakhtin knows, is an opportunity to invert the stable, organized, moral social order of a society and create, for a time, a space for the repressed voices of a subordinated and dominated subculture to express themselves. For, in essence, the hobo convention is a carnival, a world turned upside down, where the lowly are raised to the status of Kings and Queens and where the mayor sits and enjoys the warmth of the fire with men and

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women who are on drugs and haven't held onto a job in months. By using the carnivelesque as a lens, we will examine ways in which certain members of the hobo community push the boundaries of the narrowly sanitized definition of the hobo and how other members of the hobo community and members of the "normative" culture push back.

THE CARNIVELESQUE AND THE HOBO CONVENTION

The term carnival as a theoretical concept has been modified and has become more inclusive since Bakhtin's ground-breaking book *Rabelais and his World* (1965). Bakhtin believes that "[d]uring carnival time life is subject only to its laws that is the law of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit, it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part" (7), and therefore the carnival is separate from the normative culture. Later contemporary critics such as Stallybrass and White develop the word 'carnivalesque' "into a potent, populist, critical inversion of all official words and hierarchies in a way that has implications far beyond the specific realm of Rabelais studies" (294). For these critics, therefore, the carnival can exist within the normative culture at various times and places, be it in large revolts or in the realm of the everyday. The political subversions of carnival, therefore, contain a large range of meanings. For example, the historian LeRoy Ladurie studied the February 1580

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Carnivals in Romans that "transfigure[d] everything" and saw the carnival as the catalyst for the bloody peasant revolutions that toppled long standing governments—showing the distinct revolutionary acts that can result from the Carnival (xv). The cultural critic Tony Bennett understands the roller coaster rides that produce thrills and a racing pulse, which is an inversion of the normative relations between humans and machines, as an illustration of the type of carnivalesque in contemporary society (148). While the results are extremely different, both types of carnival do disrupt the status quo. John Fiske, while noting the large range of political ramifications from these two types of carnival, believes that both types are important to analyze because they both contain possible revolutionary elements. As he states, "[c]arnival may not always be disruptive, but the elements of disruption are always there, it may not always be progressive or liberating, but the potential for progressiveness and liberation is always present" (*Understanding Popular Culture* 101).

Similarly, although Steam Train has made the hobo convention more palatable for normative cultures to enjoy and sanction, there are moments within the convention when there are rifts—spaces—that open up and allow "the subordinate [to] escape from the rules and conventions that are the agents of social control" (*Television Culture* 243). While hobos try to create their own spaces within places while riding a train, the way that the hobo is remembered and memorialized—the Britt convention for one—becomes battle grounds where the hegemonic forces attempt to memorialize the hobo in order to realign the subculture with the values and structures of mainstream society. But the recuperation of this figure is never complete and the spaces are potentially present as long as the connection continues.

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The Britt convention does embody much of Bakhtin's carnivelsque where, for a very limited amount of time, the world is turned upside down and the lowly are raised in power and stature—the hobos are praised for the lifestyle that could (and does) get them arrested any other time of the year. Discussing the physical excesses of the crude, bawdy world of Rabelais, Bakhtin shows how the carnival is a space where all are considered equal and where the "hierarchal background and extreme corporative and caste divisions" are eliminated and "people were, so to speak, reborn for new purely human relations"(10). The carnival with its "grotesque realism" and its "lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal abstract" (20) emphasizes the body (especially the lower half) and its functions, and is characterized by laughter and inverted truths. In other words, the opposite of a functioning society that emphasizes the mind, is characterized by sobriety, and implements common truths and laws that must be held by all members of that society. The carnival is a time for release, a moment of play with an overindulgence of pleasure. At the same time, it is also an opportunity to express displeasure and exert a politicized voice that would normally be silenced in non-carnival times because, as Bakhtin notes, there is a "temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchal rank created during carnival time, a special type of communication impossible in everyday life" (10). The carnival is "the second life of the people who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance" (9) where those who are considered at the bottom of the society are given a space where they can free themselves from the official culture and its strict divide between the high and low. Or, as Fiske simply writes, "it is the "power of the 'low' to insist upon their rights" (*Understanding Popular Culture* 81). The carnival revelers in Rabelais, the homeless woman sleeping on

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the park bench, and the hobo riding the rods on a fast moving train are challenging the regimented places of society by creating a space through their physical bodies. But although the State allows for festivals (and in medieval times, they could take up to three months of the calendar year), the homeless woman, sleeping on a park bench in Washington Square Park, is jailed for her bodily infractions of the law. The hobo is also jailed for his actions, normally, but he is accepted and praised during the convention. If he is therefore insisting upon his "rights," the question then becomes, what exactly are these rights that exist during these carnivelesque moments?

All of these carnivalesque elements that Bakhtin mentions can be seen—in varying measures—in the Britt convention. For example, around the jungle fire, men who have worked for the past thirty years in the local factory, sit and share food and warmth with men who have not held onto a job or residence for longer than six months at a time. As Granpa Dudley (the 2001 Hobo King) announced at the start of the convention, "everyone is welcome here to stay and join in." There was not an overt separation between townsperson/tourist/hobo; rather, it seemed, all were welcome, and, as long as there was room, anyone could set up a tent and enjoy a cup of coffee from the jungle fire. The mayor of the town sat and enjoyed the company of the Sinner camp (he refrained from drinking) and an older, frail-looking Caucasian woman talked freely with the former '98-'99 Hobo King and African-American Vietnam Vet named New York Slim. Bakhtin notes, "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people: they live it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all people" (7). As Come-On-Pat said about her first trip to Britt in 1991, "I will never get over the all-inclusive feeling we had from the hobos. Everyone was welcome, but you had to act like gentlemen, too. We were two

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single women camped along with hobos and bikers and we never felt afraid. They treated us like they were our big brothers . . . . They were always ready to share stories, their pictures, their food, their clothes, whatever you needed!" (Oates 11-12). Around the jungle, it was told and retold by many during the convention, everyone was welcome because "there is a little bit of hobo in everyone." Although the hobo convention seems all-inclusive and utopian, the question remains if it also conforms to the subversive politics of the carnivelesque mentioned by Bakhtin and expanded upon by cultural critics since *Rabelais and His World* first appeared in print?

Bakhtin finds three major cultural forms of the folk carnival: 1) Ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, and comic performances 2) Comic verbal compositions: parodies both oral and written, in both: high" and "low" language 3) Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths popular blazons (5). Each of these forms, which are found in the Britt convention, shows the tension between forces that attempt to control and regulate the memory of the hobo, thus realigning it with the normative cultures values and moral codes, and the more dangerous and disruptive voices that can make the smooth definition of hobo more angular and subversive. A closer look at the convention through the lens of the carnivelsque will allow a closer analysis of these tensions.

Ritual is a very important part of the convention. At the 2002 convention, RedBird Express, who would become the King that year, inaugurated the convention with a lighting of the jungle fire. It was highly ceremonial event in which he circled the fire calling on the four winds to guide and bless all the participants who come into contact with the fire. Mixing (whether consciously or not) Native American Spirituality, Christianity, Hobo Lore and other pseudo-religious imagery, he spoke with reverence

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about the fire in the jungle camp, calling particular attention to the fact that jungle fires saved the lives of many cold and weary hobos. Telling people to walk around the fire, he stated that as they breathe in the air and get the smoke into their clothes and hair, they are becoming a part of the brotherhood. It has a leveling effect—by allowing themselves to sit around the fire, spectators are becoming part of a community: all are equal, all are hobos. Certain hobos, he stated, are in charge of keeping the fire burning the length of the three-day convention; as long as the fire burns, there is the possibility for all to become part of the hobo subculture.

While this may seem to be a simple, sanitized gesture by the hobos to be all-inclusive, I also read this moment as a space for a politically charged physical act. There is no way to stop smoke from getting into one's clothes; if one is present around the fire then one becomes part hobo—whether one wants to or not. It is not a choice, and the leveling effect, therefore, can have subversive elements to it. The mayor of the town, who is the elected official with responsibilities and commitments, is now accepted into the hobo brotherhood. He is part of a subculture whose very essence is the illegal jumping of trains, a moving away from traditional social commitments, and rejecting of certain forms of responsibility. It is a parody and a spectacle for an elected official to be a hobo. This act is be presented as a "nice" or generous way to thank the townspeople for allowing the convention to take place in Britt, as well as a way to incorporate the tourists who come to the town. But by having the mayor become an honorary hobo, the "seriousness" of the ritual—just like the seriousness of the religious elements are also strained through the mixing of many different spiritual elements from Christianity to New Age—suddenly enters the realm of politically-charged play. As Bahktin notes, the

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carnival is "organized on the basis of laughter" and while it is amusing to see the very uptight mayor (he wore tennis shoes to fit in) trying to relate with a drunk man who was attempting to limit his obscene language, this bringing together of two very different socio-economic classes also has possible political ramifications. Playing with the importance of the title of "mayor" may bring into question, both specifically in Britt and more generally throughout the country, what that title and position means. Disregarding title and inverting societal order—making everyone part of a subculture, thereby making it the dominant culture—is a way to give an inflated importance to that subculture, and to call into question the hierarchies of socio-political power that at any other time of the year are rigid. For when the distance (both physical and ideological) between the mayor and the hobo disappears, it may become clear that this distance is arbitrary and questionable at any time in the year. By looking through the lens of the carnivelesque, what is seen as a symbolic and generous gesture by the hobos to the townspeople has the potential to call into question that very separation between these two cultures.

This questioning of roles (whether conscious or not) of town officials is a theme found in many hobo texts. In the film, *Halleluiah I'm a Bum* (dir Milestone 1933), a Depression era musical comedy, Al Jolsen plays Bumper, the "mayor of Central Park," who also happens to dispense advice to his close friend, the mayor of New York City. Jolsen has a simple wisdom about him and refuses to let any complications get him down (even when he finds out that the amnesiac woman he has fallen in love with is actually—surprise!—the love of Mayor Hastings). Although the text eventually favors the accepted socio-political hierarchies (both Bumper and Hastings are happy and settled in their respective roles by the end of the film), there are parallel scenes inter-cut of train riding

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in the movie. Bumper and his African American sidekick "Acorn" travel as hobos (there is only stock footage of the train they hop) singing songs and enjoying the experience, even when they have trouble finding a ride; Mayor Hastings, on the other hand, who is traveling in the majestic comforts of his own railroad car, is unhappy and despondent as he thinks about his girlfriend whom he suspects has been cheating on him. The viewer is left to wonder when seeing these two parallel scenes: who is happier with his life—the hobo or the mayor? And, just as importantly, who is handling their respective mayorships more efficiently and intelligently? As the movie progresses, the viewer constantly switches from parallel scenes of the two "mayors" and how they perform their respective roles in front of their constituents, allowing the viewer to understand that the differences between the two roles is not as great as first imagined.[46] While *Halleluiah I'm a Bum* and the Britt convention never overtly question the authority and position of the (official) mayor, both do level the hierarchies and therefore raise doubts about these respected positions.

This potential to trouble the separation between the normative cultures and the hobo subculture is not always as disguised as in the case of the initiation fire-ceremony; sometimes the hostility between the hobos and the townspeople are distinctly hostile. Captain Cloud, a Grand Duke of the Hobos, discussed some of these antagonisms between hobos and townspeople in his article entitled "A Return to Britt—What a mistake!" which explains how some hobos feel as if they are exploited by the

[46] Another example of the questioning of arbitrary socio-economic positions can be found in *Bindle Stiff: Autobiography of a Super Tramp* by Bob Bennett. In this novel, the mayor of a small town who was a former hobo and thinks of the brotherhood with much fondness and respect is having difficulty with the city council members and finds them to be corrupt and dishonest. The book suggests that if the city council had consisted of hobos instead of career politicians, many problems of the town would be fixed.

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townspeople.[47] So upset is he by the way he was treated by the townspeople, that he writes passionately:

> To my hobo brothers and sisters, if you don't mind a city that treats its visitors terrible while they make money off them, if unnecessary police raids consisting of tent and road gear searches doesn't bother you, or the possibility that the brother next to you might be an undercover snitch, and if you don't mind running the risk of a bogus arrest then by all means go to Britt, but if you prefer to be treated with respect and maintain your civil rights then you may want to consider joining myself and the countless other hoboes (including many Kings and Queens) and **Boycott Britt.**

Captain Cloud, who was expecting the all-inclusiveness and leveling effect of the convention was upset when he found that the social hierarchies were, in fact, still in place. The convention, to him, was supposed to be a space where everyone was equal and no one was exploited. For the Grand Duke, this was not the case. While insisting that he was not expecting anything from the town except respect, he was upset by the merchandizing and exploiting of the brotherhood for monetary gains by the town.

Glancing through the *Hobo Guide* that was given away for free by the city council for the convention, it appears that he has a point since there are many advertisements that "Welcome Home" the hobos and, more importantly, the tourists who come to the town during the convention. One by Kabrick Distributing catches the eye. In a half page spread, there is a picture of a (well-dressed) hobo with a hammer on his shoulder, rail ties at his feet, and an approaching train in the background. In script there are the words to the old song, "*I've been working on the railroad . . .*"[48] Underneath it, the reader learns that *Budweiser,* the "King of Beers," is welcoming "all the visitors to Britt." Captain

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[47] Please see http://www.snowcrest.net for this article.

[48] One of the many fascinating aspects of this advertisement is that is matches hobos with working for the railroad companies—instead of stealing from them.

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Cloud could take offense at these marketing ploys that capitalize on his lifestyle, and despite the all-inclusive rhetoric of the convention, there is an understanding by some hobos that there is an obvious difference in power and status between the townspeople and the hobos. The town, which is not much different from many other small towns in Iowa, does generate income because of the attention caused by their yearly visitors. Contrary to Bahktin's carnival, therefore, the convention does become a spectacle because there is a separation between the townspeople who are making money by placing hobos as the main attraction for the three day festival.

What is crucial, however, is that this type of advertising is not seen in the jungle itself. There were no *Coors Light* women wearing hobo bikinis from *Abercrombie and Fitch* and drinking *Maxwell House Jungle Fire* coffee. It is important to separate the jungle from the rest of the town—while all along Main Street hobo memorabilia is sold, inside the jungle there are no outside advertisements to be found. Through this separation, the jungle becomes a safe space for the hobo and therefore the distance between the jungle and the town is clear. While the mayor and the alcoholic may rub elbows in the jungle, it is apparent that the hobo's physical person is commodified and his presence (*look Mommy is that a "real" hobo? Can I buy the hobo night light?*) help to sell goods in the town. And this commodfication politicized Captain Cloud enough to write his piece for all other Hobos to "Bann Britt!"

Within the jungle, the hobos do know that they have some authority and an ability to voice their power. One example that highlights the power struggle and tension between the townspeople and the hobos was the "Battle over the Box-car"—an event that shows the spaces of possible resistance that are present in the Britt convention. While the term

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"resistance" has many connotations, John Fiske uses the term in its less revolutionary sense.

> The term resistance is used in its literal sense, not in its more overtly political or even revolutionary one . . . .The refusal of ideology, of its meanings and control, may not itself challenge the dominant social system but it does resist incorporation and it does maintain and strengthen a sense of social difference that is a prerequisite to any more direct social challenge" (*Television Culture* 241).

For Fiske, resistance does not mean an overt challenge to an oppressive system. Rather, it is the creation of personal spaces by poaching from the places of society.

In the jungle, there is an old Side-Door Pullman that is at rest in the middle of the camp and many hobos gather there to talk, to eat their meals and also to teach new initiates the best way to "jump the line." In 2001, the mayor of the town, citing possible dangers, locked the car and refused to allow hobos/tourists to sleep in it. As a direct response to the decree, a group of 'bos in the middle of the night broke the padlock, opened the car, and slept inside. Seeing the 'bos sleeping inside the next morning and not wanting to create a public relations disaster that might have an effect on the amount of income generated by the town, the mayor relented and allowed the car to remain open for the three days during the convention. Hearing this story told many times in the 2002 convention, it was quite apparent to me the pride they felt in resisting authority for the hobo cause. Some of the hobos who took part in breaking the padlock and liberating the car were a female librarian who travels the rails on weekends, a fulltime 'bo who has been hopping freights since he was a teenager, and a college professor who is an "amateur 'bo" and collects and publishes hobo lore. It was an interesting and telling moment as those who were subordinated made their stand and actively fought back,

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reclaiming the box-car that they felt belonged to them.[49] What this incident shows is that the Britt convention, while it does speak of an all-inclusive atmosphere where, as Bahktin would state of the carnival, "the exalted and the lowly, the sacred and the profane are leveled and all are drawn into the same dance" (160), there is still the important question of who leads. And there are distinct moments where the tension of the different socio-political groups is seen and where the lowly do exert their fleeting power within the jungle. Whether it is the fire that couples the mayor and the homeless man together or the reclaiming of the boxcar by the disgruntled hobos, the convention does make apparent the similarities between the "high" and the "low" thereby calling into question the legitimacy of the borders that keep these groups apart as well as showing the amount of power that this subculture embodies. And though it may not be an overt political revolution where the homeless demand "rights" for themselves, as Stallybrass and White write, "For long periods carnival may be stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but . . . given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as a catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle" (14). When the mayor, backed by a few police, saw the lock on the boxcar lying harmlessly on the ground and a group of men and women inside the car refusing to budge, the "playfulness" of the convention suddenly became more serious. The mayor relented, the hobos had their box-car back and the convention continued. Importantly, the collective subculture power manifested in a physical act.

[49] Of course, many of the hobos—the librarian, the college professor, etc—are members of normative cultures, which begs the question: If only full time 'bos had appropriated the car, would the mayor have relented so easily the blatant refusal to accept his mandate?

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It does seem, therefore, that the convention calls into question, at various moments, the validity of titles and hegemonic social practices. The tension that can be found in these moments within the convention and the spaces of resistance that are carved by the hobos can also be seen as we look at Bahktin's second requirement for the folk carnival—the comic compositions. It is useful to look at the relationship between the convention and Bahktin's carnival because it does show us the possibilities for resistance on the part of the homeless to claim their own personal space within this seemingly three-day "celebration" of the hobo. And by looking through the lens of the carnival at the most absurd part of the convention, we can see the very concrete ways which the tensions between the town and the hobos, as well as the generational tensions with the hobo subculture, manifest themselves. The culmination of the festival and its largest single draw is the crowning of the King and Queen Hobo for the following year. Just as it is ridiculous for the mayor of the town to consider himself a hobo, it is also ridiculous for a hobo to consider himself a king; if the titles of mayor and king are inflated and arbitrary, then, perhaps, the positions themselves are as well. In itself, the crowning is ridiculous: a man and woman, who represent an illegal, homeless subculture are raised to the inflated title of king and queen. The "election" takes place in the town square: after a parade that lasts for a few hours, a hobo auction that raises money for the Hobo Foundation, and a feast of mulligan stew cooked by town volunteers (in previous years it was the hobos who would cook it), a large crowd gathers on the square's lawn to watch and listen to the hobos who are sitting on a platform in the gazebo. After some preliminaries by the town officials, a few words by the retiring King and Queen, a reciting of a humorous poem by Luther "The Jett" Gette, who has a Ph.D. in French literature from the University of

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Wisconsin and is also a former king, and some bestowing of honorary titles on various hobos, the election of the hobo begins.[50] Steam Train describes the proceedings:

> The system used at the annual selection of the King was to allow candidates to spend several days politicking among the crowds who had come to the convention. Then, on election day, those who had decided can and would be permitted to speak to the audience and to explain why they should be chosen for the honor of representing all hobos for the next year. Each candidate was given three minutes for his campaign address—although many would try to get at least five—after which the audience would, by their applause, select a King. A panel of judges would determine which candidate had received the most applause. (*Tales of the Iron Road* 160)

It is easy to take this election as the supreme moment of absurdity in a three-day event that at many times feels surreal. Having hobos pass out flyers and business cards asking for everyone they meet to vote for them to become King and Queen Hobo, is a somewhat strange, even unnerving, experience.[51] The speeches themselves ranged from the comic to the serious. As Steam Train remarks correctly, "Some of the campaign speeches were quite grandiose and would have done some of the national presidential candidates proud for their eloquence and pomposity" (160). At the end of the speeches, the winners are decided by the amount of audience applause and shortly thereafter they are crowned and robed. In 2001, the speeches ranged in length and seriousness. One hobo who had obviously been drinking for awhile that day, made jokes about the kingship while making campaign promises that were unrealistic (as well as misogynistic); a female hobo, on the

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[50] In the 2002 convention, Granpa Dudley spoke of his love for the town. As a hobo in the thirties, he lived for a short time in Britt and felt that his "real" home was still the town. A likeable and gregarious older man, he was clearly a crowd favorite—and he also fit into Steam Train's model definition of hobo.

[51] My personal favorite belongs to Gerard Fortin whose moniker is Frog. A very friendly man, the card represents his personality in a way that most business cards do not; there is a picture of a very relaxed and affable frog with a crown on his head.

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other hand, told the crowd that God filled her with love and as queen, she would continue to spread the love to everyone she met.

But how do we read the fact that homeless men and women are getting up in front of a crowd of both working-class townspeople and picture-snapping tourists? Is this a carnivelesque moment where there is an inversion of the social order, a "world inside out" where there is a "continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" (Bakhtin 160). When we analyze the first hobo and his speech, it does seem as if this is the case. Swaying under the hot August sun, he hurled both curses and blessings at the audience in the typical fashion of the billingsgate abuses. He was exerting a type of "non-official freedom" (153) where "praise and abuse are, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin" (165). Elections belong to the serious world, the official world where politicians look to the past to sway people to vote for them. But in the carnivelesque moment, it is about living in the present and laughing at the whole process. As Bahktin writes, "[t]here is not the slightest tone of morose seriousness in his oration, no fear, no piety or humility. There is absolute gay and fearless talk' (167). This is the type of speech that the hobo gave as he both berated the crowd and himself, breaking into moments where he just laughed at, it seemed, the whole situation.

Many in the crowd, however, were not amused. The way that certain members of the crowd reacted also pinpoints the way that the subversiveness of the convention does get recouped into the dominant paradigms. Sitting in the crowd and hearing the mumblings around me, it was apparent that many thought that the drunken candidate was making fun of the election and did not appreciate it. Instead of enjoying the ribaldry of

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his rhetoric, they were upset by his profanities. They felt mocked sitting on the grass watching a transient make jokes about the kingship; the kingship itself might be a joke but some townspeople were not happy at the fact that he was pointing out the ridiculousness of the moment. When the crowd overwhelmingly voted for Red Bird Express, they were making a statement that the tin-crown should go to the serious candidate and not to the blasphemous one. And when Red Bird Express in his speech talked about the future, making promises that he would fulfill in the upcoming year, I do not think that many cared if he achieved them or not. But he was looking towards the future—what politicians are supposed to do (and not living in the present inebriated). This correct performance by RedBird Express was sufficient for the audience to vote for him.

The reaction of the other hobos on stage as they listened and watched the speeches was also telling. When RedBird Express, a long beautifully carved walking stick at his side, stood in front of the crowd, the hobos were comfortable, sitting tall and looking forward facing the crowd. But, as the drunken hobo swayed and laughed, praised and cursed, some hobos were visibly uncomfortable. Some did take the election seriously and did not like feeling mocked as well. Shifting in their seats or talking to the neighbors, they were attempting to separate themselves from the mockery and degradation of the oration.

Degradation, however, is the point of the carnivelesque and it is during these moments of mockery at the convention where the possibility for resistance is clearly visible. Degradation is not just a tearing down but it is also a building up. As Bakhtin notes, "[d]egradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it is not only a destructive,

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negative aspect but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth takes place" (21). The mocking oration tears down the seriousness of the hobo election and, consequentially, tears down all elections, uncovering the ridiculousness aspect of campaign promises as well as the need of the electorate to hear those same promises. It is a parody, a joke, but for those members in the crowd who booed the drunken candidate and cheered for RedBird Express, many did not see the humor. They apparently did not like to be taught a lesson by a transient and were uncomfortable by the platform that has placed them on the grass looking up at the hobo. As Stallybrass and White state, "[t]he Carnival, the circus, the gypsy, the lumpenproletariat, play a symbolic role in bourgeois culture out of all proportion to their actual social importance" (300). But even the symbolic—a drunken homeless man on a stage running for a tin crown—is too much power to give up and the crowd, including hobos who take this election seriously, clap and award the crown to those men and women who speak "appropriately."

The crowning, which can be seen as a joke—the audience gathered on the lawn were clearly having a good time listening to the speeches laughing as well as applauding enthusiastically when their candidate stood up for the crowd—does have political importance in its debasement of serious institutions. This can be seen in other aspects connected to the election that also causes anxiety among some who have a stake in promoting the safe definition of the hobo. For example, the Hobo King Oath, quoted

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here in full, which is read by the newly inducted king, is a parody of the official swearing in ceremony of the U.S. president:[52]

> I, King of the Hoboes, solemnly pledge that I will uphold the constitution of the Weary Willies of the Road. I pledge that I will not during my reign veto my legislation submitted for increasing the size of handouts and I will strive with restrictions to balance the budget. I also promise to guide the ship of state on an unwavering course—guiding it with a firm hand from the rock-bound coast of Maine to the sun kissed shores of sunny California and promise not to sail at any time with more than three sheets to the wind. I, furthermore, promise not to throw bricks through windows nor will I at any time conduct an act that will bring shame and disgrace to my fellow men and the Britt Chamber of Commerce. I also promise with restrictions to love and cherish the Royal Highness, my Queen, and expect the same love and consideration in return. All of this, I promise, so help me goodness.

It is obvious, when reading the oath, that it is a parody of the bombastic language of politicians.[53] Promising not to sail with more than "three sheets to the wind" and not to "veto legislation to increase the size of handouts" could seem to make this oath no more than a comedic document that debases any seriousness involved. Who, the oath seems to suggest, can take a document that has the words "Weary Willie" seriously?

Apparently, it appears, the Britt Chamber of Commerce. "Weary Willie" might be a joke but the Britt Chamber of Commerce exists in the official place of the U.S. government and must distance itself somewhat from the transient class. If this election had no meaning except for a few laughs, then there would be no need for the words, "nor will I at any time conduct an act that will bring shame and disgrace to my fellow men and the Britt Chamber of Commerce." Beneath this veneer of fun attached to the election,

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[52] This oath, which was displayed prominently at the Hobo Gathering in Pennsburg, PA, was not read by the King RedBird Express in the 2002 convention. I was told this was an oversight and that there are plans to have the oath read at future conventions.

[53] This, in my opinion, is subversive in itself. As someone who is annoyed and bewildered by campaign speeches and rallies that use much of this same type of rhetoric, I find pleasure in the fact that there is this obvious parody of the uselessness and ridiculousness of this type of politicking.

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dwells tension and anxiety. By having the election and celebrating the hobo with a three-day convention, the town is bestowing an amount of cultural and political power and authority on the hobo subculture, a subculture that is in conflict philosophically and practically to the authority and traditions of the blue-collar, Mid-Western town. Much like the lighting of the jungle fire, the moment of crowning has the potential to reveal the tension between the subculture and the normative cultures and, at times, this tension manifests into real actions. The election does involve questions of power and visibility. The hobo has always existed by removing itself from the agents of the law—now they are being elected by the community that should be reporting them to the police. This transfer of acceptance though is sensitive and the tensions are real. Most of the times, these spaces of conflict are not apparent and can be overlooked in the laughter and fun of the Convention; at times, though, the conflict, like the Battle over the Box-car, is openly displayed.

On the wall of the Hobo Museum, there is a picture of a woman standing on the platform in the gazebo, holding a sign over her head that had one single word printed on it— GIRRLS. In between the r's of the word is the Railroad Crossing symbol. She is obviously a force that demands attention: surrounded by older hobos who use walking sticks for support and not for show, the young energetic woman seems to be out of place; sporting dreadlocks, she is wearing army-issue camouflage pants and a tattered shirt that reveals underarm hair. Underneath the picture there is a description of the sign that the woman holds in the air: "The Girl's Symbol represents the modern day hobo woman, girls, sisters and mama. Used to identify each other and to know where they have been on the rails." The picture and the description tell of the female hobo and her modern day

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traveling—something that is given very little attention in the overtly masculinized literature about the hobo. What the description does not tell, however, is that the same woman was the center of a controversy that involved a scandal over the election of the hobo queen.

I was told by many hobos who were present at the event that it was apparent that this woman won the most applause when she was running for hobo queen.[54] She had put the most effort into her energetic, feminist speech that included chants and dance steps, culminating with the raising of the sign (it was this moment that is captured on the wall of the museum). During her speech, she also spoke about her political affiliations—she was an anarchist and she was damn proud of it.

And although she seemed to have received the most vocal responses from the crowd, her speech was not well received by the older members of the community as well as some older hobos. Citing that her speech might be a bad influence on the local girls in the crowd, there was a "recount" of the vote and while it seemed that the applause was again for the young woman, the title of queen was bestowed on an older woman who was deemed a more appropriate role model. Apparently there is some power and authority bestowed on the hobo when she is robed and crowned; and this power can be viewed as subversive and dangerous to the moral climate of the town and should only be handed to those who will promote a particular type of hobo figure. It is this moment that shows the possible resistance and subversive qualities of the convention. Here, a young, overtly political woman who was living the life of the rail rider was not allowed to be queen

[54] I do not have any concrete information about the woman's name or identity. While Frog, New York Slim, and other hobos told me about the event, none could remember her name, or even the exact year that this took place (all said it happened "a few years ago"). This ambiguity is common since many of the older hobos do not relate well with the younger ones and there is not much interaction.

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because she was deemed too dangerous to be awarded the title. Both the town leaders and some hobos did not want to elect her—she threatened the safe definition of the hobo; unlike the other bos who lived in the past discussing the glory days, the young woman was living in the present, living an illegal life, and therefore was unstable and a threat. While the town seems to enjoy (and make money off of) the notoriety of older male hobos like Steam Train, who make good copy bouncing children on their knees, a young dred-locked woman espousing feminism who is *currently living* the illegal life of the hobo cannot be allowed to speak so freely in the middle of the town square. The dominant forces, which seem to be enjoying the carnivalesque atmosphere where all are supposedly equal, exerts its power the moment when the space being carved by the subversive subculture cuts a little too deep in the safe places of the normative cultures. The drunk hobo making a mockery of the crowning in a carnivelesque moment and the politicized woman raising her arms in defiance in the town square, therefore, both show the resistant actions of the hobos as well as the recouping of power of by the town and certain older hobos.

Terry Eagleton discusses this idea that the carnival is, in fact, a sanctioned and permitted event. While enjoying the populist rhetoric involved, he states that the "[c]arnival, after all, is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art" (Sallybrass and White 296). The carnival can be seen as a safety valve that controls the subversive qualities of the oppressed groups—if a subordinated group has a few days to blow off some steam, it will be complacent for the rest of the year. The release of pressure, therefore, would mark a strengthening of the

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shackles of social control rather than a loosening of it. Fiske, Bennett, and other cultural critics argue, however, that the recouping of political authority is never complete and any moment where there is an eruption in the social order by the oppressed, there is the possibility for future insurrection. The fear of this possibility seems to be the case with refusing to elect "the people's choice" when the would-be-queen was deemed too subversive; both the town and certain hobos showed that the election does have cultural and political meanings that do not fit the hegemonic discourse that the town feels comfortable with—and they put a stop to it. The refusal also showed that the "democracy" of the election is a farce; the town elders tipped their hand and revealed the way that they understand and implement freedom. The carnival atmosphere uncovered the inner workings of the way town democracy is run. The convention, therefore, had the *potential* to turn the world upside down and just because the more angular moments were recouped by the dominant forces does not mean that these moments will not appear again—and the outcome is uncertain. What would have happened if some of the hobos refused to accept the town's decree and stopped the election, refusing to leave the gazebo until it was acknowledged that the young woman was, in fact, queen? What if more "gutter-punks," "Flintstones," or "Krustez" (terms used to identify new rail riders) were present at the convention and refused to capitulate to the town and the older hobos, fighting instead for their fellow train riders? What type of media coverage would that have drawn and, consequently, how would that have affected the amount of income generated by the town in the upcoming conventions with the threat of anarchists running around downtown? The hegemonic and all-inclusive rhetoric could have been radically split and the questions of how to remember the hobo could have been open to much

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debate because it would become apparent that the "official" way of remembering the hobo does not fit with the way the subculture presently lived. And although it may seem as if the question is moot, it is crucial to understand because it shows the tension involved along the borderland areas where subcultures meet the normative cultures and the negotiations and manipulations involved to keep the hegemonic forces in control. Nothing did seemingly happen, but the potential is there, and, therefore, will be again. In the battle over how people remember the hobo, these actions may be a step for future rebellions that will not be as easily recouped.

To give any subculture center stage, even for a short time, runs the risk of giving up power might not give back. For is this not the fear behind the mid-nineteenth century *The New York Times* article that belies the anxiety caused by an "army of tramps" taking power into their own "thieving fingers"? That the rebel army, fattened through personal and state charity and allowed to exist in the same places as the normative cultures, might become too strong to be put back down in their place? The town celebrating their version of the hobo must also deal with the more unstable younger population who may not be ready to succumb to the official rules and start creating their own space. And this influx on current rail riders causes much anxiety on the part of all those who have a stake in keeping the hobo figure "safe." Although the town organizes and sanctions the convention knowing that it will draw money into the treasury, there must be some fear on their part that having an open invite for homeless men and women to live in Britt for a few days might suddenly get out of control. Or, to state in another way: did the king when looking out his window and upon seeing his image burned in effigy in the carnival

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that he sanctioned, ever get a little hot under the collar, wondering if those flames could ever be licking at his feet?

The carnival, as well as the hobo convention, has the potential to be oppositional and dangerous to the hegemonic forces who have given up some control. Although Bahktin's first two forms of folk carnival are most useful in exploring the tensions between the town and the hobo population, his third form, the billingsgate, allows us to concentrate specifically on the divisions of the hobos themselves. There is a split and contention between those hobos that want to be officially recognized and those who are currently living the life and are more concerned with the present then the past or the future. Bahktin's first two forms help us explore the forms of resistance that are present at the hobo convention. His third form will allow us to specifically concentrate on the tensions formed between the generational views of the hobo.

The billingsgate or the eruption of voices through curses, oaths and exaggerations in public places are part of what Barthes calls 'grandiloquence' or exaggerated speech and these outbursts can be seen in the Hobo jungle in the Britt convention (Fiske *Understanding Popular Culture* 89). As mentioned above, there are four main subparts to the hobo jungle: the main fire that is kept lit throughout the length of the convention and is the site for the organized activities; the "Sinner" camp where both the drinks and the language are strong; the "Inbetweens" camp where the drinking and the conversations are quieter and more relaxed; and the "Saint" camp where discussions of religion and hobos were consistently intertwined. Each of these camps has their own personality and internal order but all are places for the hobos to use their own voices and to raise them to their own desired level. The way they are used, however, does highlight how these

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voices can be either realigned with the hegemonic forces or how they can become a source of unpleasant disharmony.

A comparison between the main stage and the sinner camp should be sufficient to explain. Both camps are places where hobos are allowed to speak in grandiose language and both are given to ritual displays. But the way that the hobos present themselves are very different: on the main stage, it is obviously a performance for a crowd and while the circle around the fire is meant to be inclusive, there is a distance between performer and audience. Unlike Bahktin's view that the "[c]arnival is not a spectacle seen by people; they live it and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (7) this is not the feeling I had when I was present in the main stage. Sitting in the metal bleachers, I felt as if I was at a concert and found myself performing the role of an audience member—I knew when to clap, when to be quiet, when to laugh. Opening the show was an MC who announced the various acts that would be playing for the crowd. After a few people performed, it became obvious to me that it was, in fact, an act—beginning with a story about the song itself, various hobos would get up behind the mike and perform for the audience old folk songs, their original compositions, or religious traditionals. The stage was set up to be a casual setting where hobos would just break out in song around the jungle fire recreating an "authentic" hobo jungle fire—this is a common trope seen in movies about the hobo from the 1928 Louise Brooks vehicle *Beggars of Life* to the 1972 Martin Scorsese movie *Boxcar Bertha.* However, since it was a stage with an audience of townsfolk and tourists, it did feel much like it was—a show. There was no spontaneity; rather, there was a program. The night began with the rising of the American flag and a recitation of The National Anthem as well as a Catholic

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prayer. The singers ranged from amateurs singing their own hobo songs to the Hobo Minstrel Singers (featuring Lady Songbird, the 2002 Hobo Queen) who sang religious songs. Everything was in its right place: there was order and set programs.

There was not this same order in the sinner's camp, which was literally a hundred yards away from the main stage. Here the hobos sat on coolers, log stumps, cardboard or on old chairs that they brought themselves. Conversations were mostly jovial with good-natured joking amidst what seems to be a tight-knit community, many of whom live or squat together for set periods during the year. Ages of the core group ranged from mid-thirties to sixties and they were welcoming to most visitors but were also unafraid to tell some people to leave their camp in explicit terms. Conversations ranged from the unwanted grandiose politicking of some hobos, to the unwarranted police presence in Britt, to certain mostly forgotten jungle camps throughout the United States. Many of these discussions led to heated exchanges. Stories were exaggerated with some hobos telling impossible stories (much in line with the stories of Steam Train) of great feats that I wanted to believe in, even though I knew could not have happened. And songs did break out, but much more haphazardly than on the main stage: Malachi, a young heavily tattooed hobo who is currently riding the rails full-time with his two dogs Goldie and Lady, was asked to play his guitar by some hobos and he played a few Tom Waits songs.[55] Some mornings, just after dawn, I would wake up to him singing at the top of his lungs "Hang on Saint Christopher," or other gravely-sounding songs. The camp was

[55] Malachi, in fact, sounds like Tom Waits. In what might be a tall tale or could be reality, Malachi (who swears that he sings only Tom Waits songs) was playing on Bourbon Street in New Orleans one night for change when he looked up in mid-song and realized that Tom Waits was listening to him. After finishing the song, Waits complemented Malachi on sounding "more like me than me" and gave him every dollar that was in his pocket.

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filled with obscene and far-fetched stories that would not be found in the proper place of the main stage; while they might not be palatable for some of the tourists who sat and listened by the main fire, they were told by men many of whom were still transients.

The main stage was interested in remembering the hobo: the stories and songs were about days gone by—tough traveling, cold nights and views from the boxcar door. They were sung to an appreciative audience who were interested in learning about the past while others were happy to reminisce about times that were done and been. And while the sinner camp was also involved in reminiscing, it was a more recent past—many were still homeless, squatting together in abandoned buildings or living in their trucks, converted so they could sleep in the back. Younger 'bos like Malachi gravitated to these older men and, after a period of both groups quizzing each other about current jungle spots and present day riders, acknowledged each other as "authentic" and were respectful of each other. And while most refused to acknowledge that they were hobos—they took pride in considering themselves part of "The Tramp Family"—they did so mostly out of respect for the elder hobos like Steam Train. Since they respected him and others like him as the "real" hobos, they did not want to place themselves within the same term as he. Also, many had drug and alcohol problems with police records and sketchy pasts—they knew that their lifestyles did not fit with the accepted definition of hobo and many chose to name themselves with the more comfortable term *tramp*. But unlike the stories that were being told around the main jungle fire, their stories were a living history. While many no longer ride trains and have become part of the home guard, their conversations were not so concerned with their yesterdays but about their todays. And this is where there is the possibility for resistance—they were not as concerned about shaping the past

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as shaping the present. This is not to discount or downplay the importance of how a society remembers the past—but one way that the sanitized version of the hobo will become the only recognized version is if those who are currently riding the trains are silenced (through jails, through sanitariums, through old age, through death). Having these men discuss the current scene of the hobo and the new riders—a scene that is supposedly dead and no longer possible—is to offer resistance to the hegemonic forces that are shaping the way that the hobo will be remembered. The young woman with the anarchy sign raised above her head, the stoned hobo talking about his experiences squatting in the sinners camp—they are refusing to allow the hobo to become "safe" and only a part of the past. Having these men and women in Britt is a physical reminder that the hobo is not history, that it is still alive in the exaggerated wild stories told in loud drunken voices who are still living the hobo lifestyle today.

Although the campfire in Britt may be a central locale for these stories to be told and for the hobos to gather face to face to talk *en masse*, there is still communication taking place throughout the country every day as train hoppers meet and talk strategies. And even though the convention only takes places three days out of the year, the living and vibrant hobo community "talk" daily over the internet.[56] And while these members are mostly anonymous and are nowhere as visible as a figure like Steam Train, they are refusing to be silenced and relegated to history. Their passing of information, stories and news, keeps pushing the boundaries that limit the term of the hobo. Instead of sharing information about the whereabouts of bulls next to the tracks in the Chicago train yards,

[56] While this might seem a bit surreal, hobos using computers makes sense. The internet was heralded as a democratic tool where everyone would have access to the same information. Hobos, coming off a train and making there way to a public library or computer lab in a college, have access to this information. Using hotmail or yahoo accounts, they have access to communication that does not cost them any money.

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hobos share stories, manifestos, questions and ideas online. It is here where the profane meets the practical and in-depth, passionate discussions are played out on the computer screen. Many of these conversations focus on the identity politics of the hobo.

One popular virtual hobo mailing list named train-hoppers@nw.com, one of many internet-based hobo/rail fans mailing lists. The jungle, seemingly, has become virtual and information is being passed around at a speed previously unimagined to hobos. These internet chat rooms and web sites are spaces that allow for subcultures to explore issues and to resist, through their posts, what has become the normative cultures' hegemonic discourse on the hobo. Mailing lists allow for the free flow of discussions and personal opinions and since most, if not all, members of the lists have monikers and no personal information is known about the subscribers, all are equal in the space of the internet and all have the opportunity to have a voice.[57] This mailing list is a prime site for a discussion of many things related to the hobo lifestyle. Most of the traffic on the list consists of information-based questions ranging from requests about certain particular rail riders[58] to specific questions about trains and yards,[59] to advice on how to pass an

[57] This idealistic view of the internet, however, is not entirely true. This particular mailing list is a moderated mailing list in which "Mark" reviews all submissions and deems that the material is either appropriate or not for the list.

[58] AZ asks in the 11.6.02 post a series of questions: "1. What happened to Rapid-T and his wild adventures by rail? 2. What happened to Shawn with the munchies? 3. What happened to Jaks? 4. What happened to Cameron? (Tell us about your adventure!)" Many posts deal with traveling friends who have been separated and want to find each other again. While many have floating addresses and may be anywhere in the country depending on which way the freights are traveling, the internet has been an invaluable tool in keeping traveling companions and the larger train hopper community connected to each other's whereabouts.

[59] There are many short posts that ask specific questions. Some examples: Jennifer asks on 12.23.02, "hey what trains can I take to get me from Chicago to ny?"; Ben asks on 11.22.02, "I'm in California, oh, and I have no idea what lines run through Nacogdoches, OR if it even leaves east texas (or the tri-country area for that mantter)"; Turtle on 12.19.02 asks "Anyone know the chances any hot shots will be running from LA out to Houston in a few days before the new year? What's the route like? Advice appreciated."

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interview process.[60] Although this in itself show that they are sites of resistance where information of how/when/where to illegally jump trains are dispensed, it is also important to understand how these new virtual jungles are specifically sites of resistance to the hegemonic forces that are attempting to control the way the hobo should be understood and memorialized. Two examples should help prove this point.

Ohio Tom wrote in an e-mail inquiring if anyone "on the net, or off the net, keep a listing of these [jungles]? Except for a few ol' timers in a town, today nobody knows where the jungles were. Once they're gone, that info will be lost forever if someone doesn't record it. Be a damn shame to lose it." (11.01.02)[61] Ohio Tom, a man who has traveled to the different hobo conventions around the country for years and is an adamant railroad enthusiast, was not interested in hopping trains himself and did not use this list-serve as a way to inquire about present day train schedules or "hot" yards. He was not a train-hopper but his father was and, as he told me over lunch in the Hobo Restaurant in Britt, he always loved listening to stories of old hobos and their adventures. He was interested in using the mailing list to reach anyone who was recording the locations of old jungles and keeping the memory and stories of old hobos alive. Owen, emotionally replied the next day about the lack of good jungles for present day, "[j]ungles are not realy used or needed much because of higher freiquecy of trains . . . The problem these

[60] Philips Road asked in a 12.6.02 post, "I am settling down here aside from weekend short hauls I am getting a job here in mid NY,,,,So heres a big Job question how do I explain to a potential employer those long gaps in employment When I was out hopping trains??" The response from JR the following day suggests calling hopping freights "volunteer work" where the job consisted of identifying old unused railroads that could transformed into trails or to reply to the interviewer, "I was a correspondent for an internet-based information service." While these types of questions are not routine on this list serve, they are present and do show a community in which fellow train hoppers are able to communicate and share ways in which they have resisted and helped each other exist both outside and inside the normative cultures.

[61] I have not changed or corrected any grammatical errors in these posts.

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days is not the police as many would think but mindless right wing nazi punks who see it has there duty to break and destroy a jungle aeven to go as far to drive railroad spoikes through poor hobos food cans . . ." Ohio Tom quickly dismissed the reply and forcefully shot back in his first sentence, "I guess I did not make myself clear." Responding that he was not interested in the present day use of the jungles but rather interested in the particular places where old hobos *used* to sleep, as in "NYC (Big 4) bridge over the Scioto River" where now "the railroad and its bridge are gone, the river looks to have been dredged and there's a school's athletic field on the opposite bank." There is a division, then, between hobo enthusiasts who are interested in the hobo lore and culture and modern-day riders who are struggling to catch out and survive in an increasingly hostile environment. When these two camps meet either in the physical or virtual realm, there is a questioning and a redefining of what it is to be a hobo. Both sides are trying to find spaces where they can exist together and the negotiations of terms are often the subject of conversations. Although Ohio Tom was more interested in remembering the places where old hobos had camped, Owen responded with a passionate diatribe about the problems modern day riders face, refusing to allow the term "hobo" to be part of the past. For Owen and many others, the term is alive and is distinctly in the present. The term hobo is not static and hegemonic, rather it is malleable, and socio-political circumstances (both historical and present day) must be evaluated and discussed between the two camps and among themselves. And even though the memory of the hobo might seem to be in the hands of Steam Train and the older hobos, these list-serves show the term and the lifestyle is discussed and debated.

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One of the ways that the hegemonic forces have sanitized the term hobo, as discussed previously, is to realign the term with the value systems of the normative cultures. Emphasis is placed on the individuality, resourcefulness and adventurous spirit of the hobo while his more anti-social behavior has been downplayed or even eliminated (as the term hobo becomes narrower those who possess undesirable qualities can be demoted in the homeless hierarchy to "tramp," "bum," "gutterpunk," "Krustez"). But to be a hobo means to place oneself outside the law: no matter how one justifies oneself, to hop a train is illegal. The listserve, therefore, is a space where train hoppers can access and dispense information about police activities and hot spots to avoid. For example, in a post entitled "This'll turn the heat up," Owen reprinted a September 14th Associated Press article that reported that a dozen railroad thieves attacked and seriously injured two FBI agents, warning train hoppers to avoid the area and to watch out for increased police and FBI presence.[62] When there are derailments or holdups that are reported by the news, there is immediately someone who posts the article directly from an on-line newspaper or source with some added opinions or warnings on the situation.[63] This

[62] Joe H from AP reports, "Alleged Railroad Bandits Ambush FBI" (Sept 14, 2002)

[63] This happens more often than one might expect—they are just not wildly reported because, for the most part, they do not involve many casualties (unless, of course, it is a passenger train like Amtrack)—except to train crews and illegal passengers. Derailments are therefore discussed frequently on train hopping list serves—for example, Philips Roads reported on 12.16.02 that there was a derailment of a train in CSX Lyons, NY train yard and that, "[t]his is the second derailment in a week for csx and the fourth major fuck-up for CSX in the last three months on the Buffalo-Alabany line. Is there any wonder that John Snow president of CSX is taking a new job at the US treasury? CSX stock has also dropped from 33 to 28 in the past three months as well . . . As a fellow hobo I am issuing a rare warning to stay off CSX former conrail routes till further notice...It seems that until CSX fixes those problems given a month or two to realy inspect and corrdct defects it is just not safe out there...I suggest CP trains to bignhamton and philly sonce they have excellent safety record." There were various posts then that discussed the CSX line with a discussion of a chemical spill that happened in a tunnel in Baltimore on July 18th 2001 and the official accident report was placed in full on the list. What is interesting to me is how detailed and informed this list becomes where information and warnings are administered shortly after it is reported in the news (or personally seen by a train rider). As one can read, Roads is clearly informed knowing the job status of the CSX president and his warning has much credibility.

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shows how the virtual jungle is a space for hobos and rail rider enthusiasts to voice their opinions and concerns in unadulterated and uncensored voices. And no other situation has caused such a stir on the list than a discussion of the ramifications of September 11, 2001.

On October 24' 2002, Homeland Security director Tom Ridge along with the FBI issued a warning that Al Qaeda might attack railroad tracks and cars. Immediately there was a buzz on the list with links to articles about the situation. A few days later a listmember downloaded a memo from Al Crown, executive Vice-President of CSX lines, that all employees must be on a "heightened state of alert" and that they must "immediately report anyone without proper identification or any suspicious activity." Another message from a railroad company—this time Union Pacific—was dispersed to the listserve. This message was more adamant with a headline that announced, "HELP US STOP TERROISM BEFORE IT HAPPENS" before listing 18 examples of suspicious activity that should be immediately reported to the police. Stories of Railfans being accosted and detained for a few hours of questioning by FBI personal were reported on the lists. Questions of rights and civil liberties became a hot-button issue and mirrored many of the same divisions in the mainstream media coverage post-Sept. 11, 2001. The difference, obviously, is that hobos are part of those communities that could draw suspicion as terrorists due to their illegal lifestyle.

Philips Road wrote an impassioned response to the Homeland Security Bill on 11.26.02 calling it "blatantly unconstitutional" stating that "I feel that the right to travel with or without permission and to do so without having to account to anyone is my Godgiven right. Using the railroad systems empty freight cars does the railroad no harm

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and is a small price too pay for the Monopolistic franchise that has been granted to them by my government ." Angered by this bill and incensed by the fact that the Supreme Court allowed the president to have the power to detain citizens as "enemy combatants," he wrote another e-mail on December 8, explaining that " . . . an author of a book on bombs are made or on freight hopping could have his media decalred terrorist training manuals and be picked up as enemy combatant and then be tried under a military tribunal and if found guilty be dragged in front of a firing squad." The Grinch from Portland countered and responded the same day, writing succinctly, "This is bullshit," and then adding that while Road's remarks might be "theoretically possible" he discounts his e-mail completely as "scare tactics" and unproductive "what-ifs" and ends his e-mail with "If you don't like this fucking country, get the fuck out." Aptheticheart then weighs in the next day angrily poking holes into the Grinch's views, to which the Grinch quickly and emphatically responds. Trying to make himself clearer, he writes that "If any hoboes fit the bill, then sure they are Technically subject to the law. . . Do you REALLY honestly think the government is going to classify a simple tramp as a national security threat?" The list continued to get more hits in the following days about the Security Bill and the new presidential powers of detainment and how it affects them as hobos.

Those who ride trains are now subject to increased watchfulness on the part of the authorities and are under more scrutiny (surfcat even stated on 11.7.02 that the reason for the decrease in traffic and members on the list was that members are "probably paranoid of the FBI (Home Land Security) secretl monitoring the trainhoppers list . . ."). Hobos have always felt this pressure—whether it was vigilante mobs who administered "justice" through clubs and guns, strict vagrancy laws that were implemented in order to obtain

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"free" labor, or modern security systems involving lasers and monitors in yards—and have always subverted these pressures and have continued to sneak on trains and ride them illegally.

The term hobo, then, regardless of (or even in spite of) the hegemonic forces that want to depoliticize and sanitize the term and lifestyle, is subversive and constantly in a state of flux. What is the future for the term and the person living the lifestyle? Will the Hobo National Convention change in the upcoming years when more of the older 'bos are dead or too infirm to make the trek to Britt? Will the new "gutterpunks" and road kids make it to Britt and transform the convention?

There have been attempts to cross generational paths at the convention. For example, Red Bird Express did give Malachi a certificate pronouncing him a Hobo Duke in a ceremony around the main fire, explaining to the audience that he and his ilk were the future of the Hobo population. But the inroads have been small and they might not be enough. Many younger rail riders have boycotted Britt after the refusal by the town to crown as queen one of their own. There is distrust and antagonisms that exists between the old riders and the new.

These antagonisms were in part the subject matter of the documentary *Catching Out* (2002) directed by Sarah George. In a fascinating and cinematically beautifully shot film, the director, over the course of seven years, interviewed both new riders and older hobos. Before shooting this movie, George had never hopped a freight train and had some preconceived notions of what she would find. "Of course, I imagined old men, lines of character creased into their faces, sitting around a campfire and trading stories along with a bottle. I quickly learned that those days were long gone, but the hobo legacy survives

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on the rails today."[64] The film follows active hobos: Lee (an activist and publisher of a hobo zine), Switch and Baby Girl (two full time 'bos who met on the rails), and Jessica (an articulate and educated rider). In the course of the film, the subject of the antagonisms between the older hobos and the younger ones are discussed and there is a discussion of the possibilities of abandoning Britt altogether and starting a new convention somewhere else where the "Flintstones" (another term used by present day rail riders) would feel more welcome and comfortable—or trying to rejuvenate and reform the Britt convention.[65] Some of the older 'bos have also voiced displeasure in the fact that the new riders have not been given the respect that they have deserved in Britt. As Luther "The Jett" says in the movie, "I don't know anything about anarchism. I want to know. And if they're not allowed to talk to me in Britt about it, then we'll go someplace else." The jury is still out but it is apparent that outside of the media spotlight that cannot get enough of the feel-good stories of Steam Train and other older hobos, there is a subculture that is keeping the term, in all of its subversive glory, alive and kicking.

But in order to understand how the present day hobo subculture is viewed and debated, we must first look to the past and understand how canonical writers have interpreted and projected the hobo to its audience. Has there always been an attempt to sanitize the term and its members? In what ways have hobo characters in canonical works been portrayed? Is the hobo subculture portrayed as an active, resistive subculture or have then been seen mostly as a passive, economically draining group of miscreants?

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[64] This material can be found in promotional material for the film: www.worthyent.com/director.html
[65] There are many small gatherings throughout the year of younger rail riders with a large one taking place in Black Butte.

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The answers to these questions, much like the hobos in Britt, are more complex than what first meets the eye.

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CHAPTER II

Jack London's Hobo:
The Individual Impulse Among Class Based Movements

And better friends I'll not be knowing,
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
No matter where it's going.
--Edna St. Vincent Millay

I can't buy a job,
For I ain't got the dough,
So I ride in a box-car,
For I'm a Hobo.
--Harry "Haywire Mac" McClintock

The hobo, when "catching out" and riding the trains illegally, does have subcultural power because he is creating a space for himself by placing his body in opposition to the law and the codes of behavior that attempt to control and monitor his actions. As Michael de Certeau writes of the natives fight for their own space from the Spanish colonizers who were imposing their laws and rituals upon them, "[t]hey were the *other* within the very colonization that outwardly assimilated them; their use of the dominant social order deflected its power, which they lacked the means to challenge; they escaped it without leaving it" (xiii). Unable to escape fully from their oppressors, the natives, as subordinated subjects, manipulated the structures and created spaces that were either unseen or quietly tolerated by the forces of their oppression. As cultural critics de Certeau, John Fiske and others make very clear, it is important for readers, therefore, to analyze how the exploited use the commodities that are at their disposal. "Consumers are immigrants. The system in which they move is too vast to be able to fix them in one place, but too consuming for them to escape from it and go into exile" (40). It is not

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enough to name and count the products that they are using. Rather, it is the *ways of using* these products that are part of everyday life that subcultural critics must reevaluate. The hobo, making himself invisible from the agents of the law who will act upon his body if their gaze falls upon him, hides in the box-cars that criss-cross the United States and uses the railroad for his own illegal subcultural use. As most hobo autobiographies state, there is a feeling of power that comes with the ability of "holding her down" and a real pride that is a result of outwitting and tricking the bulls whose job is specifically to make sure that the 'bo stays off the train. In some of the more boastful autobiographies, the authors point to their strengths and survival skills as reasons for their success, while the less boastful speak of the simple relief of not getting caught or killed. Simply, there is a viable, even intoxicating pleasure that comes with not being seen.

This power to create one's own space within the proper places of society is, however, a fleeting power; it is a power of the weak to "make do" within the proper places of the hegemonic cultures (de Certeau 29-42). The hobo is not calling attention to his challenge to society; he hides from the agents of law and hopes that the bulls will not find him in the shadows of the boxcar. When the train comes to a stop, the hobo, who actively and consciously risks his life by creating his own space on the train, must once again slink away from the yards to avoid detection from the gaze of authority. Losing his invisibility when he is outside of the boxcar, he becomes a sight to be gazed upon when begging, walking to and from the rail yard, or knocking on back doors looking for

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work.[66] An outsider who may or may not be dangerous, his body therefore becomes a site for the law to enact its rules and regulations.

So while "[t]he tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices," the question that still remains to be answered is, "What type of potential/realized political power does the hobo hold?"(xvii) Is it a power that exists only in the moments when the train is cutting across the landscape? Or is it a stable power that can be harnessed for a more collective politics? For although the hobo risks his life when he hops the boxcar, his resistance is in the *invisible* act of stealing a ride from the railroad companies. By being an individualist, is the hobo relegated to the "dangerous class" that Marx quickly discounts without ever exploring: "the social scum, the passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society" that will always be a tool for the capitalist classes and undermine any attempts by the working class to affect changes in their living conditions?" (63).

Although this chapter will deal specifically with the hobo subculture, these questions do speak to larger issues of cultural and literary studies which a) questions the ability of the oppressed subcultures to resist the normative cultures suffocating and controlling practices and b) the value and extent of this resistance to affect concrete charges in the parent cultures. The previous chapter explored the former showing how the hobo subculture does have "real" resistive power (and therefore there are strong

[66] See the chapter entitled, "Retelling Life Stories: Floating Labor and the Terrain of Progressive Era Social Investigation" (98-134) from Higbie's Indispensable Outcast for a detailed study of how outsiders looked upon and formed opinions on the floating workers' subculture.

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attempts to re-coup this subculture in the hegemonic culture through promotion of "safe" cultural memories); this chapter will look at the latter to determine how much potential the hobo had to exert a political class conscious voice that was strong enough to be both heard and felt.

Central to this question is the issue of visibility. For, as previously stated, the power of the hobo resides in the fact that he makes himself invisible to the agents of order—a person who is visible in a boxcar or in a trainyard will soon find herself explaining her trespassing to a police officer and a judge. The visible is the domain of those who have power to exert the law in all areas that they can see. And the railroad allowed for this ordering of space. The iron tracks placed in the ground in the mid-nineteenth century brought much of the country into an ordered, visible sphere of control. These tracks were a controlling force that allowed for differences (different areas, different towns, different ethnicities) to be transformed into a common language that connected people and products; or as *The New York Times* wrote on Sept 9, 1883, "A wilderness is now open to civilization and one which is adequate to support in comfort the surplus population of all Europe." While the frontier was soon to be declared closed, the railroad—with the help of the cheap labor of the "surplus population of Europe"—would help to civilize the interiority of the U.S. The possibilities seemed utopian and inspired Reverend Lyman Abbott to marvel, "[t]he Steel rail he lays is an enchanters wand, and where he enters, a community of homes and a long line of villages spring up as if by magic, and a ceaseless chine of church and schoolhouse bells ring in the advent of a blessed civilization" (as quoted in Schwantes 84). Savage spaces would become

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civilized places. The blessed civilization was inclusive, however, and the elements of disorder would (supposedly) not be tolerated in this new age.

When the proper was established, the borders were formed to set up codes of contact and, therefore, certain other people/actions were deemed improper. "The division of spaces makes possible a panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform forces into objects that can be observed and measured and thus control and include them within the scope of vision" (de Certeau 36). The railroad allowed for spaces to be transformed into places and once this happened, the law had dominion over all that it could gaze upon. Rules of legal conduct were agreed upon and any deviant forms of behavior could be punished. The law controlled all that it could see and had the power of the State to enforce proper actions within its boundaries. The hobo, using tactics that rely on presented opportunities (for example, a moving train with an open boxcar and no bulls or trainmen looking), must stay out of the law's line of sight and remain hidden to be successful and safe. Her subcultural power originates from the fact that she remains invisible. Does the power of the hobo subculture, therefore, have any lasting *potential* power or, when the train dies in the yard, so too does its subcultural power? While de Certeau writes that these acts of individual defiance "transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient" (xxii), is the subculture always destined to be a renter with the State as landlord? Or is there a possible way for the transient to join together with other renters and take control of the tenement?

One important way to understand these questions is to consider how authors have used the hobo figure in their stories and memoirs to deal with these issues. For although

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there have been hundreds of thousands of hobos who have criss-crossed the United States from the day that the Golden Spike was drilled into the ground to the present, only a small minority have written about their experiences. Their words, which have been put into print in newspapers, songbooks, book-length manuscripts, chapbooks, zines and established academic periodicals, and have been passed from one eager hand to another, do have considerable sway over their readers and the way the hobo figure is perceived and understood (and therefore identified) by the reading audience.[67] The hobo is the distant dirty cousin of the cowboy and a reading audience, in search for the darker side of the wandering hero, has been a constant throughout the last hundred years and the pages and pages of print on the hobo does begin to have an authority—especially when the reader does not have any direct contact with the subject. For example, Steam Train Maury Graham, as discussed in my first chapter, does have a considerable sway today on how the hobo is viewed by the general public and his words (as well as his larger-than-life personality) have helped change and make the hobo a more palatable figure in American lore. Steam Train is not a unique hobo; what makes him unique is the fact that he is media savvy and knows how to use this culture to help him promote his own understanding of how the hobo should be remembered. Authority comes from recognition and writers who help produce the culture that they write about are an important lens to look through to understand these questions of the limits of the hobo subcultural power.

[67] For example in Charmane London's biography, London is quoted as saying that throughout his life (and even after) many hobos bragged about riding the rails with London. While they never did, London never minded having his name thrown about realizing that these hobos gained cultural capitol by connecting themselves with the author.

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Two authors, Jack London and John Dos Passos, allow us to read the hobo figure in a way that helps us understand these limits. Both of these writers—London in his autobiography and Dos Passos in his fiction—allow us to trace the contours of the subcultural power of the hobo. Both authors place the hobo within the context of revolutionary organizations and they are invested in understanding the individual within the collective. And it is during the moments when the interests of the individual and the interests of the larger group body diverge that we can pinpoint the limits, as well as the freedoms, of the hobo.

Jack London lived a highly adventurous life and his biography—like many writers who spend their lives creating and recreating themselves—has often been a primary concern of critics. Biographies abound, sustaining myths that have always shadowed his life and writings—myths concerning the physical adventures, the tempestuous love life, the heavy drinking, and his racialist views.[68] As Jeanne Campbell Reesman has noted, there is a need for a less sensational look at London's biography and a more definitive treatment of the author and his personal understanding of revolutionary politics (147).[69] Though there have been critics who have dealt with these jagged

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[68] There is no shortage of biographies on the author. A small sample include biographies by: Georgia Loring Bamford, Daniel Dyer, Becky London Fleming, Martin Johnson, Homer L. Haughey, Joan Hedrick, Alex Kershaw, Charmian London, Joan London, Russ Kingman, Joseph Noel, Richard O'Connor, Alan Schroeder, Martin Stoddard, Anna Strunsky Walling.

[69] Jeanne Campbell Reesman, "Prospects for the Study of Jack London," *Resources for American Literary Study* 25.2 (1999): 147. A partial list of critics with varying views of London's politics: William E. Cain's "Socialism, Power and the Fate of Style: Jack London and his Letters," *American Literary History* 3.3 (1991): 603-613, Christopher Gair's Complicity and Resistance in Jack London's Novels (Edwin Mellen 1997), Steven Dhondt's "There is a Good Time Coming: Jack London's Spirit of Proletarian Revolt." *Jack London Newsletter* 3.1 (1970): 25-34, Frederick Feied's *No Pie in the Sky* (Writers Club Press, 2001), Eric Homberger's *American Writers and Radical Politics 1900-39* (St Martin's Press, 1986). While these authors do in some ways look at the hobo days of London, none spend any analysis on the nuances and complexities of the hobo lifestyle itself.

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intersections of his life and ideologies, there has been little concrete exploration of the effect that London's career as a hobo had on his political outlook. While Richard Etulain's *Jack London on the Road* is a wonderful resource that collected his "tramp" articles and short stories, as well as the author's daily journal of his travel experiences with Charles Kelley's Industrial Army in the spring of 1894, few critics have analyzed and explored the importance that the hobo life had for London. When they have dealt with this issue, most see this time of London's life when he hopped box-cars as a space that "tempered his naively individualist attitude and started his questioning of the American socio-economic system"(Labor 32). It is my contention, however, that we must tread more carefully over this ground and concentrate concretely on the politics of the hobo lifestyle in order to comprehend the ramifications of these experiences for London and his perception of collective action. We must, therefore, first take a step back and spend time exploring the political nature of illegally hopping trains before we can assess what these experiences had on the work and life of the author. In other words: without knowing the hobo, we will not know Jack London.

Analyzing Jack London's hobo travels with Kelley's Army in the last decade of the nineteenth century will help us begin to answer these central questions. While London's individualism preceded his hobo travels, the way that he constructed the hierarchy of the hobo lifestyle allowed him to become a "tramp-royal" in a subculture and therefore celebrate and justify his individualism—at the cost of others around him. We should therefore not discount London's hoboing as only a small footnote to his many "learning experiences" that introduced him to class-based politics. Rather, we must look at reasons why London felt the need and the right to place his desires as a hobo over the

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needs of the Industrial Army. London's travels with, and attitudes towards, the Industrial Army focuses our attention on the politics of invisibility in connection with the politics of a class based visual movement.

Dos Passos, both in his groundbreaking and experimental *USA* trilogy as well as in *Streets of Night* and *Manhattan Transfer*, also wonders about the possibilities of grass roots political change and the use of the everyday man to affect it. Although none of these texts center on the hobo figure (they, in fact, do not center on any one character) they do, however, deal with one important concept: movement. It is the ability to move that allows the characters to be successful. Dos Passos then, using the hobo figure, allows the reader to wander/wonder with these characters to answer an important question: do these travels need to be solitary to be successful of can they be part of a brotherhood?

By looking at both of these authors, we will be able to see how the hobo figure—by living and dying along this borderland area—is used to play out the tensions that exists between individual consciousness and class consciousness. We will also examine how canonical writers, mixing memories and political leanings, use this figure in order to question the limits of this particular subcultural power as well as to shed light on some of the structures that are in place to censure it when it makes itself too visible.

Jack London as a Road Kid

In order for us to understand London's social and political make-up in 1894, however, we must look back a few years to his first train-hopping experience when he

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was a young man of 16 and had thoughts of suicide running through his head (Joan London 48). Increasingly disillusioned with factory work and the books that he had been reading, and feeling that his life as the hard drinking "Prince of the Oyster Pirates" was not rewarding enough, London found himself in 1892, at the young age of sixteen, sailing away from the law and hiding out along the Sacramento waterfront where he met some "road kids" who were swimming in the ocean. Never having met anyone like them before, he was instantly intrigued. The first thing that attracted London was the way that they talked: "It was a new vernacular. They were road-kids, and with every word they uttered, the lure of The Road laid hold of [me] more imperiously" (Jack London *Novels and Social Writings* 277).[70] Language, for the would-be writer, was what mainly attracted him, but it was also his desire for the adventures of the Iron Road about which these young hobos talked—adventures "that made [his] oyster-piracy look like thirty cents."[71] His awe, however, did not last long and, in fact, after first being enamored with their language, he soon dismissed them, writing, "I was just as strong as any of them, just as quick, just as nervy, and my brain was just as good" (278).

While it is true that no one could ever accuse London of being modest, his statement shows that he saw the road as a means of competition with the "road kids," and instead of just desiring to join them for a strictly communal adventure, he needed to prove to himself that he was better than they. So he set himself up for the test, and,

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[70] The following quotes may also be found on the Jack London Collection website which is a professional and wonderful resource for all scholars of London. Found on this easily navigated site are whole books and articles that London published. See: http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/Writings/TheRoad/. The original publishing information for this book is *The Road.*

[71] In his early tramp short stories that he wrote for his high school newspaper *The Aegis*, London would try to capture this language. See "Frisco Kid's Story" and "Frisco Kid Came Back" reprinted in Richard Etulain's, *Jack London on the Road: The Tramp Diary and Other Hobo Writings.*

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quickly gaining the moniker of "Sailor Kid," he and another novice, "French Kid," attempted to hop a train that was going "over the hill" (the Sierra Nevadas), which would initiate them into this subculture and allow them to be recognized as authentic "road kids." It was a tough first journey in which London not only had to pass undetected by the railroad men but also forty or so "road kids" who, in an initiation rite, tried to ditch him and his companion.[72] But while "all" of the other experienced and inexperienced hobos had been thrown off the train by the railroad crew and "French Kid" had slipped, losing both legs under the wheels of the train, London, "alone, had made the train out." And this was his initiation to the road: a novice who had never hopped a boxcar before was not only able to survive his first foray into riding the rails but also succeeded where all the experienced hobos had failed. He was a self-professed "natural," and, because of his skill and nerve in his very first trip, he was able to skip over many of the stages in the hierarchal learning process of the hobo, evolving from a "road-kid" to a "blowed-in-the-glass profresh" without ever having to be a "graycat" or a "prushan" (inexperienced travelers who were often the "possession" or "punk" of the profresh).[73] Most germane to

[72] It is interesting to note that while these "road kids" were friendly to London, they also participated in this competition where they "weeded out" the individuals who could not survive the Iron Road. This is very different from many hobo autobiographies where there is not this type of rite of passage or, for example, from *Wild Boys of The Road* (Wellman 1933) in which the road kids stuck and planned together forming a force that was both successful (killing a trainmen who raped one of their fellow friends) and unsuccessful (trying to fight the police who, using water guns, broke up their shanty town where they were staying). They always, however, worked together. The competition aspect of London's group is not there in *Wild Boys*. This is not to suggest that there was no community among London's gang, but that the element of competition, so crucial to London's identity and political understanding, was present in large quantities with these young train-hoppers.

[73] London describes the gay–cat as, "short-horns," "new chums," and "tenderfeet" (285). The prushan was a young, inexperienced traveler, a "punk" who was the "possession" of the profresh. London in his brief discussion of the prushan makes no mention of the sexual relations that often existed between the prushan and the older hobo who was often called "a wolf." This might be one of the reasons, however, why he is adamant about the fact that he "was never a prushun, for [he] did not take kindly to possession," and why he did not want to "own" any younger travelers. See *Boy and Girl Tramps in America* by Thomas Minehan

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this dissertation is London's desire from his very first ride to prove that he could handle the Iron Road as well as or better than anyone else; he wanted to be part of the "profresh" class who were, as he wrote without any sense of irony (and, at the same time, completely misrepresenting the philosopher), "the lords and masters, the aggressive men, the primordial noblemen, the *blond beasts* so beloved by Nietzsche."

While London felt he had a lot to learn from the road kids in terms of begging and "the strong arm" (a technique for robbing unsuspecting victims), he knew, from the very first trip, that he was one of the "knights of the road" because he placed himself in a situation where he would either survive or perish—and he had succeeded where all others had failed.[74] And while those who did not have London's skills or bravery might (literally) fall to the side of the road—and in the case of "French Kid" lose both legs in the process—London rose to the top of this subcultural society by himself. He wrote himself as the hero of a bastardized American Dream story; the "lord and master" of all

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and *The Hobo* by Nels Anderson for a more detailed view and analysis of hobo sexuality. The sexual innuendos aside, London's desire for individuality and superiority within the hobo subculture would not allow him to consider himself a gay-cat.

[74] Begging is a big issue for many novice hobos and one that most hobo autobiographies mention. At first, there is usually a revulsion to begging and then some type of acceptance to this facet of the hobo lifestyle. For example, in *The Other Half: The Autobiography of a Tramp* (New York: Furman, inc., 1937), John Worby tried to get enough courage to beg for the first time but as he writes, "After a mental argument with myself I gained enough courage to get as far as the door of a slum house, but when it came to ringing, my courage failed me" (54). Woody Guthrie in his autobiography *Bound for Glory* (New York: Signet, 1943), spends many pages discussing the humiliating experience of his first begging experience. And while he at first was "too proud to go out like the other men and knock at the doors" (201), he eventually learns from the older 'bos who not only told them the necessity of begging for a job/food but also the areas of the towns to do so. "Foolish pride" (15) was also the reason why Charles P. Barth, who wrote *in Hobo Trail to Nowhere*, was not able to ask for a handout early in his career on the road. Archie Lawson in *Freight Trains West* wrote of his first experience that, "It was an emotional shameful thing that is almost impossible for me to explain. I was practically crying, my face was red, I felt defeated . . . I went out like a dog between his legs" (24). London, too, had discomfort while begging but soon found himself able to participate in the hobo way of life. As stated earlier in this article, begging forced the hobo to lose his invisibility and offer his body up for inspection, and therefore, while hard on his pride, could also have ramifications on his freedom of movement.

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other illegal train riders who could not reach his stature, and, when he had won and was standing above all others, he simply left the road and his friends and headed back for the coast.

This immediate success (and his willingness to brag about it) is not necessarily the case with other writers who have ridden the rails and it does foreshadow his competitive relationship with Coxey's army. For example, Steam Train Maury Graham (who spent decades longer on the road than London) went through a long learning process, spending time with older hobos in the jungles around his home, asking questions and learning about proper ways to hop trains before he embarked on his first ride. And while hopping that first train was a solitary experience (even though he had a traveling companion, the moment of jumping on a freight is still a solitary moment as nervous hands grip steal) he was more confident because he had questioned those who had gone before him for advice and suggestions. Other young travelers who took to the roads for immediate concerns such as economic desperation and therefore didn't have the luxury of a "proper" education were usually not as lucky as London on their first rides. Jim Tully, who received attention for his later books but is known specifically for his hobo memoir *Beggars of Life* that was turned into a 1928 movie of the same name staring Louise Brooks, wrote "I made three unsuccessful journeys before I finally became even an amateur hobo. For it may be recorded here that hoboes regard their chosen profession seriously. There is much to learn in the game and more to endure" (11). Unlike London's bravado, Bill Bailey writes in *Bill Bailey Came Home* of the fear that flashed through his mind as he waited for his first freight train. And while he was able to get on the train safely enough (unlike London, he hid in a Pullman when the train was stationary and not

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moving), his first attempt to get off the moving train showed his inexperience; "I jumped straight out the door. I hit on my feet alright but my body kept going. I made more rolls than are put in a cinnamon bun. How many times I have no idea till I came to a halt with a well bruised body" (152). After recuperating, he eagerly learned from some more experienced hobos "just how to catch a fast-moving train, as well as to hit the ground when you are leaving it" and in the following three months, slowly (and painfully) learned the way of hobo life (156). Charles P. Barth in his hobo memoir *Hobo Trail to Nowhere* also had trouble leaving the train during his first experience, "In getting off, I stumbled and fell rolling over the rock ballast." An older hobo, who saw him take his tumble, helped him up and, cautioning, said, "Lucky you didn't roll the other way—under the wheels" before instructing him on how to survive as a hobo (10). Archie Lawson in his memoir *Freight Trains West* had no problem getting onto his first box-car in the dark but a few minutes into the ride he and his friend, not knowing the rules of the road, were attacked by the brakeman and robbed of their money (20). John Worby in *The Other Half: The Autobiography of a Tramp,* a man not unfamiliar with danger, wrote that while he was "thrilled with all the banging of cars, train whistles and bells and the steaming up and shunting of the freights" during his first train ride he was afraid of his lack of knowledge of riding and therefore nervously seeks advice from a hobo who was traveling in the same box car (42). Jack Black in his memoir *You Can't Win* barely survives his first ride when the lumber in his Pullman shifted and fell on top of him; another hobo who was also traveling in the same car did not. Black writes in graphic prose about his discovery of the fellow hobo, "his body, from the waist up, was flattened by the lumber and the front end of the car. His legs dangled below, down where I was

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imprisoned, with each movement of the car, like the legs of a scarecrow in the wind" (62).

While all of these authors were concerned with their lack of knowledge and seek advice from others riders who, for the most part, do help their novice brethren, London, who rode for a lot less time than these writers, never felt the need to question others about the rules of riding freights. The chance communality of these hobos seeking out advice is not present within London's texts. London pinpoints his reasoning for his success on his individualism and understanding of Nietzchean philosophy. While there is no time in this article to discuss London's misreading of philosophers which underwrote his personal and (constantly changing) political views, it is important to note that London conflates Social Darwinism with Nietzschean philosophy and his misreading allows him to believe that his quest to rule over this underworld is a masculine ideal of which both philosophers would approve. Social Darwinism influences London's desire to be the top "road kid"(even if he had only ridden for a few weeks) because he wanted to be one of Nietzsche's feared and respected blond beasts (he refers to this term in many essays in which he talks of his travels on the road). Eight years after he rode with the Industrial army, London wrote "Rods and Gunnels," where he clearly defines and adamantly defends the "profresh" title lending an insight into why this accolade is so important to him:

> They are the lords and masters, the aggressive men, the primordial noble men, the blond beasts of Nietzsche, lustfully roving and conquering through sheer superiority and strength. Unwritten is the law they impose. They are the Law, the Law incarnate. And the underworld

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> looks up and obeys. They are not easy of access. They are conscious of their own nobility and treat only with equals. (Eutlain 95)[75]

London thought of himself as belonging to the class of nobility that was the law—a man who had dominion over all in the underworld and who had to be respected for he himself was able to make the rules. There is a very strict divide for London in the hobo underworld, and, as "the Law," he did not want to unite this subculture—he wanted to hierarchize and separate it. Like an army, the "profresh" are "conquerors" and their "superiority" and "strength" allow them to decide the rules in their own world. They constitute a hyper-masculine ideal, and, for London, they establish the law that all others must obey if they want to reach his stature. Interestingly, while London received his subcultural pleasure from being a "profresh" and becoming the law of the underworld, he must still remain invisible from the dominant culture's agents of law to remain in his top hobo position.

Throughout London's massive *oeuvre,* the presence of the law is central to his thinking. In what is probably London's most famous novel, *The Call of The Wild*, Buck, the fearless St. Bernard/Scotch Shepherd dog, ruled the kind Judge Miller's house in

[75] While this article was written after London had begin to embrace socialism, he is adamant about calling attention to the strict hierarchy that is in place in this subculture. The article itself was written "to correct some of this misinformation" (89) about the hierarchy of the rail riders and to distinguish and describe "professional Trampland" (90) for his readers who might mistakenly consider all tramps the same. He has special contempt for the sociologists who only interview the "stew-bums" and the "gay-cats" who are unmanly in London's eyes and therefore the reading public is getting a skewed view of the "master" train rider. There is a very strict divide for London in the hobo underworld and as the Law, he wanted to place very specific borders around the internal class systems as well as have road signs that marked these divisions. Jack London did write a lot of material in his life and he was always trying to sell articles for money to support his adventures (and to pay for his families living expenses) and thus, he is prone to contradict himself at times. Although there are gaps in time between his travels with the Industrial Army and when he wrote about his experiences on the road and therefore some inconsistencies in his writing, it is my contention that even though his sympathies and political identification might change, his desire to be the "profresh" in everything that he does never wavered. The hobo lifestyle allowed him to celebrate and justify his individualism.

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Sunny California but quickly learned in the cold climate of the Klondike that "a man with a club was a lawgiver, a master to be obeyed"(London *Call of the Wild* 13). Those who had the power to inflict their law on the physical body were to be strictly obeyed; Buck understood the law after three brutal swings of the Man-With-The-Red-Sweater's stick. De Certeau is even more adamant about the relationship between the law and the (social/individual) body writing that, "a body is itself defined, delimited and articulated by what writes it. There is no law that is not inscribed on the body" (113). Law for both de Certeau and London is something that must be learned not as an abstract concept but rather felt and experienced in the blood and skin of its subjects. Buck felt the sting of the club on his back (and his side and nose) and learned to respect the law; London, who witnessed an actual whipping while he was tramping across the country, knew that the body always broke under the law and cognizant of this fact, was able for the most part to avoid spilling his own blood: when he saw that the law was bigger than him, he simply walked away.

This refusal to directly confront the law can be seen in one of his later hobo adventures when London met a group of itinerant fakir's and felt an immediate bond with them. As he wrote, "I was the American hobo, and they were the American gypsy. I knew enough of their argot for conversation and they knew enough of mine" (*Novels and Social Writings* 222). While sitting in the grass and enjoying the conversation and a glorious day, two young boys committed some small infraction and the "chief of the tribe" who was "the Law, pitiless and omnipotent . . . picked up a heavy whip" and inflicted twelve fierce blows on one of the boys. When the second boy, after receiving heavy lashes that caused blood to run "down his thin little legs" could not take any more

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of the beating, a young woman threw herself in front of the blows and received lashes from the man to her face and wrists, shoulder and arms (223). London, appalled and watching this scene play out in front of him, however, did nothing to interfere. He explains his non-action, writing, "Nor did I move, and without shame I say it . . .I knew life . . .the reason why I did not interfere was . . .that the law was stronger than I" (225). On further reflection of the incident, London challenges the reader who might be aghast at the fact that he did nothing; "Well, and what of it? It was a page out of life, that's all; and there are many pages worse, far worse, that I have seen" (226). For London therefore, as is the case with de Certeau, the law is intimately connected with the physical infliction of its power on the body. De Certeau explicitly writes, "it remains that the law constantly writes itself on bodies. It engraves itself on parchments made from the skin of its subjects . . . Every power, including the power of law, is written first of all on the back of its subject" (139-140). London is in agreement of this interpretation of the law and both in the character of Buck and in his own personal travels, respects any law that is greater than him. Knowing that he did not have the power to challenge some laws that were too powerful for him, he chose rather to become the law in the underworld of the illegal train jumper.

How, then, does London deal with the apparent inconsistency of being a "noble man" and yet, at the same time, being forced to hide and remain invisible from the agents of law and order? The answer lies in his understanding of Nietzsche. Being a part of this elite group of blond beasts—a group based on individual masculine ideals of fearlessness, strength, and skill—allows London to place himself as both the dispenser and the very embodiment of the law thus recouping any feelings of inferiority. He is playing by his

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own set of rules: the fact that he is invisible to the agents of the State is, in fact, *the very thing* that makes him part of the nobility of the underworld. The hobo lifestyle, therefore, has allowed London to become the roving "lord and master." Those "gay-cats" and inexperienced rail travelers that London so despises will eventually be seen and caught by the bulls, but the "profresh" will remain undetected and able to ride the train for as long as he wishes. Instead of reading his invisibility and hiding as a mark of weakness, London wears them as badges of honor.

But what happens when the individualist who focuses on his own body is introduced to the politics of communal action that stresses common collective fights of workers and class struggles? What happens when the "profresh," who London describes as a type of general of the army of professional train riders, comes into contact with another type of army of unemployed? How does the individual bow (if he does at all) to the greater cause? For London, as is quite apparent in his travels with Kelley's Industrial Army in the Spring of 1894, bowing to a collective's needs was something he was unable to do—before the beleaguered army finally made it to the capitol, London was off by himself encountering new adventures on the road. But he was present for part of the march east, and according to Carl Browne, organizer and Chief Marshal of Coxey's army, London's connection to the Industrial Army was "one of the most fundamental influences in his career and had much with making him a pioneer socialist soapboxer in Oakland a few years later" (28). But although his travels had an effect on his view of collective politics, to what extent did they allow him to view the individual body any differently?

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LONDON AND THE INDUSTRIAL ARMIES

The early nineties found the country in much distress. The Populist Party was gaining momentum and votes at the polls; there were large strikes, such as the mass 1892 strike in the Carnegie Steel Works that drew battle lines between three hundred Pinkerton detectives and angry strikers; the "gold standard" was being debated in Congress and the street corners across the country; Eugene V. Deb's, president of the American Railway Union, was thrown into jail and becoming more politized and recognized by people throughout the country. Questions were being raised in all sectors of the country about "the hierarchal assumptions about property rights, women's subordination and white supremacy" (Dawley 18). In the midst of this flux, the country was experiencing cyclical recessions with farmers and industrial workers finding themselves out of jobs and homes, hitting the road searching for some sort of employment. "The result was perhaps the most severe financial crisis through which this country had passed, with runs on the banks, business failures and unemployment" (McMurry 4). The country was in a crisis as it neared the end of the century, and the future was anything but certain. From this confusion and anger, on Easter Sunday, March 25, 1894, General Coxey and his "Commonweal of Christ" Industrial army, marched out of Massillon, Ohio and headed West to Washington, D.C. to demand relief for the disgruntled and disposed workingmen of the country. Without much of a concrete plan, the idea was that sheer numbers of workingmen making themselves *seen* in Washington could bring about favorable changes and relief to the very desperate men and women who made the march. And although Coxey's division was the most well known of the army, there were different fronts to this

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"Petition in Boots" with Kelley, Fry, and Hogan among others tramping East in a seemingly rebuke to Horace Greeley's "Go West, Young Man!" proclamation. The plan was that all of these divisions were to converge on the country's capitol on May Day and, in mass protest, raise their voices and demand that more support and allowances be given to the workers of the country. There was a sincere belief that their physicality on the lawns of the white house would force efforts by the government to materialize.

When all was said and done, however, the realization of the reforms sought by Coxey and his men were not achieved. Although most who started out on their journeys did not in fact make it to Washington, those who did were a much weakened outfit (both in numbers and health) and their bodies were not collectively substantial enough to favorably persuade those that were making the laws. "Congress did nothing more than disregard or suppress those of its members who talked about Coxeyism too charitably and the police and the local authorities did the rest" (262). And as Carlos Schwantes summarizes, "The result was that when the Coxey movement ended, the railroads backed by the Federal government had established even greater dominion over small-town America" (103).

To read this march and judge it only in its end result, however, would not do it justice. Many thousands of men were on the road to make their political voices heard, and more telling, many thousands of men, women and children, who were in the towns that the army visited, helped the army by supplying them with food, shelter and entertainment. They were there along the routes that the army marched cheering these men as they made their way to Washington. At times, these citizens also stood with the army and were arrested for blocking police and U.S. army regulars who were attempting

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to enforce the laws—some even giving their lives as they fought along side the industrial armies. And although it is certainly true that many of the citizens and officials fed these men in order to keep them moving so they would not bankrupt the town, it is also true that many were sympathetic to this traveling group of unemployed men.

There were a myriad of reasons why these ordinary men and women of the country were sympathetic and followed the industrial armies treks closely in the newspapers and discussed them openly and passionately from the pulpits to the saloons. Germane to this argument, though, is that many of the men and women of the West were antagonistic to the railroad and to what they perceived were the harmful effects of the Iron Horse upon their lives. The railroad became the symbol for greed and one of the greatest causes for the panics of the late nineteenth century and many cheered uproariously when an army of disgruntled men were able to physically take on the trains and the companies who were having direct harmful effects on their lives.

The belief in the utopian value of the railroad was not being realized by many who had pinned (or whom had been forced to pin) their hopes on this new technological wonder. Although Reverend Abbott spoke so highly of the civilizing aspects of the railroad, George Herron, the evangelist and Christian socialist, understood the railway system as "a greater menace and perpetuity of the nation than even the institution of slavery (Smith 102). Even though the transcontinental railroad allowed many workers to imagine a better land in the West—much like Steinbeck's "Oakies," the workers came to California and other places West of the Mississippi with promises of a better life—the jobs were not always present. What was once frontier land was now sensitive to the

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economic rise and falls of the East. "The pendulums of depressions and recoveries now swung from coast to coast" (Joan London 15).

As Henry Adams wrote succinctly, "The generation between 1865 and 1895 was already mortgaged to the railroads and no on knew it better than the generation itself" (Smith 90). For many of these dispossessed workers, their ire was often directed at the railroads themselves whose profit base grew as farmers lost their homesteads to the banks. Industrial workers, whose job conditions were getting more dangerous even as their pay lessened, were finding it hard to find and keep a job. Coupled with this disappointment of their own personal lack of employment was the obvious and blatant connection of these private corporations and their intimate and perceived illicit relationship with the government. With the federal government giving land grants to companies, the railroads expanded into territories, stabilizing the land and thereby one of the major factories contributing to the creation of states.[76] These railroad companies were not always successful and by 1895, one year after the March on Washington, the Federal courts "were operating nearly one-fourth of all the railroads in the nation through court appointed receivers, many of whom were the men who had run the lines into bankruptcy by stock manipulations" (101). These observations were not lost on the average citizen and anger was bubbling over towards these corporations. The transcontinental railroad did offer possibilities. But when those possibilities weren't met, many from the working classes (as well as the middle class who were also feeling the

[76] Page Smith writes of these grants, "The number of acres given the railroads [by states] totals some 164,000,000—an area larger than all the lands granted individuals under the terms of the Homestead Act, four-fifths as large as five states of the Old Northwest or almost as large as the combined acreages of California and Nevada (99).

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pains of the recessions), envisioned the railroad in many ways that Presely, an easterner transported to the West in Frank Norris's indictment of the railroad and first book in his proposed Trilogy of Wheat, *The Octopus* (1901), understood the Iron Horse.

One day, as Presley is traveling through the ranches and "the feeling of absolute peace and quiet and security and untroubled happiness and content seemed descending from the stars like a benediction," there "was suddenly an interruption" when he runs into the tracks of the new railroad that had been laid in the earth:

> He had only time to jump back upon the embankment when, with a quivering of all the earth, a locomotive, single, unattached, shot by him with a roar, filling the air with the reek of hot oil, vomiting smoke and sparks; its enormous eye, cyclopean, red, throwing a glare far in advance; shooting by in a sudden crash of confused thunder; filling the night with the terrific clamor or its iron hoofs. (40-41)

Presley, who has a potential poem of the glories of the rural West in his head that vanishes upon running into a cyclopean monster steaming past him (Norris is never one to understate a metaphor), is almost killed by the train—a single locomotive that has no apparent reason to exist except to be a menace. Its power is not being harnessed for anything other than for its own power; it is not carrying people, or crops, or animals for markets. Seemingly, almost out of pure malice, the machine causes a quivering to the once peaceful earth. The potential for the train was immense and utopian for many of the proponents of the railroad but, for Presley in *The Octopus*, and many men and women who had become harmfully reliant on the trains, the railroad was an oppressive force. And although the average man and woman at the turn of the century might not have vocalized their anger at the railroad in apocalyptic terms as "the leviathan with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless force, the ironhearted power, the monster, the

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colossus, the octopus," they were comfortable enough to condone the "emancipation" of trains by the industrial armies (and in some cases actively help them in their attempts to steal the trains) and to support the armies as they tramped across their land in order to make a collective stand in Washington (42). The railroad was at the center of conversation and debate at the turn of the century and, to some, "[a]ll that was best and worst in America seemed caught up in the railroad mania" (Smith 89). The transcontinental railroad, which was promoted by entrepreneurs and politicians as a unifying force had ironically—as the industrial armies showed—turned into exactly that; ordinary citizens were beginning to be unified against the railroad companies and its powerful tentacles.

Hobos, however, had been unified in one particular sentiment from the beginning; they believed that they were free to ride the trains as they wished. Unlike the industrial armies who made their presence both felt and seen—it is impossible, after all, to hide a thousand men on a train—hopping freights for the hobos meant staying hidden from the gaze of authority. For London and his ilk, the professional train-rider dictates the rules of the game for himself and therefore feels in control of his destiny. To be part of the nobility, therefore, the hobo must remain invisible and ride a train without being thrown off by bulls or the train crew. For London, it was a competition the hobo, as personified by him, could always win. As he writes confidently in *The Road*:

> Barring accidents, a good hobo, with youth and agility, can hold a train down despite all the efforts of the train-crew to ditch him—given of course night-time as the essential condition. When such a hobo under such conditions makes up his mind that he is going to hold her down, either he does hold her down or chance trips him up. There is no legitimate way, short of murder, where-by the train crew can ditch him. (202)

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As long as it is dark and chance does not look unfavorably on the noble train hopper, the hobo will always be able to ride. In his chapter, "Holding Her Down," which discusses his hobo travels in the mid 1890's, London explains in detail the competition that is involved between the individual 'bo and the rest of the "world" of the train—including bulls, train crew and, most tellingly, *other hobos*. London, much like his initial ride when he met the "road kids," explains that his attempt to ride a train that is guarded by "two brakemen, a conductor, a fireman, and an engineer" is an individual contest, lacking all feelings of cooperation with the other twenty 'bos who are also trying to ride out (205). When the train starts moving, all head for it. London, as an individualist and therefore in direct competition with the other 'bos for a spot on the train, wants to be the top "tramp-royal" who alone makes it out. The train crew is ready, however, and with clubs in their hands reminiscent of The-Man-With-The-Red-Sweater, they quickly knock off five of the least experienced. "The weeding out process had begun nobly, and it continued station by station. Now we were fourteen, now twelve, now eleven, now nine, now eight." As a "profresh," London is actively hoping for his fellow riders to be knocked off and as he writes in his overtly racist language, "It reminded me of the ten little niggers of the nursery rhyme . . . . If I weren't the last nigger, I might as well quit the game and get a job on an alfalfa farm somewhere" (206).[77]

[77] My analyses of London is not an apologia for his racist ideals. His view of the superiority of the white race over all other races is evident in his work and has been a central discussion in many articles written on London. Some critics lament the fact that London has been now remembered mostly for his infuriating racial understanding, such as Leonard Cassuto, who in his article entitled, "Jack London's Class-Based Grotesque" writes, "Just as Poe is known for his Gothic horror rather than his light and humorous fiction (which exists in equal measure) London has come to be remembered for his Darwinian extremes rather than his more reflective and equivocal writings. A certain rugged individualism is of course undeniable in London's work, but the extended attention given to it has tended to obscure what Earle Labor in his

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And indeed, through daring and skillful moves, he is able to outlast all other 'bos and outwit the train crew who, although they know that he is somewhere on their train, cannot see him and are unable to get their hands on him. In a moment of realization, London, tired and out of breath, suddenly understands the enormity of what he has done and writes, "As I wait in the darkness I am conscious of a big thrill of pride. The overland has stopped twice for me—poor me, a poor hobo on the bum. I alone have twice stopped the overland with its many passengers and coaches, its government mail, and its two thousand steam horses straining in the engine. And I weigh only one hundred and sixty pounds and I haven't a five-cent piece in my pocket!" (207-208). London as an individual ("I alone") is able to take on the physicality of the powerful locomotive and stop it dead in its tracks, not allowing the mail and passengers to get to their destinations on time. In this David and Goliath scenario, the boy wins: "It was five to one, including the engineer and the fireman and the majesty of the law and the might of the great corporation are behind them, and I am beating them out" (211). Although it is not a knock-out shot, London does earn the reluctant respect of the crew who, after a consultation among themselves, know that they are beaten and say, "Well, I guess you can ride, Bo. There's no use trying to keep you off" (216).

And although, for London, this is proof that the professional hobo can always win, the law, however, is actually never fully defeated—the train crew still *allows* London to ride. There is a ceiling to the power of the 'bo and London, through his skill and bravery, is hitting his head against it. If they had wanted to, the train crew could

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analysis of "Koolau the Leper" cites as his sympathy for the "underdog" in Society" (126). It is my opinion that his need for racial superiority also parallels his need to be the top "profresh" and his willingness to sacrifice all those who cannot "beat" him.

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have stopped the train indefinitely and called in more authorities to capture the young hobo. In other words, London's subcultural power, as de Certeau would note, is a fleeting one that he must give up as soon as he wins it. The train moves again and people and merchandise, even though slightly delayed, get to their stations. The hobo's resistance has caused an inconvenience but has not led to any lasting changes. Since London has created a new set of rules for himself, however, by remaining invisible, he has become the law in the underworld and his actions on this train have proved that he is part of the upper echelon of illegal train hoppers. For the hobos who were left on the side of the road, and for the train crew who could not get its hands on him, London is recognized as a premier hobo who, for a night at least, bested all others. And for young Jack London, breathing deeply in the dark and swelling with pride, that is enough.

For others who were not looking for adventures but rather wanted to find work, however, those solitary moments in the dark were not enough: invisibility had extremely limited effects on the hegemonic ideology that they wanted to change. Many, who found themselves without jobs at the close of the nineteenth century, were not interested in creating new invisible subcultural systems or laws, nor did they take pride in self-appointed titles as "profresh" or "comet." Rather, they wanted to publicly announce their demands for jobs and opportunities. Frustrated and angry, these dispossessed workers wanted to make sure that they were being counted by the politicians and that their demands would be acknowledged and acted upon. The best place to make a visible display of their poverty they felt would be in the nation's capitol. And although some were prepared to walk, most were determined to head to Washington on the same object that forced many out of their jobs—the railroad.

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When Kelley rose from the ranks of the largest industrial army and gained control of his men in April of 1894, it was not only for practical reasons that he demanded from the Southern Pacific Railroad transportation for his first small leg of his journey from Oakland to Sacramento. Knowing that they could not make it to Washington by foot and also realizing that the railroads of the West would therefore play an important role in his crusade, Kelley did what the hobo could not—he raised his voice to the railroad corporations and started demanding that both he and his men ride free (Schwantes 84). When he was quickly refused (and sent to jail), he replied that he was going to again demand transportation the next day, he frankly told reporters, "I cannot tell you what are plans are for we have not made any. We have our rights as poor men and we must have them." Kelley was mixing both a veiled threat and a fierce, almost religious, determination that would categorize most of the armies sentiments (McMurry 151). And after leaving the jail, he rallied the men by climbing on the roof of the railroad car (symbolically taming the beast), urging them to stay and fight together because among other things, public opinion was on Kelley and his men's side. In California, there was a particular "hatred of the Southern Pacific, whose monopoly in California was greater than any of the railroads anywhere" and "[b]itterness against the Southern Pacific, which opposed the army with every means at its disposal, was shared by middle and working class alike, and sympathy with the industrials grew from day to day" (Joan London 19, 72). The mayor of Oakland, feeling the pressure from citizens who supported these men as well as having the drain of 1,000+ army regulars (who still needed to eat) on the local economy, convinced the railroad to offer boxcar transportation. Kelley, after receiving this concession, at first refused, demanding coaches instead of boxcars to take him and

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his men, stating, "We, the industrial army, emphatically refuse to ride in boxcars. We are the United States citizens and not hogs. When we are furnished with proper transportation will then proceed to Sacramento, not otherwise" (McMurry 154-155). Kelley, however, realizing that this deal was the best that he and his men were going to get, soon accepted and the army was off on its first leg of its trip.

One of the principle reasons that the Southern Pacific finally complied was because the company was eager to get the men out of their territory because public opinion did not look favorably on the S.P. after their handling of General Fry's branch of the industrial army, who was also heading towards Washington hoping to meet up with General Coxey. There was an open hostility between the corporation and the army and when Fry's men were unable to get transportation. Unlike Kelley's division that repeatedly demanded for transportation, Fry's men took a more direct route and simply "captured" a train as they were trying to make it through the driest and most desolate country near Coltron, Texas. While the men did "steal" the train, they figured that they had the company's implicit acceptance since the crewmen made no attempt to dislodge them as they headed for El Paso and the army thought that they had a straight run through Texas. The S.P., however, had a surprising move in store for the army and seventy miles east of El Paso in the Chihuahua Desert, "the train suddenly swung onto a siding, the cars uncoupled from a locomotive and the men were left stranded" (Schwantes 92). Furthermore, in a move that seemed to be for pure spite, the Texas Rangers were then ordered to protect railroad property and to not allow the men to eat the citrus fruit that were in some of the cars. The men were stuck in the sun with the only option being to starve to death (walking to the nearest town was impossible). Even so, the Southern

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Pacific adamantly refused to move the train out of the desert. When called to account for their actions, Superintendent W.G. Van Vleck said, "Well, I hardly think that there is any law to compel us to transport people who refuse to pay their fare. Of course, if there is, we will obey its mandate" (94). The S.P. was attempting to show that the company was the one following the law and therefore could get away with what Governor Hogg and others described as murder.[78] Hogg (who was never a supporter of the railroad) demanded that the Southern Pacific transport these men out of the desert and finally the Southern Pacific, after realizing that they were making enemies out of many, capitulated and offered to take the men back to El Paso. The citizens of this city were scared of having to support the army and quickly raised money to push the men the other way.

Officials of the government and the railroad companies now hit the law books trying to determine what was the legally correct move of transporting men with no money across state lines. The fear was not just about this one instance but they were concerned about the precedent they could set. While Fry's army were eventually pushed forward, it did make many people uneasy about the consequences. As the *Galveston News*, in a tongue in cheek editorial, wrote, "Governor after governor demands that the railroads shall pass them on and on—around the world. Nor will they stop at a single circumnavigation. Round and round they must go from land to land throughout the endless ages of eternity" (as quoted in Scwhantes 97). And although the hobo was riding the trains and being passed on "from land to land" and town to town everyday without

[78] Again there is a difference between the lone hobo riding the rails and a group of men standing together—while it was well known that hostile train crew members did murder 'bos by throwing them off fast moving trains, there were no consequences from these action because the hobo was outside the law and therefore no one could witness the illegal action. But with a whole group of men slowly starving to death under the hot sun and the papers writing about the mens' and the companies' actions, The Southern Pacific had to capitulate to the public's demands or face a public relations disaster.

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much fanfare, problems were arising when a whole army in the visible sector was attempting to do the same thing.

While the hobo, out of necessity, needed to stay invisible in the boxcar, the armies, which ranged from a few hundred to over a thousand men, could and would not hide. As Todd DePastino writes in *Citizen Hobo*, "[t]he Industrial Armies of 1894. . . proved particularly effective in offering up powerful models of nationhood as well as working class white manhood during times of economic crisis" (DePastino xx). London would now be riding with a group that would accept neither his running away and hiding from train crews and bulls nor his pleasure in watching other riders being knocked off a train.

Although Kelley's actions might have initially appealed to hobos, the generals, who were orchestrating these armies and working to gain public sympathy to further their cause, needed to distance themselves from the hobo.[79] Kelley, clearly, was trying to separate himself by publicly proclaiming that the Industrial Army's cause was just and not a rag-tag outfit of mere hobos. The furtive and beggarly image of the hobo was an image that Kelley did not want the general public to conjure up when they thought of his army.[80] But even though Kelley bragged that "not a tramp or drunkard" was in the army,

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[79] While there was much public sympathy for the out of work floater, there were also pundits who, from their pulpits and their newspapers, attacked these men. Dr. Stetson of Des Moines College, in a chapel talk stated harshly, "no men with a determination animated by high moral purposes will live like swine" (*Iowa State Registry* May 4th, 1894). Thorstein Veblen saw these men as only idlers who did not have a clear goal in mind and therefore did not have substance to their crusade (See T.B. Veblen's discussion of the army in, "The Army of the Commonweal," *Journal of Political Economy* (June 1894). The dean of Yale Law school denounced them as both morally and physically "dirty" (Editorial, *New York Times*, May 1, 1894), 4. Other editorials, especially after trains were hijacked by the armies, called for a return for whipping posts for vagrants ("The Whipping Post for Tramps," *Century* 49, 1895), 794.

[80] According to the May 3rd issue of *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, Kelley's Army was even more organized and disciplined than Coxey's. Kelley, therefore, wanted to promote the image of a collective, regimented

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many a "profresh" like London must have been along for the ride, although it is impossible to have an exact count (McMurry 164). Kelley, of course, denied that any these professional wanderers were in his regiment, and since the army conducted itself in an orderly manner, the thousands of men and women who came to gaze at the army throughout their trek believed that no hobos were among the group. The regimental order under harsh conditions allowed for public sympathy to pour out towards the army. Local newspapers such as *The Lake Tribune* identified and described the army as "men, pale, cold, without covering or blankets and wan with hollow sunken eyes, hunger and destitution pictured on their faces, looked out the side of common cattle cars" (as quoted in Schwantes, 105). Not seen as "dirty" hobos who were only out for their own sake, the public perception then could empathize with them.

The hobo, who was invisible in a boxcar, was now seemingly invisible in the army because there was no way to distinguish an out of work steel worker from a "professional" train rider. And since the public was supportive of the men, after some haggling, Kelley eventually did head out from Oakland to Sacramento on a train where he inspired many men to join his cause—men like Jack London, who were suffering the injustices of the industrial workplace and looking for a travel adventure.

In an oft-told story of why he headed for the road with the army, London, in his article, "What Life Means to Me" (1905), recounts being abused on a job in a jute mill:

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group and stifle any projections of individuality and personal gain. It was of utmost priority for Kelley and the other generals to keep the public sympathetic of their plight and not fearful of them. Order over the bodies of the men—waking up at the same time, marching in unison, etc—were all important to presenting an organized group of working men to the public. See *The Palimpsest* (Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1971) for a more detailed description of Kelley's regiment.

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> I was willing to work, and [my employer] was more than willing that I should work. I thought I was learning a trade. In reality, I had displaced two men. I thought he was making an electrician out of me; as a matter of fact, he was making fifty dollars per month out of me. The two men I had displaced had received forty dollars each per month; I was doing the work of both for thirty dollars per month (Eutlain 140).

Realizing his exploitation, London threw up his job and decided to hit the road. "Now hot with resentment at realizing anew the merciless exploitation of his strength whenever he tried to sell it for wages, he was mastered by the determination to be his own boss" (Joan London 70-71). Like the out-of-work miner and the landless farmer, London felt he had been exploited and went in search of Kelley's army. But London, as his biographer notes, was determined to be his own boss. Unlike many of the other marchers, he was under no illusion that this trip to Washington would bring about great changes for the working man. Because of his experience as a "road kid" and a "profresh," London entered the army not believing that he was part of a movement that was going to change the laws of the State, but that he was a "noble beast" and was the law of his own underworld kingdom. And so while his sympathies might have been with these men, he was also looking for opportunities for his own personal gain. It was with this philosophy that he finally found a sidetracked car full of hobos that contained "the Reno Detachment of the Industrial army, 80 strong & cramped in a refrigerator car" and together they made their way to where Kelley and his men were stationed (*The Palimpsest* 39).

As Kelley's Industrial Army was heading out of Sacramento and towards Utah, the police, preachers, politicians, and the army itself ardently debated the laws that the army was breaking when they took possession of the trains:

> The main question, according to Governor West, was whether state and local authorities of California could load vagrants upon trains and

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> dump them upon Utah without liability on the part of these authorities or of the carrier. From another point of view, the legal battle was between the Southern Pacific which wanted to get the army off of its hands and the Union Pacific and the Rio Grande Western which had western termini at Ogden and which doubtless feared the consequences if it hauled these men to some point further down the line. (Briggs 157)

For the most part, local state politicians, fearing riots and also the cost of keeping these armies in their towns, wanted to pass the army onto the next province. They wanted these men and their quest for political action to remain figuratively in the dark, and, as many town officials did when vagrants were a local problem, they were happy to keep pushing them on down the line. It was not uncommon, especially during harsh economic times, for large mobs of local citizens and law enforcement to wait at a train station, refusing to allow any hobos or transients to get off the boxcars. Courts also legally forced vagrants to get out of town and often had marshals escort hobos directly to the train station to "help" them remember to leave immediately. When London was riding the trains on the sly into a hostile town, he thought of himself as an individual against all others. If he won, he was able to ride the train. If he lost, he would have to watch the train from the side of the track as it sped past him. He was dependent on his own skill and determination—and nothing else—to ride. But because of the visibility of hundreds of men on the side of the road, and since the Army's journey was understood as a unified, collective act, public sympathy for the army grew daily. Since Kelley and his men refused to hide, they were the subject of debate from the courtroom to the bar room and there was no clear solution for what to do with an army stranded with no transportation.

While the law clearly stated that these men did not have the right to ride on the train, editorials and street preachers began to question the validity of these laws. The

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men were stationary and under the public's gaze who came out in droves in order to see them; at one point, "thirty thousand people came to see the army" (McMurry 164). With the large crowds and the excitement surrounding the men, every time the army entered a new place it was as if "a big circus had come to town" (Browne 11). The Army was a public event and the drama was on center stage for all to see. With the large mobs of people coming to gaze and mingle with these men, restlessness abounded; it was obvious to all that these men had to be put into motion—and kept moving.

The courts, facing a situation that they had never faced before, decided in favor of the companies. Judge Miner who handled this case announced with his verdict, "This is one of the most difficult decisions I have ever been called upon to make . . . There are no precedents here . . . The court is obliged to travel over a road which has never been traveled before to my knowledge" (as quoted in Schwantes 108). Kelley and his army, responded and simply "captured a Union Pacific train of twenty-six boxcars" and headed East through Iowa. Even though the companies won, there was a stalemate between these two groups which resulted in an acquiescence of the railroad without admitting that they were allowing it to take place; "[t]he 'theft' appears to have been with the connivance of the Union Pacific officials" (McMurry160-161). It was obvious that no one wanted to risk overtly breaking the law but all needed to keep the men moving and "the whole affair appeared to be an elaborate charade to allow the Union Pacific to avoid charges that it brought indignants into a state in violation of the law" (Schwantes 110). The railroad companies, both fearing that they could be held responsible for bringing these men across state lines and also not wanting to set a precedent for allowing people to ride free on their trains, however, began to balk loudly and demanded protection for their

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property from both state and national forces. Marvin Hughitt, president of the northwestern lines wrote to Governor Jackson, "Permit me respectfully to suggest that the cure of the evil which now exists in the vicinity of Council Bluffs is not to transfer to some locality, the unlawful assembly which subsits by intimidation and travels by the forcible appropriation of railroad property, but should be disband." The president of R.R. Cable of Rock Island also demanded of the Governor, "We shall expect protection to our property and employees against the unlawful acts from these men of Kelly's army" (Briggs 290).

The line was drawn openly in the sand and when Kelly's army hit Council Bluffs on April 15th, the militia was called out to protect the railroad's property. No more transportation would be provided and the militia was called in. The men were once again stationary and under the gaze of the public who came out in droves in order to see them; at one point, "thirty thousand people came to see the army during the first day in the city" (McMurray 164). Throughout the many newspaper descriptions of the marches on Washington, most of the articles commented on the sheer number of citizens who were present. For example, throughout Carl Browne's pamphlet on the march, there are constant comments about the great crowds that followed them wherever the army went including many paper reporters who followed them every step of the way (although they safely followed in comfortable covered wagons). The result was that when the army reached a new place it was as if "a big circus had come to town" (11).

As the local and national newspapers reported, the sympathies of the people were for the men and growing daily until finally, after noticing the harsh and condescending treatment of the militia towards the army, it culminated with a demand by the citizens

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that the militia be discharged (166). The men, who had been behaving well and did not provoke any of the fights, were gaining sympathy everyday that they stood surrounded by the law and the crowds were unimpressed by the presidents of the railroads who wanted protection for their profitable big businesses while poor men were seen openly suffering. There was also a growing contempt for the legal system that was seemingly siding with the companies. It did not help the railroad companies reputation that men like Judge Hubbard, who was an attorney for the Chicago and Northwestern lines, was adamant and outspoken of his hatred for the army boldly warning the men and the public that "should they gain possession of a train by hook or crook or by the sympathy of our trainmen, we will ditch the train if it destroys every car and hurts a lot of men." And if his this wasn't clear enough, he announced that his company "will steam up a wild engine, open the throttle and send it down to meet the captured train and let the wreck solve the problem whether we are obliged to carry these men without remuneration" (as quoted in Schwantes 121). Governor Jackson, rightly nervous about an impending crisis, just wanted to keep these men in motion and not rooted in one place and he was "trying to induce the railroads to carry the army to Mississippi or to Chicago offering to pay the cost of running the trains. But the railroads did not want to set a precedent that would encourage other bodies of unemployed to move east-ward. They also feared the displeasure of the people of Illinois and they asserted that they had no right to carry men without means of support into that State" (McMurray168-169). The question now came down to the extent that the law allowed for mobility. The issue was sent back to the courts that were called on to determine what type of mobility would be allowed by poor men.

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This question concerning the mobility rights of poor men and women had been argued since the transcontinental railroad changed the "problems" of vagrancy. What had once been a local issue where towns mostly took care its own poor the railroad allowed for migrants to travel to many far reaching places resulting in towns having to deal with a large number of poor crossing the borders of their towns. For example, barely seven years after the transcontinental railroad was in place, the first "Tramp Law" was instituted in New Jersey (Cresswell 50). But these laws, which were copies of their British counterparts, were quickly needed to be amended to reflect this new type of wanderer and in the ten years after the first Tramp laws were passed, nineteen states were busy revising their laws. "The new technologies of modernity—so connected in America myth to democracy and Manifest Destiny—also created new forms of deviance and new repressions" (52). The laws had to be tailored to fit this new wanderer in order to understand and define him, thereby setting the boundaries of what he was capable of doing. Once this was established, punitive measures were implemented to stop him when he became too visible. But these laws were set up to punish individuals; now as the army started marching together across the country, the police and courts were not quite sure how to handle this new type of deviant behavior. As Thorstein Veblen, who was not sympathetic to Coxey's crusade, wrote "[t]hese men disregard the fact of local units and local relations with a faculty that bespeaks their complete emancipation from the traditions of local governments" (as quoted in Schwantes 100). The army, as Veblen stated, was not a local problem but a national one. Clearly transporting these men across state lines defied existing laws, and since the whole train was filled with these out of work men who could not support themselves—and not just a few men hiding in the

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bowels of the train—to allow this to happen would to blatantly disregard the law. Since these men did not have any money and were traveling across state lines, their bodies were illegal and the law needed to exert itself.

In the end, many of the Army's regiments forced the State's hand by blatantly breaking the law and actually stealing trains. Not content to stand around and wait for the court to determine their legality, they simply began commandeering trains. The armies coming from the Pacific Northwest seemed to be the most ready to break the law and "for two or three months they kept United States marshals, militia and even regular army busy protecting railroad property" (McMurry 199). General Hogan and his men from Montana, who were emerging from a severely economically devastated region, was one of the more forceful groups. After stealing a train (many members from his army were former employees of the railroad) they headed east, breaking through the roadblocks that the railroad had set for them and encountering friendly citizens as many towns let them pass, unheeded, despite orders from the Attorney General to have these men arrested. They were a "wild train," which was a railroad term for any train that was operating without orders, and in a scene that seems to come straight out of a Spaghetti Western, United States marshal William McDermott, who had following the men in his own train car, finally caught up with Hogan and his men at high noon on April 25th in Columbus, and demanded that the men surrender (Shwantes 149). The men refused to acknowledge the law and a fight broke out and the deputies were repelled and defeated (204). These deputies, who were inexperienced and rounded up from the saloons of Butte, in the melee shot and killed two citizens of the town. Using sticks and rocks that they found around the train (and refusing to use any weapons), the army and now the

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enraged public were tactically able to create a resistance from the instruments that they had at hand and cornered the deputies forcing them to take shelter in a barn where they stayed for fear of being lynched until the U.S. army would escort them out of town (160). The mob cheered the army who, victorious for a moment, headed back onto the train and onward to Forsyth. It was momentary and they could not hold onto their victories, however, because President Cleveland after hearing the news of the defeat of the deputies, ordered six regiments of the national army to overtake the train. Three hundred and thirty-one Industrial army members were quickly taken prisoners and brought to trail.[81] But "since there was no federal law on the subject of train-stealing, the only clear case against the Hoganities was that they were guilty of contempt of court" (McMurray 205). As the local paper *The Standard* wrote about the case, "It is admitted that it will be impossible to find a jury in Montana to convict these men whose only crime has been to help themselves to boxcars" (as quoted in Schwantes 164). There would be no trial, however, because by holding these men responsible for contempt of court, the judge alone decides the fate of these men. Hogan and his men were not convicted of grand larceny—it almost didn't seem to register in the courts that men could capture and take control of the Iron Horse—but rather convicted of refusing to listen to the law. While public sympathy might have made it hard to convict these men, the courts avoided the public altogether. The law had once again established itself and showed that it had the power over the men's lives.

[81] President Cleveland, interestingly enough, was influenced by Attorney General Olney who "as the chief legal officer of the United States, he earned 8,000 a year and at the same time received 10,000 a year for services rendered to the Burlington" (Schwantes 162).

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In other similar circumstances, Sanders Cripple Creek brigade of Colorodo were also involved in train-stealing. Although Hogan's men stole a modern train that could race down the tracks, Sanders' men were only able to capture an "old Rio Grande Western switch engine train that leaked badly and a few flat cars" (McMurray 207). The men would not be deterred and they headed east towards Washington. The railroad companies, hearing of their progress, began constructing roadblocks and tearing up their own tracks to stop the eastward progress of these men. Undeterred the army, when they encountered a derailed engine, likewise tore up the tracks behind them and planted new tracks that circumvented the dead engine, creating their own paths that allowed them to continue—slowly—towards their destination. A few miles later, another roadblock was found in their path. Again the men tore up the tracks and built new ones, this time carrying more rails with them so that when they encountered a third wrecked train, they were more easily able to circumvent the obstacles. When deputies finally overcame the leaking train (they had a hard time because the tracks were torn up and they could not follow!), Sanders refused to acknowledge any wrong doing on his part and said that, "it was not their fault that the Missouri Pacific had destroyed several thousand dollars of its own property and had obstructed the mails in the attempt to prevent the army from getting out of Colorado" (210-211). Dead trains, new paths, rebuilding of roads—all of this accompanied by the armies in their search for their collective voices. The courts did not see it the way that Sanders did, however, and in much the same way that Hogan and his men were convicted, Sanders and his Industrial army was also convicted, not of stealing a train, but of not listening to the courts.[82]

[82]This set the course of action for the way that Eugene V. Debs and his followers would be stopped in their

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If Fry, Hogan and Sanders and their men would have made their way to Washington in secret, hopping on freights in the middle of the night, or even, quietly, and in less numbers, making friends with sympathetic train crews who might have allowed them to ride in their freights on the sly, then they quite possibly might have made it to their destination. At this time, thousands of hobos were riding the rails everyday and while they were doing so illegally, as long as they remained hidden from the agents of the law (who, for the most part, turned a blind eye), than they would have been able to ride. But these generals and their men refused to hide and therefore they were making their stand against the law. The army, with backs arched and lining up together, were able to stop trains in their tracks and disrupt the ordered schedules of these companies. The law, which could bend by pretending not to see individual men hiding in the cracks and crevices of the trains, refused to break, however, when the men stole the trains and disrupted the rigid time schedules of the mail trains and acted swiftly with deployments of regular army to stop the men when they made themselves too visible.

In Council Bluffs, Kelley's army was also involved in stealing a train. But while there was much celebration as local citizens (who were responsible for the securing of the train for the army), hobos, and out-of-work industrialists stood and danced on top of the captured train, after a few hours, it was returned to the rightful owners. Even though Kelley demanded free transportation, and had previously "stolen" a train when it was

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Pullman Strike: "In addition to the injunctions issued to protect property in the hands of the receivers there are some indications that the government was asked to arrest Coxeyites and perhaps did so on the ground that they interfered with the carrying of the mails. Whether the legal decisions involved in the Chicago strikes were consciously based upon these industrial army cases or not the fact remains that the judicial and executive branches of the Federal government in their handling of the problem of industrial army train stealers during April, May and June 1894 set precedents for most of their better known actions in the Pullman strike in July" (226).

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given to him on the sly by the railroad companies, he stated that the reason he didn't take this particular train, given to him by the citizens of the area, was not because of the lack of box-cars (it was insufficient to carry the whole army) but because that act was illegal and he and his men had pledged not to do anything against the law.[83] Kelley believed fully that they were on the side of the law, and, as good citizens whose only "crime" was that they were poor and looking for work, they would follow it. Whether Kelley was anticipating that the State was looking for an excuse to swoop down and arrest him and his men, or whether he really believed that he was not in violation of any laws, is debatable. Either way, Kelley was trying to work within the law. This collective regard for society's law, however, marks the distinction between the industrial army's mass politics and the hobo's individualistic sense of disregard for both such laws and a group's adherence to them.[84] We see this most clearly with London's account of his time shared with the Army. While he was as excited as the other men when the stolen boxcar was given to the army, London was not invested in the collective body, caring mostly for his own. For example, when the army turned into a navy and constructed rafts to sail down the Des Moines River after the railroads refused to move the men, the former "Prince Oyster Pirate" found a perfect opportunity to break away from the collective—regarding himself in competition with all of its members.

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[83] Each man who joined the army had to take a Pledge where they would have to state out loud "to not intentionally violate any law of the United States or any state or territory in which I may be or aid and abet any riotous conduct; to respect the right or property and law and order" (*The Weekly Gate City* (Keokuk) May 24, 1894).

[84] This regard for the law is one of the key differences between the Industrial Armies and other radical organizations, like the IWW, that appealed to the hobo.

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On Wednesday, May 9th, 1894, London and the rest of the army headed down the river in boats that were built for ten men each. Soon, London's boat manipulated its way to the front of the group and separated itself from the rest of the army. London explains why in his chapter, "Two Thousand Stiffs:"

> In any camp of men there will always be found a certain percentage of shirks, of helpless, of just ordinary, and of hustlers. There were ten men in my boat, and they were the cream of Company L. Every man was a hustler. . . . The ten of us forgot the remaining forty men of Company L, and by the time we had missed one meal we promptly forgot the commissary. We were independent. We went down the river "on our own," hustling our "chewin's," beating every boat in the fleet, and, alas that I must say it, sometimes taking possession of the stores the farmer-folk had collected for the Army. (London, *Novels and Social Writing*, 291)

Townspeople, both fearful that the navy would descend on them en masse but also sympathetic to the cause, would leave food, tobacco, and milk on the shores for the men to come by and pick up. London and his crew of "independent" men, however, went first down the river getting far ahead of the rest of the boats and reporting to anyone that they met that they were the emissaries for the army. In the process, they grabbed possession of anything that they wanted. In his journal entry for May 11th summarizing his life on the water, London writes simply that he is "Living Fine" (Eutlain 51). Tellingly, there is hardly any mention of the other men in the army, except when he writes about how he outwitted them. Just like the previous example where London is wishing for the failure of the other hobos attempting to board the train, London here was fulfilling his desire to be the "tramp-royal" whose success came at the cost of his fellow travelers. Although he does acknowledge that he stole from the men, he also feels as if it was his right as a strong individual to get what he could—and the group politics be damned. As he

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explains in more detail in *The Road*, "[w]hile we were ahead, skimming the cream, and while the commissary was lost far behind, the main Army, coming along in the middle, starved. This was hard on the Army, I'll allow; but then, the ten of us were individualists. We had initiative and enterprise. We ardently believed that the grub was to the man who got there first, the pale Vienna to the strong" (London 292).

London was Kelley's and the army's worst nightmare—he exemplified the reasons they had tried so desperately to keep the professional hobo out of the army. As a hobo, London survived by hiding and remaining invisible in the bowels of a boxcar. To be brought into the light and made to stand collectively with the army was not directly beneficial to him and so he only used the name of the army in order to fulfill his individual desires. London in his diary makes constant mention of the soreness of his feet from walking or his attempts to hide on the back of a cart; there is no mention of his political affiliation with these men. To be part of the collective body meant to suffer, and to a man who wanted to be his own boss, this was not acceptable. As a "profresh," London believed that he could make any train that was pulling out and therefore to be "stuck" waiting with other "stiffs" to be permitted to ride was both useless and degrading to his sense of self. In his mind, the hobo was part of the nobility, and he could not understand why he should give this up for a fight against the State that offered him no immediate gain. Savvy enough to know that the army would be defeated, London tried to satisfy his own personal pleasures. Priding himself on his masculinity, London could not accept that he had to be subservient to the higher ideals of the group. While, as John Fiske notes, there is pleasure involved in subordinated classes rising up and defining themselves in resistance to the dominant classes, there is also "a pleasure for many a

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subordinate man in exerting power over others" and this can be seen clearly in London's bravado when discussing his hobo travels both within and outside the army (49). He gets a kick out of telling of his successes and, conversely, of the failure of all others who come up against him. As an individualist, he would not bow down to any cause that was larger than himself and was thus able to use the lifestyle of the hobo to exert power over anyone he saw as competition.

For the hobo with London's individualistic bent, unlike the out-of-work farmer who had so much riding on his trip to Washington, the eventual failure of the Industrial Army was not the end of his travels. After a few weeks with the Industrial Army and in the national spotlight, the 'bo was able to fade back into the darkness and the crevices of the train and once again cloak himself in his invisibility. There would always be another ride. As his biographer writes about London's experience with the Industrial Army, "[h]e left the army lightheartedly, careless of whether it would reach its destination or not and pushed off alone. He was still lighthearted and believed that while he was a member of the lower class he was different, special" (Joan London 84). Throughout his travels with Kelley's army, London was footsore and secretly grabbing rides on passing wagons or freights, or, when he was on the Des Moines river, he was actively plotting against the welfare of the men. Like his view of other hobos who were attempting to catch out on a train, London was ever the individualist and when opportunities appeared before him, he took them with both hands. W.M. McDevitt, when evaluating London's entries in his diary, writes, "[w]hat puzzles me is that in all the pages from his diary . . . there is not a single word as to the political, sociologic, economic views of the members of the Industrial Army that he contacted or fraternized with during the month and a third" (29).

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His belief in the hierarchy of the hobo subculture sheltered him from being touched by the politics of the industrial army. And, in fact, London, although admitting later that his experiences on the road helped him reconsider his political views, does not seem to regret much about his actions with the Army. He wrote in *The Road*, "[a]nd right here I want to say to General Kelly and Colonel Speed that here's my hand. You were heroes, both of you, and you were men. And I'm sorry for at least ten per cent of the trouble that was given you by the head-boat of Company M." (296). Ninety percent of his actions he therefore condoned; not committed to the politics of the army, the stolen "grub and pale Vienna" did belong to anyone who was strong enough to take it. Although living the life of the hobo did not make London an individualist (he was one before he hopped his first train), it did allow him to exploit his individualism at the cost of the industrial army.

And it is here that the tensions between personal pleasure and group politics in the boxcar (or in this case, the boat) were impossible to smooth over. If the industrial army was successful, many substantial changes could have been made for working people. But for the hobo that London both was and admired, there is pleasure precisely in being unsuccessful within the dominant culture. Being a success in the subcultural world of the train rider means that the hobo assumes that he is "outside" of dominant ideology and/or that the dominant ideology tempers the (Darwinian/Nieteschean) individualism that he wants to access. It is this type of "success" that appeals to many who are not part of this society. In a speech entitled "The Tramp," given at the Academy of Sciences Hall in 1902, London attempts to reason why a person would become part of this dispossessed class:

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> When out of work and still undiscouraged he has been forced to "hit the road" between large cities in his quest for a job. He has loafed, seen the country and green things, laughed in joy, lain on his back and listened to the birds singing overhead, unannoyed by factory whistles and bosses harsh commands, and most significant of all, he has lived. That is the point! He has not starved to death. Not only has he been carefree and happy, but he has lived. And from the knowledge that he has idled and lived and is still alive, he achieves a new outlook on life; and the more he experiences the unenviable lot of the poor worker, the more blandishments of the "road" take hold of him. And finally he flings his challenge in the face of society, imposes a valorous boycott on all work, and joins the farwanderes of Hoboland, the gypsy folk of this latter day. (London, War of the Classes, 92-93)[85]

The wanderer, unable to compete in society with its "factory whistles and bosses harsh commands," is forced out (or voluntarily leaves) and becomes a member of this floating surplus army, and finds himself alone and on the road. And while some may repeatedly attempt to make it back into society, and others may join revolutionary organizations intended to change the society itself, such as the industrial armies or, later, the International Workers of the World, others, like the hobo that London became, found the lifestyle to be reward enough. According to London, once he understands that he will not starve to death, the "modern gypsy" chooses to become an individualist and makes a space large enough for himself to live "carefree and happy." And if he is good at what he does, then he can enter the top class of the underworld: he can become a hobo. Unlike the industrial army that wanted to work within the system to change it, there is an acceptance by the hobo of the overall structure of the system.

By riding trains on the sly and avoiding the detection of the agents of order—by remaining invisible—a hobo possesses the subcultural power that grows as he becomes

[85] While this was written after his political ideals had changed, London still holds onto his admiration of the "profresh" and the hobo lifestyle. Again, while these texts were written years apart, the value that London places on the hobo lifestyle does not change.

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more skilled at hopping trains. He is not dependent on the collective endeavor to effect change; he is able to manipulate the system on a small scale and he is able to survive and flourish in this underworld. This is the pleasure that London so thoroughly enjoyed. And although there is a limit to what he can do, the hobo is not attempting to travel vertically on any figurative ladder of success. He is concerned with avoiding the bulls and traveling horizontally wherever the tracks head. London and other professional hobos like him who watched the remnants of Kelley's Army defeated in Washington and invisibly stood by while all those who remained visible were arrested and fined, might very well have felt that they made the right decision to separate themselves from the group. The pleasures might be short-lived, but to ride alone and remain outside the gaze of the law is more profitable to the hobo who makes his way across the country in the bowels of the train. It is a dirty and bumpy ride, but it gets him where he wants to go.

Jack London's bravado and unwillingness to succumb to any group politics might be the reason why earlier critics applauded London's distinctive "Americaness" and rebelliousness. As Fredrick Feied writes in *No Pie in the Sky*, "There is red blood in London's writings. His style is vigorous and powerful, working under bunched muscles. When he hits, it is always a hammer blow" (56). For Feied, the "red blood"—the overtly masculine prose—allows London to "hit" the reader with descriptions of the hobo who needs noone except himself to be successful riding the rails. And although this strength of the author leads Feied to believe that London has the "ultimate confidence that the down-and-outers, the men of shambles and the abyss would live to see a better day, building a new society on the foundations of the old. Social wrongs would be righted—and soon," it is my contention that London, while traveling the rails, did not believe that

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the hobos that he met were going to rise up together and collectively challenge society (40). London, when riding the rails, was simply concerned with his own personal pleasure. As seen in his trip down the Des Moines river, he was not willing to submit to the larger group body, instead he was trying to exist in his own and gain the label of top "profresh."

This is not, however, to imply that there were no socially conscious hobos who were joining revolutionary political organizations and who were actively plotting to make these changes a reality. Although London might be praised by Feied for his independence, both in reality and in fiction, the hobo was very often linked to "dangerous" organizations that challenged the legitimacy of their society. And in many texts, hobos are proudly willingly to identify themselves as both a hobo and a radical organizer. For example, autobiographies of "Wobblies" (members of the International Workers of the World) testify to many long hard nights stealing rides on trains, attempting to reach a free speech fight in California or to organize workers in the wheat fields of Kansas; they do not see any inconsistencies between the hobo lifestyle and those of an organizer and, in fact, see them as complimentary. If we turn to fiction, John Dos Passos, for example, in *The USA Trilogy*, shows the complexities of what happens when the hobo becomes radicalized and gives up some of his independence for the cause of the working class. By examining these canonical texts in dialectical terms with alternative texts that have been previously excluded from consideration, we will be able to complicate this figure of the hobo, thereby continuing to contextualize and reconsider the importance of this figure in cultural memory. My first chapter has shown that the hobo does have a resistive political power through the very act of illegally hopping a train, and

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the first part of this chapter has showed how some hobos resisted being incorporated into "movements," I will now turn to instances both in fiction and non-fiction where the hobo lifestyle is seen as being conducive to radical politics.

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CHAPTER III

John Dos Passos's Hobos: The Collective Impulse among Individual Hobos on the Move

In the fiction of Dos Passos, movement is a central theme. Dos Passos's second novel, *Manhattan Transfer*, although writing specifically about a place—New York City—has designed a novel concerned with the unsettling, albeit freeing, aspects of movement. Even the title itself contains an action word (Transfer) that alludes to the idea that the characters—who are searching for meaning in their lives as they move along the city's blocks and avenues, high-rise parties and back alley saloons—will transform and change throughout the course of this novel. By examining the way that change is intimately connected with the ability to move physically, Dos Passos's hobo characters will help us answer more completely the questions we began asking in the previous chapter: what is the relationship between the individual hobo and collective politics? While Jack London's individuality was the focus of the previous chapter, we will focus specifically on how movement itself is the key to understanding the ability of the hobo to find pleasure and freedom by hopping freight trains. Even though collective politics will have a central role in giving the characters pleasure in the brotherhood of revolutionaries, it is the ability to move that allows them to define their individual successes.

In the opening pages of *Manhattan Transfer*, the city is entered by a naive, backward, idealistic young man with an unformed dream of succeeding in a new environment. On the last page, a man is leaving the city for an unknown place: this man is worn out, disillusioned, and hungry, with blisters on his toes and three cents in his

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pockets "for good luck, or bad for that matter" (404). Through the course of the novel, the vague belief in dreams leads to the characters' indifferent reliance on luck and, in the case of Jimmy Herf, a willingness to turn his back on everything he knows and to try his luck out on the road. The New York City that Dos Passos describes does not allow for individuality: the characters walk the city's streets, ride its subways, and rise and fall on the speculation of its ever expanding real estate, but they never leave the realm of characters to become "people."[86] The title of this book is an allusion to mass transit and the characters enter and leave the pages of the book as if they are entering and leaving a crowded subway car: they squeeze in and make their presence, if somewhat anonymously, felt before quickly leaving when they arrive at their stop. This is a novel of stories in motion whose characters are lurching in loud, cacophonous, heavy steps along the concrete pavements of a transforming society in search of a middle, a nucleus, a distinct point of understanding: a reason for being. It is as if the characters unconsciously realize that if they can stay in motion, if they keep hitting the concrete, then they will eventually find meaning within their lives. But, like Bud Koerpenning who searches desperately for Broadway in the opening pages of the novel, they erroneously keep looking within the city itself, hoping to find this center. Eventually they have to stop searching, and, tired and worn out, they end up in a state of stasis. For Dos Passos, the center is slippery (and most probably illusionary) and, therefore, can never be pinned down. Without a center, there is nothing to hold onto and the characters are left to drift violently up and down the social ladder depending on economic and social forces that are

[86] Joseph Warren Beach makes the point, as do other critics, in his article "*Manhattan Transfer*: Collectivism and Abstract Composition," that the form of the novel does not allow the characters to become fleshed-out beings. None of the critics I have read, however, explore the idea of the transformative power that movement has on some of the characters that leads to a self-realization.

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mostly outside of their control. There is an inevitability in the stories that coincides with the physical lives in this metropolis; as loosely connected vignettes that paint a city of cold steel and reflecting glass, the stories consequently become a splattering of life that will lead to their paralysis and for many, their (emotional, financial, social) death.

Jimmy Herf, however, after having a revelation that remaining stationary in the city is going to kill him, finally realizes that he must leave Manhattan immediately. The solution he discovers is brilliant in its simplicity; Herf decides that he can—and will—just walk away. And so he does. All night long he walks, with his back to the city, resulting in his newfound ability to just take "pleasure in breathing, in the beat of his blood, in the tread of his feet on the pavement" (314). Stuck within the limits of the city, he is slowly dying; on the road, taking pleasure in the feel of his blood against his skin, he is alive. And although he only knows that he is going "pretty far," he finds himself laughing at the fact that he can't seem "to remember anything [and] there is no future but the foggy river" (313). He has found immense pleasure in physical movement—which is textually connected to living within the present moment. He is no longer thinking of the past or worrying about the future; rather, he is living in the present as he walks away from the constricting *place* of the city. In a novel filled with despair, it is thus possible to read this ending as one of hope: Jimmy Herf knows he will not survive inside the city and instead of allowing himself to be destroyed (as Wenny would do in Dos Passos's next novel *Streets of Night*), he decides to start anew. It is a romantic notion, but one immensely filled with life. And with no money or direction, he feels comfortable with his decision. It is telling that on his walk, Herf sees that "[t]here are tracks below him and the slow clatter of a freight, the hiss of an engine" (313-314). Even though he ends

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up catching a ride with a furniture truck driver at the end of the novel, instead of a hopping a freight, it seems only inevitable that if the pages of this narrative were extended, the reader would encounter Herf as a hobo riding the Iron Horse, criss-crossing the country while looking for jobs. It is Herf's refusal to be stationary in a city that enables him to walk away from the limiting and constricting place and, in the optimistic reading of the ending, he is on his way to manipulating the road for his own advantage.

But Herf is not a hobo and these possibilities remain unwritten. Dos Passos's next novel, *Streets of Night*, however, depicts a true "authentic" hobo character. And while Whitey is only given a few pages of text, his meeting on a park bench with Wenny is romantically idealized by the confused anthropology Master's student. The hobo becomes the inspiration that leads Wenny to believe that travel will allow him to become a success, to himself and the woman he loves, outside the safe confines of his Cambridge university.

Streets of Night was first published in 1923 and while it was the third novel that Dos Passos completed, it was also the first novel that he began working on during his senior year at Harvard in 1915. It is a novel essentially about desire on the part of three characters—Wenny, Fanshaw and Nan—all of whom are nervous about losing their safe social confines: desire to do something substantial and concrete, desire to experience love and sex, and desire to become independent and living within their own skins. Both university students, Wenny and Fanshaw, are dealing with the undetermined future in very different ways. Fanshaw, scared of the slums that his friends and he enter to dine and afraid even to imagine having a working-class job, nervously anticipates a life of privilege. Wenny, on the other hand, is not content with the vapidity of his life and wants

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to do something more substantial with it. When this culminates in an awkward attempt to kiss their best friend Nan, who quickly and with a voice of "shrill hatred" rejects him, Wenny is even more convinced that he must leave Cambridge and do something "real" to prove himself a man of substance to both Nan and himself. With romantic notions floating in his head, he has dreams of becoming part of the working class and earning callous, strong hands from tying ropes on fishing boats or other physically taxing employment. But these are only abstract notions and he has no concrete plans on how to commit himself to the life of the working-class man. It is when he is contemplating the mysteries of his future life while trying to deal with the rejection of his professed love, that Wenny encounters Whitey, the hobo, who offers advice and incitement that gets the soon-to-be ex-Cambridge student in motion.

For Christie Phontinos, author of an insightful dissertation on how the hobo figure has been used by the popular culture to combat men's anxieties of feminization and failed manhood in the late 19th and early 20th century, Whitey represents the ideal in working-class masculinity. "Dos Passos depicts the hobo not as a figure of hardship but rather the embodiment of American adventure . . . Whitey can thus be viewed as a kind of Whitmanesque composite American for having lived in so many different parts of the country" (101-102). It is hard to discount Phontinos' view—even the name Whitey is reminiscent of Whitman. And Whitey, explaining his life over a hamburger steak to Wenny, certainly does express some pleasure in riding the rails:

> What I like is goin' round to new towns, hoppin' freights an' all that. Jeez, I been some places in the last year. I've worked in Akron an' Cleveland, an' Chicago, an' Atlanta, Georgia. If I'd had the sense to stay down south I wouldn't be freezin' to death at this minute . . . . An' Tallahassee an' Key West. I passed up a chance to go to Havana 'count

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> of the lingo. An' Glaveston an' South Bend an' Topeka an' Pittsburg. That's where they pick you up an' put you on the stone crushers. An' Duluth an' Cario an' Albany an' New Orleans. Ought to see them high yallers down there if you stuck on girls. I didn't get to the coast but I was in New York and Philly. (*SON* 79)

For Wenny, rejected by the girl he is in love with, the road suddenly seems to be the answer to his problems. At this moment, sitting across from the hungry and tired hobo, the country sounds open and borderless. Traveling illegally and encountering all types of people and places tinges the hobo life with a newness and excitement that he so desperately wants and, almost immediately, Wenny is hooked. Hearing about all the places that Whitey had visited suddenly causes him to consider, "'Why couldn't I do that, bum from town to town? That's the worst that can happen to me anyway and that sounds fun. That way I can forget her and this life. Start afresh as if I had just been born'" (80). The road would allow him an escape and a place for a rebirth where he would be allowed to grow into the man he wanted to be. Much like the frontiersman who heads to the road to discover himself, for Wenny, the hobo lifestyle would allow him to forget both a woman and his suffocating lifestyle. By joining the other adventurers on the road, he would be able, as Phontinos suggest, "to define authentic Americaness" (106).

However, while agreeing that Whitey certainly does have elements of the Whitmanesque and is a model for the young Harvard student, I believe that this section is more complicated. To make Whitey just an ideal for Wenny and nothing more would be to flatten out this character. Whitey may be romanticized by the Cambridge-educated student, but Dos Passos also created a character that epitomizes why many people did go on the road—not for adventure or to live out romantic notions of the working class life

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but because this was the only option that they had. Besides the debacle with Nan, Wenny wants to run away because of an overbearing clergyman father who is willing to pay for his son's education but wants his son to choose "eternity" rather than romantic views of "life" (60). By leaving for the road, he is rejecting his father's money and the opportunities it could afford him. Dos Passos also has Whitey rejecting his father, but for quite a different reason:

> Well I looked through the kitchen winder and, jeez, there was Ma and the old man chasin' her around the kitchen with the ironin' board an' beatin' at her with it . . . An' I runs in an tells him to quit beatin' up Ma . . . An' then he picked up two flatirons, red hot on the stove an' came after me . . .an' I runs out of the house and used my legs till I fell down cryin' on the side of the road a mile out o' town . . . I jumped a freight an' went to Milwaukee, an' I aint been back since. *I'm goin' through in about a year an' plant myself among the weeds*. This aint no life for a white man. (italics mine 79)

Although Whitey might enjoy heading into new towns, his background is not a celebration of the American life but speaks of a household filled with poverty and abuse. He is not rejecting a father who talks too much about religion; he headed for the road because his drunk, abusive father was chasing him with two hot irons and trying to kill him. So although I agree with Phontinos that Dos Passos might be celebrating through the hobo figure the resiliency of the "American Man," I think that she misses the way that Dos Passos undercuts the masculine-adventurer character type—making a more complex comment on the reasons why men like Whitey head for the road. Movement is of utmost importance to Dos Passos, but it is not without hardships and pain. The road is an option for many because it is the only option. For Jimmy Herf and Whitey, the road is the only alternative to a death which is connected intimately to a place (New York City and the abusive home respectively). And although there is a freedom associated with carving an

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individual space when traveling, many "enjoy" this freedom because it is thrust upon them and not because they have gone searching for it. The road may be a conduit to escape death, but it is also must be manipulated as well as endured.

Whitey, obviously, is not traveling for pure adventure. When he first spots Wenny, he knowingly asks "Out of a job?" and then later comments that this life that Wenny is admiring is "no life for a white man"(79). Although some hobos certainly did hop boxcars for pure adventure and others did enjoy this subcultural lifestyle, Dos Passos seems to suggest that others are on the road—and have to stay on the road—because of socio-economic circumstances that are outside of their individual control. Movement, for Whitey, is a way of life. Much like Jimmy Herf, Whitey is able to leave places when they become too constricting and the hobo, using skill and a will to live, is able to create a space on a train that allows him to keep moving. But it is also a cycle that Whitey is unable to break and once on the road, he is unable to stop and stay for too long in any one place. Although his hoboing keeps him alive, it is also apparent that this is not the life that Whitey wants. Wenny, however, who is only thinking about himself, does not surprisingly connect the abjectness of Whitey's story of his father as the reason for his travel adventures. Instead of commenting on the violence of the story, or acknowledging the reason for his heading for the road, or acting at all surprised about the mention of suicide, Wenny immediately changes the conversation to a topic of immense importance to him and asks, "What about girls?" (79).

Wenny, though, is inspired enough by Whitey to become part of the working-class. After three days of unsuccessfully looking for a job, he finds himself enjoying tea and sandwiches with Fenny where he gushes that he had been in "[h]eaps of wonderful

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places . . . I've been finding my place in society . . . on the benches" (99). Contrary to his newfound understanding of the lifestyle, however, he never learns how to leave his known surroundings. Wenny, while he might enjoy the thoughts of seeing the country through the opening of a boxcar, is unable, unlike Whitey, to ever get in motion. Whitey survives as most hobos survive—by always being in motion. Staying only a few days in each of the cities that he lists to Wenny, the tired hobo has been in almost continuous motion for a year and a half spending only a day or two at a time in any town or city.

Wenny, however, is connected to places. Even though he has given up many of the privileges that his birthright affords him and takes a room in a depressing boarding house, he is unable to disconnect himself physically (and mentally) from the places where he has lived. Although Jimmy Herf realizes the potential for the road at the end of *Manhattan Transfer* and giddily turns his back on the place that he has known and been intimately connected to, Wenny cannot do the same. Unable ever to get himself in motion directly leads to his death. The former student who wants to make his mark in society does not live to see the conclusion of the novel. Unable to get moving, in a drunken moment of despair, Wenny takes a gun and shoots himself: he is never able to use the road as a means of escape.

Mac and The Politicized Hobo in USA

While *Streets of Night* shows the negative results when characters are unable or unwilling to move, Dos Passos's most critically acclaimed work, *USA*, begins with the hopeful recordings of a whole country filled with individuals who are excitedly moving

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in every imaginable direction. The introduction is about the hopeful possibilities that exist in movement. Dos Passos, who added the introduction to the trilogy in 1937, begins with a nameless young man whose "blood tingles with wants" and whose "muscles ache for the knowledge of jobs" walking the streets with "greedy eyes, greedy ears taut to hear, by himself, alone." The streets are deserted because "people have packed into subways, climbed into streetcars and buses; in the stations they've scampered for suburban trains." The eager young man knows what he must do; "he must catch the last subway, the streetcar, the bus, run up the gangplanks of all the steamboats" (v). He must stay in motion, he must find the energy to be everywhere and learn everything because, while he may have the desire to keep searching, he has "[n]o job, no woman, no house, no city" and therefore nothing to ground him (vi). He is rootless and floating through the country; he is a transient, a man, who has nothing concrete except his own body. And although the prologue has nicely set up the trilogy for the reader as a mosaic of American "voices" that tell the story of the country in the beginning of the twentieth century, Dos Passos also begins this collective epic with a floating worker who does not have any place to call his own but whose excitement and physical movement makes him the embodiment of an energized nation. It may be a mosaic of voices, but it is the way these voices will be carried that is important to analyze. Although this trilogy is named after a country that has been mapped and is bordered, Dos Passos implies by this introduction that these novels will not be about places but the movement of voices—the "speech of the people"—and the altercations that happen when these voices collide. The voices will intermingle along "city blocks, spread over pavements, grow out along broad parked avenues, speed with the trucks leaving on their long night runs over roaring highways . . .

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joining up cities and fillingstations, roundhouses, steamboats, planes groping along airways" (vi). *Manhattan Transfer* might have been about the constraining influence of a city upon an individual, and *Streets of Night* about what happens when a person cannot separate himself from a place, but *USA* will be a study in how the voices and people of a nation are defined through their movements.[87]

One of these voices whose life will be intimately connected to travel and ideological movements, and the first character to enter the narrative of *The 42 Parallel*, is Fenian O'Hara McCreary, or more simply, "Mac." It is with this character that Dos

[87] This focus on movement is seen very clearly from the opening pages of *The 42nd Parallel*, the first part of the trilogy. In both the main narrative and the Camera Eye sections, the reader finds its characters in the harried process of traveling. For example, in the first ten Camera Eye sections, it is apparent that the reader is situated in a child's point of view and that child is experiencing the joyous fright that is involved with the first tastes of travel (see especially Camera Eye sections two (12), three (24) and four (25)]. But while these sections deal with traveling in a more general sense, in the ninth Camera Eye section, Dos Passos has the child come into contact with a hobo. It is telling where the author specifically has placed this meeting—this snapshot is embedded between the narrative section where Mac, deciding that he would not sell out to the bourgeoisie, writes a letter to Maisie telling her that he would be leaving town to help the "boys" of the IWW and the biography section that captures Big Bill Haywood, one of the most charismatic leaders of the IWW. While all the Camera Eye sections thread together and connect with the other sections of the novel, this one seems particularly obvious. The mention of the hobo is a significant point that ties together Mac's decision to flee the domestic sphere of Maisie and the story of the rebel leader who is fully ensconced in the overtly masculine political sphere of the Wobbly.

While there has been some discussion among critics of how autobiographical the Camera Eye sections are, this particular scene has been linked to a specific incident when Dos Passos was fifteen years old and on a yachting trip with his father (Ludington 38). Drifting over towards the tracks, he met a young 'bo who excitedly tells the would-be-author of his travels. This influential meeting would appear in the novel as a stream of conscience: "but up on the freight I got talking to a young guy couldn't have been much older 'n me was asleep in one of the boxcars asleep right there in the sun and the smell of cornstalks and the reek of rotting menhaden from the fertilizer factories . .. I guess he wasn't much account but he'd bummed all the way from Minnesota he was going south" (*The 42 Parallel* 85). Much like Wenny, in this Camera Eye section, there is much romanticism attached to this hobo figure—the young boy who "couldn't have been much older" was sleeping in the country fields and having many adventures. All these things would sound wonderful to the boy in the story who had to spend his days with the smell of "fertilizer factories" in his nostrils (or, in reality, Dos Passos who felt uncomfortable spending time with his yachting dad). Dos Passos, according to his biographer Townsend Ludington, saw in this hobo something that was lacking in himself and "envied the other's vitality and freedom" (Ludington 38). And Dos Passos, who was uncomfortable with his bourgeois upbringing, envied that freedom. It is as if both in the context of this novel and in the context of the author's life, Dos Passos is showing how movement that can be used as an escape initially can lead to a politicization by the one who takes the chance and heads for the road. This type of romanticism can also be seen somewhat in the narrative sections of the novel—but the author is not a child anymore and much like the Whitey character, the hobo figure that we encounter in the main section is much more complex and fleshed out.

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Passos will show how the hobo lifestyle can be manipulated to gain individual freedom. And although Mac may be unable to sustain relationships to individuals or political parties, he will use his ability to move to manipulate a space for himself whenever he feels the need to escape.

As the novel opens with "Noise," "Labor," "Churches," and the 'Nation" greeting the new century, the reader is introduced to Fainy who, not so joyously, is chocking on the smell of "whaleoil soap . . . cabbage and babies" that pervades the four family frame house where he was born (4-6). But he is not to stay long living across from Chadwick Mills—his mother soon dies from overwork and his father, after becoming lame and being fired from his job as night watchman, must sneak away from under the hospital and funeral bills. Feeling like "a whipped cur," he leads the family West to make a new start in Chicago (13). Only six pages into the narrative section, young Fainy soon finds himself in a train station where "with an enormous, shattering rumble, sludge puff sludge . . . puff, the train came into the station" (11). It is quite an entrance for this powerful machine and within seconds, Mac and his sister Milly are scooped up and find themselves anxiously looking out the window watching Connecticut fly by them in a blur.

In Mac, Dos Passos creates a character whose mother is immediately killed off and whose defeated father is reduced to a mumbling nonentity. Things are changing quickly and needless to say, Mac, at first, is confused and resentful about leaving the town that is his home and all that he has ever known. Add to this the train making its foreboding and scary entrance into the station and it is no wonder why young Mac does not handle the forced movement well. Frightened and disoriented as a passenger on a

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train, he finds himself wrapped in the confusion of attempting to understand why it is still light outside when he is positive that it is night and only stars should be in the sky. He has lost all sense of time in his movement across the country. And although outside is disorienting enough, inside the car, he is also confused and his imagination is getting the better of him:

> Fainy's eyes smarted; in his ears was the continuous roar, the clatter clatter over crossings, the sudden snarl under bridges. It was a tunnel; all the way to Chicago it was a tunnel. Opposite him Pop's and Uncle Tim's faces looked red and snarling, he didn't like the way they looked, and the light was smoky and jiggly and outside it was all tunnel and his eyes hurt and wheels and rails roared in his ears and he fell asleep. (14)

The train, whose wheels "roared" in his ears, is cutting through the main streets of never-heard-of-before-towns as factories and pastures and telephone poles fly by their eyes. Dazed, he looks out the window not quite comprehending the movement. Mac, waking up from an uncomfortable sleep and thinking that he is in Chicago, cannot fathom that they have only made it as far as Syracuse. Time and distance are outside of his control and any sense of agency is taken away from him as he sits in his seat as a passive passenger. Finally, after (he thinks but is not sure) three days of falling asleep and waking up only to see more towns and factories and pastures and telephone poles flying by, they make it to Chicago. Mac and Milly soon find themselves entering a streetcar but "[t]hey were so sleepy they never knew exactly where the train ended and the streetcar began" (16). Sick, exhausted and frightened, they arrive half-way across the continent.

It is important to note that the opening of this narrative section is about defeat. The McCrearys are running away and the object that will be the means of escape—the train—has all of the power. For Mac, the machine has total control over time and

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distance; unable to understand the machine, he has simply to give himself over to it. The train, it seems, controls the lightness outside the window and the amount of time that it takes to get to a place that he had only barely heard of before. He is a passenger, and although uneasy with his lack of control, all he can do is passively to wait out the ride. But it is not only young Fainy who had a lack of power; the whole family has no control over their travels. His father and uncle Tim, bleary eyed and with booze on their breaths, transform into creatures that were "red and snarling" while his sister Milly is only able to cry ceaselessly when she is not being physically sick. As stated previously, movement is key in Dos Passos's writings; here he decides to begin the trilogy linking the lack of control on a train directly with the reality and feelings of defeat. At the start of the new century, with technological wonders seemingly offering unlimited possibilities, Dos Passos suggests that there is a danger with losing control to machines—to lose control over one's movement is to be defeated. And Mac, from this very first trip, seems to understand this point. Although trains and physical movement will continue to play a large role in Mac's narrative, nowhere in his sections will he ever be as defeated as in this opening chapter, when he has no control over the locomotive that has brought him to Chicago. He will learn how to use the machines as ways of escape and he will gain control over his movements by learning the ways of the hobo. Dos Passos reveals with Whitey that the road, while it may offer escape, is also a place of hardship and confusion. Mac learns this at a very early age. But instead of shying away from the road and ensconcing himself within a place, he will use his ability to move, attempting to manipulate the road for his own personal pleasure and freedom.

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Shortly after arriving in Chicago, Mac's father dies and Mac is placed under the tutelage of his left-leaning, alcoholic uncle who gives his young nephew a trade as a printer and plants the seed for his future radicalism. After a few years, however, his uncle, refusing to buckle under the pressure of the capitalist interests, has his business shut down and, defeated like his brother-in-law, spends the rest of his days in front of a half-empty glass in the local saloon. Mac, needing to support himself, soon takes off on the road to earn some money with "Doc" Bingham, head (and only member) of Truthseeker, Inc.[88] Bingham, as a comic figure, soon gets in trouble with a married woman and leaves Mac in the middle of the night. The young apprentice, escaping the buckshot from the cuckolded husband's shotgun, soon finds himself with little money and with "nobody following him" (46). He is completely alone and on his own. With this knowledge weighing heavily on his shoulders, he soon falls asleep in a train station with no prospects or ideas for his immediate future.

But George "Ike" Hall soon notices Mac sleeping on the bench and, recognizing him as a fellow traveler, calls out, "Hey, bo, you better not let the station agent find you" (51). Although Mac might think that he is completely alone, he is soon to recognize himself as part of a subcultural working-class society of migrant workers. Because of his sleeping arraignment, Ike recognizes in him a fellow transient worker.[89] Willing to split his last dollar with Ike, they soon find that they have the same (not-quite-formed)

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[88] Soon after taking the job, there is another train travel experience for young Mac, but while he is still frightened and feeling that "the conductor looked at him sharply" (37) and has a fear that he does not belong in the car, he is still much more comfortable and in control than on his first trip. After some trepidation he is even able to sell Doc Bingham's books to some of the passengers. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to note that each time that he heads on a train, there is a growth process where Mac learns how to handle himself better each time.

[89] For a discussion of subcultural signifying practices, see my discussion of Hebdidge in chapter one.

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political bent and spend the afternoon lying in the sun talking politics and books. Unafraid about their lack of funds, they are able to enjoy the afternoon with no thoughts of the future. They are immediately friends and become traveling companions. Wanting to head up to Seattle to find jobs and to study, they decide to hobo their way there. Mac, whose experiences with trains have not been pleasant and who has never traveled as a hobo before, is however willing to try his hand. They are successful and make their way across the country picking up jobs to tide them over as they continue to hop freights. When they make it to Duluth and Ike finds that his mother has left with no forwarding address, they soon decide that although they do not have a concrete plan, they will be fine if they just keep moving. For Mac this is not a problem. He is enjoying his newly formed life and Dos Passos writes about his experiences in an extremely romantic light:

> Mac loafed round under a lamppost at the street corner and smoked a cigarette and waited. It was warmer since the wind had gone down. From a puddle somewhere in the freight yards came the peep peep peep of toads. Up on the hill an accordion was playing. From the yards came the heavy chugging of a freight locomotive and the clank of shunted freightcars and the singing rattle of the wheels. (58)

The "continuous roar and clatter clatter" (14) that describes the train on Mac's horrible first journey as a child is now transformed into a "singing." What was noise to him when he was younger is now music to his ears. The train that had been overpowering to him as a passenger has been subdued by him as a hobo. Mac has given up worrying about where he is heading and—unlike his long first journey—he is able to notice small details of his surroundings. Indeed, the whole experience itself is also romanticized:

> The train started and stopped and started and shunted back and forth on sidings and the wheels rattled and rumbled in their ears and slambanged over crossings. Towards morning they fell into a warm sleep and the

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> thin layer of hay on the boards was suddenly soft and warm. Neither of them had a watch and the day was overcast so they didn't know what time it was when they woke up. (59)

Although certainly not the most comfortable trip, both Mac and Ike are far from powerless in their travels. Even though they are without money, they do not have the defeatist attitude that marred Mac's first train travel, and they create a space for themselves within the train. Frustrated with not being able to find his relations in Duluth, Ike with Mac simply keep moving. By finding their way into the boxcar, they are able to escape the confines of the town which Ike feels suffocated him.[90] After a few costly adventures where they encounter hostile train crews, they suddenly find themselves in Winnipeg, Canada—a new country with new possibilities. A job soon materializes and they begin to follow the trend of many an itinerant worker—building a stake by working the harvests or lumber camps and then quickly spending their money when they hit the first town.

Mac, therefore, at this point in the narrative can be read in a romanticized light. Phontinos suggests that "Mac's narrative is . . . infused with nostalgia for a kind of male autonomy and freedom that Dos Passos associates with turn of the century hoboing" (119). This friendship and traveling can be basically read as a coming-of-age story where the two become "men" (complete with a harried visit to a prostitute) through homo-social bonding and callous-forming harvest work. "Dos Passos offers many favorable descriptions of cross-country freight hopping and even aspects of 'roughing it' are

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[90] Again, there is a connection between this hobo figure and Wenny from *Streets of Night*. Ike wants to leave town because he doesn't want to meet "all the crazy galoots I ever knew and the girls I had crushes on" (58). Jumping a freight, he is able to leave all these ghosts of his past behind. Wenny, of course, who never did follow after Whitey and hop a train, finds himself stuck in the town with the girl he had a crush on, and unable to leave, places a gun in his mouth.

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written into a larger narrative of adventure and experience . . . Mac and Ike like being on a train—one of the great symbols of industrialization—but their hoboing represents an escape from modern social conditions and a retreat into nature" (122). The two, by heading west, willing to earn their keep, find themselves in a typical male narrative that has remnants of such masculine paradigms as Teddy Roosevelt's "hardening" experience in his trips out west.

Again, though, the text is more complicated. What differentiates these two young hobos from the man who would be president is that they are lacking any particular goals; they are neither heading anywhere definite nor are they returning to any particular place. As hobos, they are in an ambiguous position floating between the respectable and dangerous classes. As Kingsley Widmer correctly summarizes the life of the working hobo:

> The working tramp raised one of the usual American paradoxes: as a tramp outside, as a worker inside. In a society where 'the job' ("What do you do?") provides the major way of identity, the hobo had one but frequently shifted and violated it. Thus, imaginatively, the hobo well represented American uncertainty about self-definition since he is neither fully a pariah to the social order nor fitted into a fixed place. His justifications to others was his work, his justification to himself was his flight. The image of the American hobo becomes representative in being both unfixed and righteous. (95)

The lifestyle that Dos Passos describes with the characters of Mac and Ike is certainly one that is easily romanticized and leads to the nostalgia about the hobo as Phontinos suggests. But as Widmer also shows, it is a lifestyle filled with paradoxes. While the two are connected to fixed places when they are "pearl divers" in a restaurant or working in a construction camp, they also have the ability and desire to leave these jobs when they have enough money or when the conditions are not to their liking.

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On the flip side, however, they also feel that they are able to leave the hobo lifestyle whenever they want to. For example, after working in a construction camp for a few months, they pay money for a boat ride to Seattle and rent a room at the Y.M.C.A. where "[t]hey were through with being laborers and hobos. They were going to get clean jobs, live decently and go to school nights" (65). The hobo skins, seemingly, can wash off under some clean soap and a good night's rest in the Y.M.C.A. They are perfecting the "art of living in-between" where the life of the hobo can be given up for a time for the life of respectability before heading back on the road whenever they want to go.[91]

But this slipping in and out of skins is not as easy as they first imagine. Even though there are romantic tinges to the lifestyle, the search for jobs, the accruing of money for the jobless winter and the dangers of the road are significant. Ralph Chaplin, who became radicalized by his travels as a hobo and who, in 1948, wrote a fascinating and informative autobiography, *Wobbly*, discusses the darker side of trying to leave the road for even a short time:

> Even after the migratory harvest hand had made his stake his troubles were not over. There was still the gauntlet of bootleggers and tin horn gamblers to run. If the stiff managed to escape this parasitic army of harvest camp-followers, he was still in danger of being hijacked or rolled by professional thieves who made a practice of harvesting the harvesters. If he made this hurdle and his winter stake was intact, he still faced the danger of riding boxcars and of being shot, killed wounded or arrested by railroad detectives for stealing rides or encroaching on railway property. (88)

The problem, according to Chaplin, was that it was not easy to change from hobo to a man of "respectability"—even if the migratory worker had a stake to get him on his feet.

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[91]It is a common memoir troupe to use the youthful life of the hobo as a way to appreciate the middle class life of the adult. For example, a common plotline in many hobo autobiographies is a boy forced out on the road and after many trials and tribulations, becomes a respectable and patriotic citizen and father. Two examples would be *A nickel for Bread* by Jim Mitchel and *Freight Trains West* by Archie Lawson.

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The result was that "we were indeed a sad lot of unskilled, unorganized, overworked, and underpaid undesirables . . . We were expected to keep moving yet we couldn't move at all without breaking the law. And every time we broke the law, the law tried to break us" (88). Without movement, the hobo is a target for the law and angry citizens—the line between the floating migratory worker and the stabilized working class is apparently less malleable. Although it may seem easy for the citizen to become a migrant, it is much harder for the migrant to once again become a citizen. Like Whitey, once on the road, many felt it hard or even impossible for the migrant to stay in one place for too long. And for Mac, as for Chaplin, this has a politicizing effect and a search for collective action.

The romanticism of the hobo lifestyle is thus undercut by Dos Passos and instead of what seems to be a coming-of-age story in which the young kid who pulls himself up by the clichéd boot straps learns valuable lessons and begins to climb up the ladder of success, the narrative suddenly becomes the story of a man who joins a revolutionary organization meant to tear down the capitalist society from the ground up. After a drunken evening where the young men are robbed by two prostitutes, Mac wakes up with a headache and suddenly realizes: "I wanta study an' work for things; you know what I mean, not to get to be a goddamn slavedriver, but for socialism and the revolution an' like that, not work an' go on a bat' an work an' go on a bat' like those damn yaps on the railroad" (67). Mac, now, neither wants to be a part of a "slavedriving" class nor part of the "damn yaps" who followed the make money-lose money cycle that many an itinerant worker could not escape. Although his political understandings are not fully formed, he is ready to take some action.

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Many of these "damn yaps" whom Mac discounts were also not content with the poor working conditions that migrant workers were finding on the road. They knew that while they sweated and suffered their labor power was being used to get their bosses richer. And with room and board being taken out of their meager pay checks, they were forced to keep moving down the road to another similarly oppressive job. Charles Ashleigh who emigrated from England in 1910 and wrote a semi-autobiographical novel entitled *The Rambling Kid,* as well as frequently writing for *The Hobo News,* wrote the essay, "The Floater," which examines why many were forced to live the hobo lifestyle:

> The wholesale firing of men by foremen, the arduous nature of work and the temporary nature of the work, and the temporary nature of the employment, keep the worker constantly in motion. He does not usually have enough to pay his fare, if he is to exist at all in the town whilst waiting for the next job. Therefore, the only alternative is to beat the trains. This is also the only method of following the harvests over the wide stretches of country where to pay a fare would be impossible usually and ruinous anyway. Hoboing is therefore, the universal method of traveling among migratory workers of the Pacific coast. The railroad tracks are alive, at certain periods of the year, with men tramping the ties, under the burning sun with heavy bundles of blankets upon their backs. (as quoted in Kornbluh 81-82)

The possible romanticizing the hobo lifestyle is completely non-existent for Ashleigh. And once Mac has his revelation and knows that he wants to fight for the revolution, Dos Passos also undercuts any romanticizing in his prose connected to the hobo: no longer does he include lyrical passages describing the beauty of nature when looking out a boxcar. Rather, Mac, is left behind by Ike who hops a train and leaves his friend sleeping on the side of the tracks. Much like when Doc Bingham leaves him, Mac is seemingly completely alone—but this time he knows which direction he is heading and he begins to move that way.

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Mac continues to hop freights and find jobs; in Sacramento he has a job smashing crates in a factory and gets a room at the Y. Unlike before, though, he does not feel the respectability that he previously associated with this room, and, much like the young man in the prologue of the *USA* trilogy, he finds himself thinking and walking the streets. But while in the prologue, the "streets [were] empty," now the streets are packed with the desperate and preying flotsam of the lower class (v). "Lonely as a ghost he walked up and down streets until he was deadtired; he walked fast not looking to the right or the left, brushing past painted girls at streetcorners, touts that tried to put addresscards into his hand, drunks that tried to pick fights with him, panhandlers whining for a handout" (78). Dissatisfied with this lifestyle and angry at the system that causes it, he soon quits the job and finds himself working for an Italian anarchist named Bonello and together they head to socialist picnics and libertarian meetings on their days off from work. Mac is now becoming educated and connecting with people who share many of his ideas. Eventually, he finds himself in an audience listening to Upton Sinclair and is immediately immensely inspired by the rhetoric of the speech. Soon after, he meets the organizer Fred Hoff who tells him about the new revolutionary group—The Industrial Workers of the World. Mac immediately feels connected with them and when he fills out the card, he thinks to himself, "I was just on the point of selling out to the sonofbitches" (81). It is in this union that he feels he will be able to create a space for himself, avoid the trappings of the working class, and actively help bring down a system that survives on the surplus army of floating workers that he is a part of. But will the IWW allow him the freedom that he is desperate to hold onto or will it place borders around his efforts to stay an individual? Before turning to the rest of the narrative sections concerning Mac in the *USA* trilogy, it

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is important that we contextualize and historicize the connections between the hobo and the IWW to have a better understanding of the negotiations of individuality that was a focus of many hobos who were traveling the Iron Road and coming into contact with the revolutionary group.

THE HOBO AND THE IWW

Melvyn Dubofsky's seminal history of the IWW, *We Shall Be All*, explains the great importance that the organization placed on politicizing the hobo in order to achieve their overall revolutionary goals:

> Few workers in America were better adapted to the doctrines and tactics of the IWW than the migrants who followed the harvest on the West Coast, from the fruit and hop fields of Washington and Oregon to the ranches of California's San Joaquin, Central, and Imperial Valleys. No workers were more mistreated by their employers, and none so lacked the elementary amenities of a decent life: a home, a family, an adequate diet. (168)

Without any place to hold him and embittered from being on the front line of the class war, the hobo could then be used as the "scouts" and the "advance guards" of the IWW. Using their ability to create spaces and slip under the detection of the law, they could use guerilla warfare tactics to spread the seeds of discontent. But committing to the Wobblies, however, meant that the hobo would have to submit to a larger body politic than his own skin. He would have to follow orders that may limit the type of movement that he may want to do. This submission, as seen with London, was not always immediately gratifying for many hobos and "labor organizers including those from the IWW found the migrants difficult to organize" (168). The hobo, who survived by hiding,

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did not like to be seen and organized. This attitude led many observers like Nels Anderson to believe that hobos were a "great heterogeneous group, unorganized and incapable of being organized" (*The Hobo* 105).

This does not mean, of course, that there were no attempts to do the impossible. While Mac is a fictional character, many autobiographies attest to the successful attempts of these unions to organize the floating proletariat as well as the desire on the part of some hobos to join political organizations such as the IWW. These workers saw the limitations of the hobo lifestyle and were not content with the tiring, cyclical lifestyle of the migrant worker. Henry E. McGuckin's, *Memoirs of a Wobbly*, which portrays a political awakening that closely parallels Mac's own introduction to the organization, can help flesh out the connections between the hobo and revolutionary lifestyle. McGuckin, who hated the confines of school and was stealing rides on trains at an early age, decided to hit the road when he was a young boy and learned the rules of the road from a kind, older hobo who traveled with him. As a member of the floating proletariat, he then began hoboing his way across the country, working on farms, making just enough to survive, before moving on to the next homestead. Like Mac, though, he was not satisfied with this life and one night in 1912, when looking for a job, he came across a soapboxer who was preaching industrial unionism and discussing the free speech fights that were currently taking place on the West coast. He soon found himself in an IWW hall listening to other speeches that had a profound effect on him. "I followed this soapboxer to the hall where a fellow worker named Floyd spoke, followed by Tommy Whitehead. I was sold before the meeting was half over. Floyd was a wonderful speaker who could make you understand because of the way he had of explaining the complicated theories of

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industrial unionism in simple language" (35). Although not fully understanding the nuances of the IWW politics, much like Mac, the soapboxers influenced him enough that that very night McGuckin was heading for the train yards so that he could actively participate in a free speech fight in Aberdeen, Washington. These soapboxers connected Mac and McGuckin to a sense of solidarity, friendship, conversation and idealism. The IWW offered this to them. Beating his way to the city, McGukin was able to use his vast freight hopping experience to participate in the fight. Finding much pleasure in the solidarity of the group, he was soon traveling all over the West whenever Wobbly organizers decided that there was a need for him to propagandize in a particular place. For McGuckin, therefore, there was a natural logical progression from the life of a hobo to the life of a Wobbly radical.

This use of freights was the single most important tool to spread the word of the organization. For example, William Foster, whose political life follows many of the same curves as McGukin's, writes in his autobiography *Pages From A Worker's Life*:

> Many I.W.W. militants were skilled hoboes. For them to make a jump from Chicago to the Pacific coast in four or five days enduring great hardships and exposure en route was a small matter. When the I.W.W. held its convention in Chicago in 1912 at which I was a delegate characteristically most of the delegates from the Pacific coast received no expense money from their locals. Without a dime, they had to beat their way over some five thousand miles of hostile railroads and spend about three weeks in Chicago and nobody thought anything unusual of it. Such spirit of the floating workers of the West. (109)

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To hobo their way across the country saved money, helped them avoid detection and connected them intimately to the very people they were hoping to convert.[92]

The hobo and the IWW seemingly were a good match. "A high rate of geographic mobility and mixing with men of many backgrounds made of the hobo a vitally aware person alive to the political as well as economic and social issues of the day (Ward 117). But for many years, organizers were unable to get large numbers of "bindlestiffs" (terms used for the itinerant worker) to be their front-line soldiers. There was plenty of resistance, and making inroads with the vast army of workers seemed impossible:

> Moving from place to place and from job to job the casuals were hard to contact and harder still to keep in a stable labor organization. Often unemployed and always poorly paid, they could seldom pay dues regularly enough to maintain union membership in good standing. Thus before 1913 all efforts to organize West Coast migrants, whether by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) or the IWW, failed. (Dubofsky 169)

Discounted and seen only as strikebreakers or unskilled scabs by other unions, the IWW, however, actively sought to find a method to organize the unorganizable. And although Wobblies were found throughout the country, they found their deepest roots in the west. As the frontier myth champions the west over the east, many Wobblies also felt that the western workers were the harder-boiled men and the revolution would therefore have to

[92] This is very reminiscent of a scene in John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* where the two organizers, Jim and Mac, head on a train in order to start agitating in the apple orchards. Jim, who never has hoped a freight before, is instructed by Mac on the proper techniques. They ride "a hundred miles down the line" and encounter non-political hobos who are seen as bull-headed cowards. But, just as Foster describes, these delegates of the IWW had to find their own way to their meetings and organizing efforts and thus, they had to be skilled in the hobo ways.

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begin on the plains.[93] As one IWW organizer stated simply, the worker in the west was "infinitely less servile than his fellow worker in the East" (Kornbluth 67). Charles Ashleigh pinpointed the reason as the fact that the workers in the east were stationary and connected (chained) to their factories. But "[a]s we journey westward we mark a great change. We leave the zone of great industry and enter country in which capitalism is still, to some extent, in the preparatory stage" (Kornbluth 80). As Dubofsky suggests,

> Like the migratory of the West Coast, those of the plains states lacked wives, families, homes roots; nothing tied them to society; their alienation if frequently unconscious was nevertheless complete. They seemed perfect recruits for the IWW gospel. As one Wobbly, who saw in them the last, best chance for establishing the One Big union, asserted: 'Nowhere else can a section of the working class be found so admirably fitted to serve as scouts and advance guards of the labor army. Rather, they may become the guerrillas of the revolution—the *franc tireurs* of the class struggle. (181)

William Foster, both a hobo and IWW organizer, also explains in a more detailed, practical way the differences between the Eastern and Western types of hobos:

> In the East, with railroads closer together and trains more frequent, it was no calamity to be "ditched" from a train. He usually could eat in the surrounding populated country and all he had to do was to wait an hour or two until the next train came along, or maybe he would just hop over some other road and catch a train. The railroad bulls and train crews bothered him little, the Eastern hobo usually riding openly on the trains. But in the sparsely populated West it was quite a different matter. Through the wide deserts and mountains the railroads were few and trains ran seldom. Hence a hobo ditched off a train might have to stick around a day or two waiting for another, probably with nothing to eat while doing so. (106)

[93] This aggressiveness can be easily seen in the number of train robberies (or liberations) that happened on the March on Washington in the last decade of the 19th century. See my description of Jack London's involvement in Chapter II.

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The western hobo, therefore, was the stronger hobo because of the skills that he acquired from hopping trains in hostile areas. To be a successful hobo in the west meant that you were giving yourself a chance to live; to be unsuccessful meant being ditched in deserts and mountains where hunger, cold, heat or other intolerable situations could lead to death. This was one of the reasons why the IWW would find in the west its strongest fighters.

In 1915, ten years after the birth of the union, Wobbly leadership finally found an effective way to organize the migrant workers. For the April 15th convention, Wobblies from all over the west beat their way to Kansas City to found an organization specifically aimed at the harvest workers (Dubofsky 183). Nine delegates were there and after electing Walter T. Nef to secretary-treasurer, they decided that they would open a headquarters in Minneapolis, Minnesota, called the Agricultural Workers Organization, IWW, or AWO (McGuckin 70). Deciding that soapboxing and street speaking were not proving effective in persuading the everyday worker to join their organization, they decided to concentrate on making immediate improvements in the worker's life (ten hour day, minimum wage, overtime, clean and safe boarding) instead of spreading propaganda about a future revolution. The need was to get the hobos and other workers thinking of themselves as participants in the same struggle and that success would effect concrete changes in their day to day lives. Frank Higbie notes, "[l]ike their adversaries and allies, the Wobblies wanted "community" and "stable" labor markets" in order to solidify their base followers (136). As W.I. Fischer wrote in *Solidarity*, the official newspaper of the IWW, Wobblies must work and organize side by side with the workers instead of having delegates in far off cities. To do so, they would have to invent tactics that would enable

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Wobblies to infiltrate the places where hobos gathered. "The union must 'colonize' camps and mills, and where possible hold 'local business and propaganda meetings and where not possible [hold meetings of] secret job groups'" (as quoted in Higbie 138). Changing tactics, delegates of the union no longer waited for the workers to come to them; instead, Nef sent "[o]ne hundred delegates out into the field, who brought in at least one hundred new members a week" (Dubofsky 183). These new tactics worked almost immediately. McGukin, who was one of the delegates, proudly stated, "[w]e began with nine members and reached more than one hundred thousand!" (70).[94]

Part of the reason why they were so successful was that the delegates were extremely skilled at hopping freights (Charles Ashleigh, for example, was one of them). But although the Wobblies were effective in organizing this migrant community, there were, however, some tensions involved: hobos survived by remaining individuals but these men, since they were Wobblies, stressed solidarity. How do these two seemingly polar opposites coincide together? How does one who considers himself a hobo also consider himself a Wobbly? Although there are different ways to enter into this dialogue, let's take a concrete example from an individual who considered himself both.

McGuckin was a part of a group of five or six delegates who traveled around the country staying for a week in one place, selling literature and organizing, before leaving on the underbelly of a train for the next town somewhere down the line. In one particular instance, a large group of them tried to head out on the same freight train. McGukin knew that there would be trouble right away: "I thought at the time that there were a few

[94] This number is somewhat suspect. At the end of the year, the AWO officially claimed to have a minimum of three thousand members, by late 1916 the number shot to over twenty thousand. Records were hard to keep and not all who claimed membership paid their dues (Dubofsky 184).

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too many of us, but we made about ten miles before the train slowed down and the conductor, a very hard-boiled customer, put us off. As the train started up again, we all climbed back on. We only went about a mile when the same thing happened. He told us the next time someone was going to get hurt" (71).

This scene is very reminiscent of the incident from London's *The Road* discussed earlier in the first part of this chapter. When London found himself one among many trying to jump the same freight, he had enjoyed the battle between the crew as well as other hobos stating that, "[t]he weeding out process had begun nobly, and it continued station by station. Now we were fourteen, now twelve, now eleven, now nine, now eight" (*The Road* 32). Giddy over the fact his fellow train hoppers were getting knocked off, he relished in his superiority over all other hobos and guarded his title of "profresh" with fierce pride. Although London was aware that the power of making a train purposely stop for him was a fleeting one, he was still overjoyed with the fact that he was able to make it out, alone, on the train.

McGuckin, however, whose purposes for his hoboing had changed from when he had first hopped as a kid, was not ready to leave behind any of his fellow travelers. It was not a competition among the hobos but a communal activity. When the trainman came into the boxcar with a .45 in his hand, the "boys" stuck together. Even though the train was going fast, they all decided that since they weren't *all* going to be able to stay on, that they would *all* jump off. After distracting the pistol waving crewmember, every one of the Wobbly agitators jumped out of the moving boxcar. "We [McGuckin and another delegate Ted Frazer] sat there a while and waited until one by one the others came along. After a while we found them all accounted for and started down the track. We *decided*

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that the next freight was going to take us to Pocatello" (italics mine 72). Although no one of this group could consider themselves part of Nietzsche's "blond beasts" that London so admired, they did find that their collectivity had strength and that they could *decide* that the next train would take them exactly where they wanted to go. Unlike London, who had to remain invisible and escape from the extended hands of the law, this group of revolutionaries decided that they would make the decisions for themselves. When they hopped the next freight and the trainmen demanded a dollar from each for the ride, they overpowered the crew and told them to "beat it before we beat the hell out of [you]" (72). Ten miles out of the city, they then disabled the train by cutting the air off, allowing them time to jump off the train and thereby not get caught when it entered the yard.

This account perfectly accounts for both the limitations and benefits of hobo solidarity. Because of their solidarity on the first train, they were unable to remain invisible and were consequently seen and attacked by the agent who had a .45 pistol in his hand. Because of their solidarity, though, they were able, for a time, to overpower the next train crew and to hobble temporarily the Iron Horse ensuring their safety and freedom. There is a power here by this subculture to force the crew to pay attention to them by making their demands both heard and felt. Not only were they able to reverse the roles due to their numbers and visibility and take over the train from the crew, they also had power over the machine itself, sabotaging it and escaping before they could be apprehended by reinforcements. Much like the youths who wrought havoc on the train in Portugal that I discussed in my first chapter, these men took advantage of their power making themselves physically seen for a moment before, once again, disappearing.

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As seen with the industrial armies who were unable to hide on the trains headed for Washington and who took matters into their own hands, however, it is also this visibility and willingness to stay together in the light that caused the turn of public opinion, creating a backlash against hobos on the rails. The AWO "introduced an unprecedented level of structure and planning into IWW harvest organizing" and as they began to be more successful in its membership drives, they also began to try to reform and colonize the spaces on the trains that they were creating while riding from place to place (Higbie 153). Hobos, because they never officially existed on the trains, were often subject to harsh encounters while on the road. In many cases, they would be forced to pay a dollar or more to train crews who saw them as easy marks. Even more seriously, "yeggs" or thieves would attack hobos right after a season was over, taking whole harvest salaries from the 'bo.[95] Sadistic bulls were also often a problem as many autobiographies attest, with the worst taking pot shots at unsuspecting 'bos. But with the AWO having some muscle and their numbers growing, they were now in a position to protect more actively hobos who were willing to be part of their organization.

Some of the older time-tested Wobblies joined together and decided that they would start pushing back and they, themselves, would become the policing agents on the trains:

> Small units of not less than two or three were organized in such a way that each unit knew only itself . . . Their purpose was to clean up the harvest fields of hold-up men, whether they were parts of train crews, railroad detectives, law officers, or just plain hold-up men. During the clean-up, freight trains might pull into their division points with a

[95] For a great description of the "yegg" lifestyle—and one that influenced many people including William Burrows who reportedly could repeat excerpts from the book thirty years after reading it—see Jack Black's influential and well-written memoir, *You Can't Win*.

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> brakeman missing, never to be found. A railroad dick would be reported missing in the same way. (McGuckin 74)

Although hobos would resist the law by creating a space on the regimented places of a train, now Wobblies, at least according to McGuckin, were willing to commit murder in order to keep these areas of the train "safe" for riders. Another of the new strategies that the IWW used to control trains was a method that some Wobblys called the "800 mile picket line" which meant that they had control over the railroads of the West and could decide who rode the trains and who did not. The use of persuasion to enforce this picket line, they felt, was justified. It soon became apparent to many train riders that it would be advantageous to buy a "red card" (the membership identification) in order to be safe from some of the more militant members of the IWW.

Paul S. Taylor who wrote extensively about the migrant worker for the Public Affairs Committee, described the lifestyle of the itinerant worker:

> On lots of the big grain farms, some of the harvest hands turned up season after season, were known, expected, and had a place in the scheme of things . . . The harvest hands were men. They traveled by train. In the years before the first World War, one could see the freights in July moving slowly through Sioux City into the Dakotas, the roofs and doorways of boxcars literally black with men on their way to the wheat fields. In the second decade of the 20th century, American radicalism, organized by the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) spread rapidly. It became unsafe to ride the frights in some places unless one carried a "red card." Farmers learned the meaning of strikes for better wages and living conditions. They responded sometimes by giving way, and sometimes by organizing mobs to drive the agitators and workers from towns at the point of guns (5-6).

The unprecedented levels of organization by the AWO allowed the IWW to exert themselves forcefully into the hobo subculture which, therefore, had an effect on the

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larger culture that depended, in part, on hobo labor to harvest crops. Although the AWO may have grown out of certain elements of the hobo subculture, it now had some influence to shape the mobility of the members of this subculture as a whole. By protecting the hobo from everything from sadistic bulls to thieving yeggs, the IWW had also colonized (this was, after all, the word used by W.I. Fischer in his article for *Solidarity*) and controlled the trains in the image that fit their political world-view. Hobo spaces would now be turned into Wobbly places with its own rules and regulations. Some hobos, who were already forced to hide from the law to ride the train, would now have to try to hide from the Wobblies as well.

Even though the possibility of safer roads was a result of the IWW, many hobos just did not want to have this connection to the revolutionary organization. As Roger Bruns writes, "[m]any hoboes were undoubtedly intimidated by the unwarranted reputation of the IWW as a crazed, bomb-throwing gang of thugs. Other stiffs were leery of labor organizations generally who they thought of as shyster con men out for a fleece. Other boes merely wanted to be left alone" (150). And for some hobos, the IWW had become too powerful because they had begun to restrict their ability to move. As Nels Anderson writes in *The Hobo*:

> Rumors circulate that no one will be permitted to work on certain jobs unless he carries a red card; that the 'wobblies' will throw all non-members off freight trains; that all the other workers are taking out membership cards; that the employers of a certain district are going to cut the wages of transient labor, or that in other localities the wages are good because the I.W.W. will not permit anyone without a red card to work. (232)

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With all of these restrictions (even though many of these hobo migrant workers benefited from the IWW), some 'bos began to ponder whether the red card kept them safe from the hijackers on the road or whether they were buying protection *from* the IWW as well?

What the IWW had done by making themselves visible on the trains and also in the jungles on the outskirts of town was to create what Benedict Anderson defines as an imagined community where the hobo could see himself as a member of a group engaged in a common purpose. The IWW stressed solidarity; the hobo was a subgroup of the working class and therefore when he entered an IWW jungle, he was not an individual hobo anymore but was greeted as a "fellow worker." This title, however, did have responsibilities to the group and to disobey the laws would mean to face punishment (expulsion from the camp or possible physical injury). As Nels Anderson writes, "the I.W.W. has at times been able to exclude everyone who did not carry the red card of that organization" (20). The establishment of rules and fixing of borders forced an order, a stability upon those individual spaces. For example: inside a Wobbly jungle were Wobblies. If you did not have a red card—or refused to buy one—then you were an outsider and would not be allowed in the camp. The red card signified in that jungle the dominant power and those who would not submit were forced to keep moving down the road. Again, although the organizing of the jungles and trains was established to help all migrant workers, they also limited the types of travel that the individual could partake. Some hobos did not want to be aligned with a large group of men who placed ideological beliefs over the immediate concerns of the individual body. Other hobos simply did not want to be associated with a group that espoused anarchist beliefs. Still other hobos

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simply did not want to buy a red card, or any other card for that matter, because they did not want to be coerced into any group.

This type of colonizing by the IWW has been linked by some critics to strategies used by the federal government to attempt to locate and define the body of the hobo. Ted Grossardt writes, "[b]oth the Federal government and the IWW attempted to project its presence into the same geographical space for different purposes" (286-287). In his view, both the government and the IWW attempted to manipulate the hobo by trying to delimit the individuality of the hobo. The hobo, who existed far from the public eye, was now being fought over by the Federal government and a revolutionary organization, both of which saw much at stake in colonizing and controlling the migrant worker population. Again, their reasoning to do so was extremely different but the goal—to control the mobility of the migrant worker, and therefore the hobo subgroup, was important to both groups. And although thousands of hobos did find relief through the efforts of the IWW, many also saw the limitations it placed on their individuality. In order to understand this important predicament in which the hobo now found himself in, let's turn quickly to how these two very different groups fought for control of this subculture.

Farmers, anxious that their crops would not be picked in time, would send handbills across the country asking for workers to come to a particular place to help with the harvesting. Usually asking for more workers then they needed, often they would get even more then they had asked for, resulting in an advantage for the farmer who could

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then set lower wages and longer hours.[96] But, although they might have the wage advantage, they were still faced with many angry and weary individuals on their property wishing for work. According to Grossardt, farmers had the option to look either to the federal government or the unions to help control this population. Farmers wanted to be able to group and define this population to fit their fixed agenda. Spotting the advantage, they turned to the government who looked more favorably on owners than workers. The workers, then, who had been welcomed in previous years, suddenly became dangerous in the farmers' eyes and needed to be regulated and controlled.

Part of the farmers' and citizens' anxiety was the way in which the workers were not completely known: they would appear when harvests would ripen and no one was quite sure where they came from or where they went. "When the activities of a mobile group of people are no longer observable and thus cannot be fully known, those people become potentially omnipresent to the fixed observer. The observer suddenly faces the possibility of being the observed" (285). And the citizens did not like the feeling of being watched. Fearful of giving this mobile community too much power—a power that they inherently had because it was their labor that would bring in the crops—the popular press vilified them and anxious citizens demanded that the law step in and control the workers. When the IWW began to organize the workers, the hobos who had been welcomed on these same farms in previous years now were seen by some as bomb-throwing anarchists and "the jungles became the site for the IWW" (293). Newspaper editorials that had in previous years produced stories of colorful migrant workers now produced angry

[96] This type of scene is seen in agonizing detail in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. While dealing with auto tramps and not hobos specifically, the large numbers of "Oakies" arriving with promises of a job only to be turned away in droves is extremely similar to the hobos' predicament.

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diatribes against the IWW. The Farm Bureau then became the organization that most farmers looked to for guidance and the setting of proper rules. And thus the federal government enjoyed being on the "inside" and having the labor unions on the "outside." "By constructing the IWW as part of the labor problem and by extension anti-American, the idea of federal government could be telescoped into each locality in the person of county or Farm Bureau agents" (298). Once the IWW formed an imaginary community around the hobo, the citizens then had something to define themselves against. "The constitution of any sort of IWW community provided a purchase upon which government could begin to define its own version of disorder = IWW. By its presence, the IWW could become the Symbolic boundary for the location of government" (299-300). In other words, the farmers now had the IWW to hate. They also had the will and ability to control and monitor the workers.[97] They knew where the jungles were and they attacked them. "Local towns set about recolonizing the jungles and the railroads. Part of combating the IWW presence consisted of disrupting the places symbolically appropriated" (300). With the jungles controlled, towns could always rely on the police to "vag" a potentially dangerous agitator (or just a worker whom they didn't want in town) and send them to jail or to work on a chain gang. The IWW had too much potential and felt power and towns, which could now define the hobo in terms of the principles of the Wobblies, joined together to take it back.

The hobo, as stated previously, is exerting a resistive politics when hopping trains. But when individuals are grouped to the collective politics of the IWW, then they

[97] James Byrkit in his article "The IWW in Wartime Arizona" seems to support this view when he writes, "Taken as a movement, the IWW in 1912 was seen as peaceful" (152). But, as he suggests in his essay, with the AWO becoming more visible and the Farm Bureau becoming the political arm of the farmer, the IWW was to be vilified and seen as a danger to the citizen-farmer.

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are seen as part of that group. And while they may be part of an imagined community, the results are exerted on the individuals physical bodies. Resentment towards the IWW was therefore present among many hobos who did not like to be forced and confined into any organization. Nels Anderson wrote, in *The Milk and Honey Route* that, Big Bill Haywood, the Wobbly leader, "made a futile attempt of organizing hobos around an "ism" and he doubtless demonstrated for all time that the real hobo moving in and out the honeycomb of society is not interested in causes" (167). Roger Bruns suggests that some hobos had been driven to union membership by force and intimidation and had bought red cards more out of fear than protection" (159). Drummond Mansfield retells an account of an incident of violence between an IWW member and a hobo who didn't want to join the organization: "One of [IWW members] approached him and asked if carried the red card . . . . When the hobo replied in the negative, he found himself suddenly shoved out of the car, landing in the ballast along the track" (38).

Are all of these accounts symptomatic of a cold war mentality where unions represent tyranny and oppression on individual men? Is this just faulty logic that shows how working class men are split apart in order to avoid a more potent political voice that demands more workers rights? Perhaps. Hobos and other men who placed concerns with their immediate bodies over the concerns of the collective one were frequently used by owners to break strikes and destroy working class-based organizations and movements (they were the "front line agitators" used to agitate for the owners and not the workers). But if we construct a scale and place Jack London as the Darwin individualist on one end and Henry McGukin and Charles Asleigh as the proponents for a group based politics on the other, we must also explore the middle ground where there were many hobos who

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both enjoyed the solidarity of radical organizations but also placed an importance on their individual bodies. This is the case with Dos Passos's Mac character. He believes in group solidarity in theory but, in practice, he places an importance on his own body. The way that he resolves this contradiction is through movement.

MAC, THE HOBO, AND THE INDIVIDUAL IMPULSE

The political hobo never had a chance, explains Fredrick Feied in his examination of the *USA* trilogy. While Dos Passos was obviously sympathetic to the Wobbly cause, Feied finds the hobos lacking any real insight in the nuances of class-based politics.[98] "They are working stiffs, not intellectuals" Feied seems to accuse and Mac and his ilk could not fathom the strength of the oppositional power facing them (46). It was inevitable that their defeat, which was a defeat of "the America of Walt Whitman" and the "decline of political freedom in the United States," would result in the hobo's abject uselessness at the end of this trilogy (55, 85).

> "What we discover below is a no-man's land between two opposing classes and the theme that runs like a bitter current throughout the more than 1,300 pages of *USA* is the theme of the gradual dissolution of hobo strength and the transformation of the one time militant wobbly at its inception to the homeless and dispossessed Vag of its conclusion." (55)

According to Phontinos, the "defeat" of the hobo in the novel is also a symbol for Dos Passos of the greater defeat in the political body of the United States: "the demise of the

[98] As Phontinos writes correctly, "The activities of the Wobblies have a kinetic makeshift quality—soapboxes, gatherings via freight car—that Dos Passos celebrates" (143).

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Wobbly represented the demise of authentic American rebellion and by extension the demise of authentic manhood" (143).

It is interesting to note that for these two critics, there is an either/or dichotomy that they have implemented: either the hobo is militant or dispossessed; either authentic rebel or inauthentic sell out. And although I do not disagree that the text can be read in these ways, if we read somewhat against the grain, and in the context of the history of the hobo's involvement in militant organizations, we can see that this issue might not be as clear cut as the text first suggests. Yes, this is a trilogy that is essentially about defeat: the rise up the figurative ladder of success in the United States is littered with the dead and defeated of those who could never quite make the climb. From Mac's father feeling in *The 42nd Parallel* like a "whipped cur" to the Vag character in *The Big Money*, who with seemingly useless "idle hands numb" looks down the road and sees nothing but the same—the underdogs never do seem to be able to get on their feet (494). The father dies, poor, in a city many miles away from his home. The Vag, who has the "staleness of discouraged carcasses crowded into a transient camp" lingering in his nostrils, seems to be a defeated reincarnation of the young man who had boundless energy in the opening of the trilogy (492). But the boundless optimism is gone and now he must stand on the side of the road waiting passively for a ride. While the young hopeful man's "muscles ache for the knowledge of jobs," the Vag's "head swims, hunger has twisted the belly tight, he has skinned a heel through the torn sock, feet ache in the broken shoes" (v, 492). The excitement of the young man in the beginning of the trilogy seemingly leads only to a crumpled, worn suit framing a tired, hungry body. The Vag has sat in the jungle camps, has run away from the railroad bulls, has looked for the jobs, and, in Dos Passos's

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pessimistic ending (which is quite different from my reading of the hopeful ending in *Manhattan Transfer*), he has also been passed by.

Toeing the edge of the concrete, the Vag looks into the sky and witnesses an airplane cutting through the clouds overhead—he is very far apart from the new means of transportation. In other words, he will not be able to move in this new world order. The railroad has given way to the airplane (a prominent storyline in the trilogy) and instead of a hungry young man braving hardships in the belly of a boxcar to make it to a job, "[t]he transcontinental passengers sit pretty, big men with bank accounts, highly paid jobs" (493). These men, who pass overhead through the towns in the short time that it takes them to vomit their steak dinners into the bags kindly supplied by the airline companies, have taken their movements for granted. They do not have to fight for their space on a moving train and there are "plenty of restaurants in LA" to refill their extended stomachs (494). The Vag, though, who had dreamed of this life of greenbacks and polished offices, of platinum haired girls and greetings from doormen, is now dependent on a driver speeding past him to stop and take him "the hundred miles" down the road. Although a hundred miles down the road might seem like a small jaunt for an experienced hobo, the Vag at the end of the trilogy seems afraid of the Iron Road with its violent bulls and harsh living conditions. Not willing to risk his skin to create a space on the train, he remains passive on the side of the road, dependent on drivers to stop their car and offer him a place in the front seat. For the Vag, "the hundred miles down the road" must seem like the other side of the world.

Modes of transportation always seem to be in competition with each other in these novels and the inability to keep up with the newest modes of transportation will spell

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defeat.[99] For example, for Dos Passos, the train always beats the car in terms of power and speed and the hobo who can hop the train is someone who should be admired. But in the changing world that is at the heart of *USA*, the train cannot compete with the power of the plane and for the Vag character at the end of this trilogy, he is left behind in the new world order. The destitute man who had such dreams at the beginning of the novel can only look enviously at the plane crossing the sky waiting for a car to stop and pick him up. The Vag is unable and unwilling to move by himself and for Dos Passos, this will lead to the character's physical and spiritual death.

But is the Vag the defeated stand-in for the whipped hobo as some critics suggest? Does the *USA* trilogy indeed, "narrate the decline of the tramp from American hobo to beaten-down Vag" (Phontinos 148)? Although I do see that this is one way to read the hobo figures in the trilogy, I feel that a more complicated and nuanced reading of this figure will show that it is not quite as defeatist as the text or critics would first suggest. Yes, the political hobo when he stands up with his fellow travelers and tries to make a stand is convincingly defeated. For a hobo who survives by sneaking and hiding, making himself visible in the light of day will lead to his demise. This future was clearly seen with London's involvement with the Industrial Armies. It was also the case when the IWW began to gain power and to make hobo jungles places for IWW agitation and propaganda. Once they began to get a foothold and make themselves too known and thus too much of a threat, the agents of public order who police the borders were able to

[99] For example, Charlie Anderson gained notoriety from his exploits of flying airplanes in WWI. But, further into his narrative sections, when he drives down the East coast to clear his head and try to get his life back on track, he spots a New York train running parallel to him. Taunting the train, saying, "Hell they don't make no speed," he tries to outrun it and make it first to the crossing (330). Misjudging, he ends up in the hospital.

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swoop down and defeat the politicized hobo. But is this the case with Mac in the trilogy? Is he much like the Vag character at the end of the novel whose "wants crawl over his skin like ants," or is he a much more, for lack of a better word, contented character (494)? In a novel where many characters are left defeated both emotionally and financially, are we making a jump when we just assume that the Vag is the defeated hobo? Or, as I would suggest, can we read Mac as a figure who is able to use his "in-betweeness," learned as a hobo, to consistently escape any potentially confining circumstances that threatens his own individuality? Did Mac, at the end of his narrative sections "sell out to the sonsofabitches" or, although never becoming the political revolutionist that he expects to become, nevertheless create a space for himself that coincides with his own individual desires and wants (81)? To explore this possibility, we should concentrate specifically on Mac's manipulation of the domestic sphere—a sphere that Dos Passos uses to show how a potentially political revolutionary can be undermined—throughout the remainder of his narrative.

After hearing the soap boxers pontificate about the coming workers' revolution, Mac decides to join the IWW and throw up his job because he was about to give up his political beliefs for economic stability. But although he understands that the wrong job could lead to what he considers selling out, he is not cautious enough to stay away from females who in this novel represent a constricting noose around masculine revolutionary politics. Most of the women in this novel are used as scapegoats, and their sole purpose seems to be to confine and control the men. For example, when Maisie realizes that Mac will leave her, she submits her body to his wishes and after having sex with him in the woods, calls him "little husband"—the words that many hobo autobiographies write is

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the death of any man's freedom on the road (83).[100] After the act, "they" decide that he will not join the IWW in the free speech fight that he had planned to go to and that, instead, they will immediately get married. His lust satiated, however, Mac wakes up the next day and attempting to throw off the feeling of confinement, writes Maisie a letter telling her that he is needed for the revolution and quickly takes a train to Goldfield, Nevada, where he uses his trade as a printer to get out the revolutionary paper *Nevada Workman*. Once he leaves Maisie, things immediately improves for Mac. As soon as he gets to Goldfield, Big Bill Haywood comes to town to stir the miners to keep their fight strong and true. Mac has escaped the confines of the domestic feminine sphere that could break him of his individuality as well as his left-leaning class-based political bent; now he is using his hobo skills for both individual freedom as well as for the greater cause of the revolution.

Dos Passos, however, undercuts this optimistic narrative in two distinct ways. First, the reader has already been introduced to Haywood a few pages earlier in the "Biography" section. So although Mac and the rest of the fellow workers are excited about the possibilities that Haywood will bring, the reader already knows that Haywood would soon find himself in jail that would make him at fifty "a heavy broken man" (86). The same man who was drinking, laughing and writing articles for the *Nevada Workman* has already been introduced as a man whom would end up sick with diabetes and, on the run from the law, would have his "big broken hulk of a body" burned and his ashes buried under the Kremlin wall (87). As readers, while our sympathies may or may not be

[100] Nels Anderson, under the pseudonym Dean Stiff wrote in *The Milk and Honey Route*, "To be matrimonially attached means to become domestically attached, to be haltered. A domesticated hobo is a doomed hobo. He can no more endure captivity than his simian ancestor, the gorilla" (149).

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with these complicated, passionate, misogynist workingmen, we do know how the fight will eventually end.

As for the personal politics of the hobo, Mac also, while listening to Haywood speak, is unsure of his own particular place in the revolution. With a letter from Maisie burning a hole in his pocket, Mac wonders, "what Big Bill would do if he'd got a girl in trouble like that" (92). Maisie is pregnant and suddenly the word "solidarity" takes on multiple meanings for Mac. Does he stay for the revolution or does he stick with the woman he coerced into having sex with him? After staying around for another few months contemplating what to do, he heads for the rails again to make it to San Fransico to meet his soon-to-be-wife because "[a]fter those bleak dusty months up in Goldfield he needed a woman" (96).

This turn of the plot seems to suggest the end of Mac and any chance he has for "freedom." Once he has turned his back on the revolution, he seemingly has given up any opportunity for living a strong masculine lifestyle. To make this point even clearer, Dos Passos has Mac, when hoboing his way to San Francisco, meet an old, dying hobo who cannot catch his breath. He is chocking on his own blood and does not have long to live. Anticipating his approaching death, the hobo only wants to go for one more ride and to head to the West where "there's trees an' stuff" (100). Mac quickly helps the old man into the box car and stays with him to fulfill the old man's last romantic Whitmanesque request. The next morning, looking at the body with a kind brakeman, he sees a "face of a statue of a Civil War general" that was stiff and lifeless (102). The hobo who had been on the road for at least "seventeen years" never was able to see those trees before he died (100). Time has passed him by.

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It seems, therefore, as if Dos Passos is ringing the death knell for the hobo. Mac, who has a chance to do some good in the masculine world of politics is now sacrificing himself and joining the feminine world of Maisie—a world of silly burlesque shows, babies, frivolous magazines and Sundays where Mac would "putter [sic] around the house" (103). He is getting behind on his payments, he is getting soft, and he knows it. And, Dos Passos blatantly implies, it is all Maisie's fault. The misogyny in these sections (and throughout the novels) are apparent as well as disappointing and critics have already pointed this out.[101] Once Mac made the decision to leave revolutionary politics, he also seems to lose all of his masculinity. Maisie is to blame for his problems: she has to go to the hospital to give birth to their child Rose and Mac has to "beg two months' advance of pay" from his boss; Maisie gets sick after the birth of the second child and they have to go into debt; Maisie is frivolous and constantly wants things like an icebox or a new stove (103). This is what happens, Dos Passos seems to say, when you choose the feminine over the masculine world.

To explore the larger question of whether or not the hobo that turns into the hapless Vag character, however, we must take Dos Passos's gender views at face value—

[101] The other hobo character in this novel, Ben Evans, is also caught in the web of an overbearing female character. Ben's narrative, much like Mac's, is the story of a young man who is forced on the road because of economic circumstances. Leaving his home with his brother Izzy, they hop freights heading from one job to another following the cycles of the migrant worker. While working in one of these particular jobs, he meets Nick Gigli, a young anarchist, who politicizes Ben. Refusing to work under harsh conditions, the two then hobo their way across the country. Eventually meeting Bram, a Wobbly, Ben travels to the West and participates in free speech movements. He also works in the fields and as the calluses on his hand grow deeper, so does his confidence and strength of character. As Dos Passos puts it succinctly, "He began to talk like a Harvest stiff" (435). But Ben does not stay in the West and returns to the effeminate East where (after being attacked at a free speech fight) he loses his nerve and strength. It is here in the East coast, that he meets a radical Jewish lawyer who, while helping him fight prison time, also makes him lose any sense of his individualistic, strong-willed hobo personality. Once this happens, he then becomes a toy for the Jewish lawyers wife who at the same time is both a mother/seducer figure that controls Ben. As Photinos writes, Ben becomes a "kind of anti-hobo; he is the property of the female tourist" (142).

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masculine: real and substantial; feminine: soft and complacent. There are obvious problems with Dos Passos's world view when it comes to revolutionary politics—Emma Goldman and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn are just two whose autobiographies could discount him. This is, however, the world that Dos Passos creates and we must work within the confines of this world. The politicized hobo who wanted to fight the revolution not only had to escape the grasps of the federal government but also the feminine sphere which is not possible in *USA*. But if we disconnect Mac from the group politics and instead see him as an individual who, while enjoying moments of solidarity with other men, values his own movement over group based movement, then Mac is not the defeated character that critics suggest. If stasis is death for Dos Passos, Mac, who never stops moving, is never defeated within the text.

If Mac would haven taken Maisie's brother Bill's offer to get him into real estate, for example, then Mac would have become a "hen-pecked" defeated character: the hobo who had died and gone to marriage. He would have stopped moving, grown roots, and set up house. Although he might want—for a time—heterosexual bonds and marital comfort, he refuses to be placed in the domestic sphere. And while he might have traveled up the ladder of success (owning property seems the best way to succeed in these novels), his traveling days would have been behind him. [102] But Mac is able to separate

[102] This is the case with another major character in the trilogy, J. Ward Moorehouse, who understands the need to own property as well as how to use propaganda. In fact, Mac and Morrehouse share the same page when Mac, later on in the trilogy is in Mexico and listens to Moorehouse speak about labor relations and acknowledges that he is "a smooth bastard" (286). As Phontious suggests, "All of these elements appear in the narrative of John Moorehouse whose rise in the U.S. society parallels the decline of the hobo. . . Moorehouse represents the "new" America that becomes increasingly hostile to the hobo figure (i.e. authentic American). . . Mac's road adventures take place during a period of transition in the United States when men like Moorehouse are rising in power and men like Mac are finding the world increasingly

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himself from the feminine world (and his responsibilities to his children) and "before he knew it," he finds himself after a fight with Maisie, with his hands stuffed in his pockets, once again walking the streets of the city with no direction (111). Like Jimmy Herf from *Manhattan Transfer*, Mac finds himself walking aimlessly away from the world that he knows. And just like Jimmy—and unlike the Vag character at the end of the trilogy—this lack of direction and the physical movement away from the world that confines him, is all that he needs. In a moment of epiphany, Mac suddenly realizes that, "I'm free to see the country now, to work for the movement, to go on the bum again" (112). And although "the movement" in this sentence might mean the IWW or any type of revolutionary politics, it also has the duel meaning of the freedom to just physically move around the country and not to be under anyone's thumb. For although Mac might have a desire not "to sell out to the sonofabitches," his connection to *the movement* is most real in the *physical movement* itself.

Although Mac worked hard when he was in Goldfield, he also did not believe that he was strong enough to give up his own pleasures for the greater cause—he wanted to blow off steam, drink, laugh, and have sex with prostitutes. He complained of being stuck behind a printing machine in Goldfield and his feelings of unworthiness in the party politics to his fellow worker and friend Ben Evans. But what is most exciting to Mac when he releases himself from Maisie's grip is that he is free to travel again. When he has left Maisie behind, it is important to note that he does not decide to join "the boys" that he originally left for her or even to find another IWW fight in the West. Rather, he

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inhospitable" (116-119). But as I will show, when the world becomes inhospitable for the hobo, the hobo learns to adapt and to change.

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puts as much distance between him and his family as he can, beats his way to the U.S./Mexico border and "with a beating heart . . . walk[s] across the international bridge into the dusty bustling adobe streets of Juarez" (112). And even though he states that Mexico might represent a chance to continue party politics that knows no national boundaries, Mexico also represents his opportunity to travel into an exotic locale where he is not known.[103] Like a hobo who shakes the dust off his feet in one town and looks forward to a new opportunity down the line somewhere, Mac has a chance to reinvent himself into the type of man he wants to be.

Although Mac does have a "vague idea of the politics of the revolution" as he lives and joins the political fight in Juarez (although neither Mac nor the reader know what exactly he is doing), Mac once again leaves and heads for Mexico City and finds himself in the middle of a domestic scene (273). While working for the *Mexican Herald*, Mac sets up house with Concha, a former mistress of an American oilman. And much like Maisie, Concha also does not have any love for revolutionary politics, stating succinctly, "every poor man socialista . . . a como, no? But when you get rich, quick you all very much capitalista" (278). The two domestic scenes, however, are very different. Even though he is never rich, and therefore not a "capitalista," Mac does seem to enjoy his life and soon finds himself "running a bookstore on the Calle Independencia with a line of stationary and a few typewriters" (284). Concha, who is a good cook and can stretch Mac's small salary (she has no interests in magazines or ice-boxes), seems to find pleasure in Mac spending most of his days reading and talking to his friends. Although

[103] For Mac, Mexico is an exotic, fetishized land that reminds me very much the way that Eddy Joe Cotton also fetishizes the country. See Chapter IV for my in depth discussion.

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he found himself confined and trapped in his life with Maisie, Mac enjoys the un-pressured life of living with Concha (who is unable to have any children) because it allows him to sit and talk about revolutionary politics. When he is not working, he finds himself showing representatives of the AFL to the "clean" whorehouses and the "backside of Mexico" (280). Drinking and talking politics, Mac enjoys for a time this life of the store-keeping patriarch. If we connect this to the hobo mentality, then, Mac is doing what many hobos did—he has a stake and he is living off of it for a time before he moves on to a new experience.

For critics who want to see Mac become a revolutionary martyr, or for those who see this novel as a story of the squashing of the revolutionary impulse in the early part of the twentieth century, Mac, lifting his glass of cognac toasting "to the workers, to the tradeunions, to the patrido laborista, to the social revolution and the agraristas" is an empty, pathetic figure (290). Nonetheless, although he does not fight to his last breath for the revolution, he also does not turn his back on the revolution either. Instead, he has found a niche where he can breathe a little easy and enjoy his life "in-between" the life of the revolutionary guerilla and, for example, the prospecting American oilmen that are found in abundance in these sections. He has not sold out his beliefs in the revolution; rather, he has remained true to his original goals in the beginning of this novel. There is no evidence in the text that while in Mexico, Mac is just "faking" his belief and mouthing the revolutionary credos for his own advantage. In fact, most importantly, he has not changed from the naïve hobo in the beginning of The 42nd Parallel who had found great pleasure sitting in a grassy field talking revolution to his friend Ike. And although he is not lying in a field under the warming sun waiting for a train to come to a stop, and is

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now in his own courtyard, surrounded by cats and a subservient mistress, he is still talking revolution. Unlike his life in the United States, where he was stuck to the feminine sphere that seemed to control him, he still has freedom in Mexico, traveling by train when the revolutionary fight becomes too close to his liking. He is still moving—heading from Juarez to Mexico City, from Mexico City Vera Cruz, and from Vera Cruz to perhaps Mexico City again—and he has the ability to move from one feminine sphere to the next. For example, when he first leaves Juarez, he escapes from a prostitute that he had been spending time with and then, arriving in Mexico City, quickly meets up with Concha. While traveling again with his mistress, he begins to think that she might be too much of a weight for him and plans on leaving her. But she proves not to be too much of a responsibility and when we leave Mac and his life in Mexico, he plans to still stay with her for awhile longer.

For Dos Passos, who puts such importance on the idea of movement, Mac is still in motion, riding out and manipulating the unstable political conditions of Mexico. Sizing up every situation to see how it would best affect his life, he makes choices that benefit himself first before worrying about anyone else and therefore there is a freedom for Mac (helped along because of his gender privileges) in his travels throughout Mexico. Unlike the Vag character who is dependant on a car stopping to take him down the road, Mac still has agency and is willing to create his own particular roads. Mac might be a failure as part of the revolutionary vanguard but he is not a failure in the way that the Vag characteris a failure. He is still moving.

HOBO ORGANIZATIONS

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While most scholars of the hobo subculture do concentrate their critical eye on the relationship between the Hobo and the IWW, there were, in fact, other successful organizations that also had a large hobo membership. But unlike the IWW who focused on being a worker first and a hobo second, these organizations placed much more importance on being a hobo. Nels Anderson discusses four different types of Unions: The IWW, the IBWA, the M.W.U. and the Benevolent and Protective Order of Ramblers. Other, less established Hobo affiliated groups included The Hoboes of Americ, Inc. and The Tourist Union number 63. But why this intense focus on the Wobblys and only a passing glance on these other organizations? One reason is obvious: The IWW produced real, tangible results that affected those who were *not* hobos: farmers trying to get their crops in cheaply and on time, police who were trying to run agitators out of town, etc. The Wobblies' actions were performed in the public domain and they were certainly noticed. But for Lynne Marie Adrian, this "focus on the I.W.W. has kept scholars of the period from acknowledging the parallel development of an autonomous organizational movement in the hobo subculture. Consequently, the autonomy and distinctness of the hobo subculture has been severely underestimated" (74). Although the I.W.W. certainly did use the hobos for their guerilla movement (and vice-versus), for Adrian, the focus on the IWW has been too great because the Wobblies were a diverse group that had primarily non-hobo leadership and were "not an inherent part of the hobo subculture" (79). Although the leaders might have *used* the hoboes for their "sowing the seeds of revolution," they were not exclusively a part of the hobo subculture. For Wobblies, the life of a bindlestiff was a result of the capitalist oppressing on the man who works with

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his hands. As a fellow worker, the miner was no different than the harvest hand, who was no different than the lumberjack; the way that he made it to these jobs was by stealing rides on trains. Hoboing was a way to get to a certain job, it was not an essential defining quality. This mode of transportation was character building: it made him tough, made him strong, and it made him perfect for a revolutionary outfit. But being a hobo was a by-product of being a worker first and foremost: it was just how he beat his way from one place to another. For other organizations, however, being a hobo was not just a by-product of a subcultural lifestyle, it was in itself the reason for being a member.

Perhaps the best known of these "other" organizations was the one led by James Eads How, the "millionaire hobo," who was both the soul and the financial resource for the International Brotherhood Welfare Association. The IBWA was exclusively organized to make the life of the hobo easier and less dangerous. It wanted shorter work days, the abolition of the "shark" employment agencies, free municipal facilities, unemployment insurance and the implementation of other basic need-based facilities (Bruns 109). How, who was influenced "more from the Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden than from the class conscious theories of the Anarchists, Marxists, or the I.W.W." made it clear that he separated himself from other Labor organizations; his was an organization for the advancements of hobos (Adrian 104). In a lead editorial for *The Hobo News* (which was the organ of the IBWA and financed by How), the paper declares adamantly:

> The IBWA is not a Labor Union. It is a clearing house for Labor. It plows the field and plants the seeds so that Organized labor can reap the benefit. It works toward one end and one end only and that is, the complete emancipation of the Migratory Unskilled and often Unemployed workers. It helps unions in every way possible . . . Labor

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> could have its demands complied with at once if there were no scabs and we try to eliminate this evil. There is only one way, and that is by education. (as quoted in Adrian 92-93)

The IBWA was designed to "help" labor unions through educating the worker in his rights or potential rights. They were not an organization that was determined to force a revolution; what they felt was that through education, traveling men could become better hobos. Through this practical and relevant education, the hobo then could decide for himself what was best. If the educated hobo wanted to become a front-line fighter for the IWW, then all the better (there was no love from the IBWA towards the capitalist class). But, if he wanted to remain on the road and was merely stopping to just get a bite to eat while he listened to a speaker, then that would be fine as well. The IBWA was primarily concerned with creating places for hobos to go to during the winter months when they were trying to live on their stakes and waiting for the harvest cycle or industrial work to begin. Unlike the Sallys (Salvation Armies) who wanted to save the hobos' souls, the IBWA was more a communal space where the doors were always swinging: come in for a bite to eat before heading out to look for a job, come in for a class on hostile rail junctures before heading out to catch a freight; come in to hear a professor talk about economics before heading out to the slave market.[104]

The focus of the IBWA was on a practical education. How and other well known hobos such as Ben Reitman began to set up "Hobo Colleges" that were designed to be "an intellectual and spiritual haven, a place where they could seek an education in a variety of subjects from law to economics, where they could make their own voices

[104] Criticism for the Salvation Army has been widespread in hobo autobiographies. See *Broke: The Man Without A Dime* by Edwin A. Brown for one of many examples.

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heard, and where in times of trouble, they could find sympathy and concern (Bruns 1-2).[105] The education that the hoboes received depended on a rotating list of "professors," some who held degrees from academic institutions and others who were "specialists" in their own particular field. Frank Beck's memoir *Hobohemia*, a personal history through the underbelly of Chicago in the 1920's and 1930's, lists some of the Chicago's Hobo Colleges eccentric and impressive faculty: Herman Adler, Mental Hygiene, Preston Bradley, Public Speaking, E.L. Schaub, Philosphy; E.W. Burgess, Sociolgy; David Rotman, Psychiatry; John Landesco, Criminology, Jim Tully, the author, was also on the staff" (75). Depending on the night that the hobo entered the college, he would have the opportunity to grab a chair and listen to a speaker ranging from a published author of hobo travels to an accounting of the psychology of the migrant worker. These classes, however, were not for the most part lectures: if the hobo disagreed with the speaker, he could add his own voice in the mix—his personal knowledge and willingness to speak his mind were the only prerequisite to enter into the conversation. The Hobo Colleges were "part community center, part debating forum, part ego trip, part educational institution" and this style of organization was popular among many hobos (Bruns 177). For example, in 1920, the most successful year, "the IBWA counted twenty local offices: Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Cheyenne, Cinncinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Daytoon, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, MO. Memphis, Muncie, New York, Oklahoma City, Philadelphia,

[105] Ben Reitman is perhaps the most infamous hobo ever known. A man of many words and even more tricks, Reitman has been called (and never denied being) "a liar, a thief, a cheat, a pimp, an adulterer . . .a socialist, an anarchist, a communist, a stool pigeon, a friend and pal to murders, thieves and crooks . . . a disloyal revolutionist, a cowardly radical and almost every name that can label or discredit a man" (as quoted in Carpenter 2). Hobo doctor and lover of Emma Goldman, Reitman was the author of *Sister of The Road*, a sensationalist account of the hobo lifestyle. There are numerous discussions of this publicity seeking hobo; see *The Damndest Radical* (Bruns) and *No Regrets* (Carpenter) for book length biographies of him.

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Pueblo, Co. St Louis, Salt Lake City, and Toledo" (as quoted in Adrian 127).[106] These Hobo Colleges were not demanding on the hobo and coincided nicely with his lifestyle. If the hobo was in the area of a College, then he could join, have a discussion or debate, and then leave on the next train out of town.

The IBWA was therefore more of a fraternal organization instead of a militant political organization.[107] But even though the IBWA swore that they were not competing or connected with the IWW, others were not so convinced. Tellingly, any organizing of hobos was a cause of alarm for both the dominant and radical cultures who wanted to keep an eye on the hobo. The Military Intelligence Division Files of the War Department connected the IBWA with the IWW. In a memo recounting his investigation of the IBWA, Sergent Lynn D. Copeland wrote, "[t]his organization [was] supposed to have been founded by a "harmless hobo" whose motives were to help and assist unfortunates is now being manipulated by unscrupulous agitators and being used for propaganda purposes to stir up unrest and dissatisfaction and foster the principles of the Soviet form of government" (as quoted in Adrian 95). Although there is no concrete evidence to

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[106] Adrian makes an interesting point that it was only after the IWW began losing its foothold with migrant workers that other organizations began to become more popular. As Adrian writes, "It is only after the decimation of the I.W.W. by the Espionage Acct of 1917 that the other organizations gain public visibility . . . The other possible explanation is that the organizations, particularly the IBWA and the MWU [an off-shoot of the IBWA] emerged from relative obscurity to take up the torch which had been wrested from the I.W.W." (82).

[107] Some members, however, within the IBWA felt the need to make the IBWA more political and to start demanding more—especially after the government crackdown of the IWW left a space for other organizations to gain firmer membership ground (Adrian 82). While not as militant as the IWW, an off-shoot IBWA organization called the Migrant Workers Union was formed to be more politically active general labor movement. The MWU was not concerned about education, what they were concerned with was action. "Some of the leaders of the IBWA felt that the older organization was neglecting the interests of the migratory worker. They charged that it was too much concerned with welfare work and too little with the organization of the workers" (Anderson 240). What the MWU wanted to do was to structure the IBWA more forcefully and "organize the workers along industrial lines more effectively than had the IWW" (241).

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substantiate his wild claims, it does show the fear that many in the government felt towards the hobo. "Innocent" and "harmless" organizing of hobos with altruistic purposes could then be corrupted by "unscrupulous" radicals who would turn the hobo into a bomb-throwing anarchist—and therefore there was a need to keep these organizations visible to the ever watchful eye of the government.

But although the government had propaganda purposes in discrediting the IBWA and placing all hobos in the category of "possible anarchists," the IWW also began attacking How's group because it felt that the IBWA was crouching into their (limited) territory. "Although James Eads How's organization of hoboes the IBWA was not essentially a labor union but a fraternal society and although How had encouraged hoboes to support the labor movement, IWW leaders saw fit to attack him as a faddist with half baked schemes likely to injure the hobo cause rather then help it" (Bruns *KOTR* 151). For these IWW members, How was an eccentric millionaire and had no authentic connection to the working class and would only hinder the revolution. William Foster, who was a member of the I.W.W. and author of *Pages from a Worker's Life*, wrote that "[t]he Industrial Workers of the World from 1905 on was the true organization of the floating workers, the hoboes of the West. Such bodies as Eads How's and Jeff Davis Brotherhood Welfare Association were mere pretenders" (108). For Foster and other militant hobos, these "inauthentic" organizations were not political or structured enough to effect concrete changes for the migrant worker and they were thus just mere "pretenders." They felt that the IBWA celebrated the hobo for being a hobo and were not using these men as effectively as their lifestyles could permit. Thus when the IWW had a strong influence on the hobo, the militant members began to see any organization or even

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individual who was not willing to become radicalized as harmful to the movement and subject to censure and retribution.

As Tobias Higbie writes in his book *Indispensable Outcasts*, for the more militant in the organization—especially those within the AWO arm of the IWW—those hobos who were not with the organization were against it. "Because it [the IWW] was open to all workers regardless of race, craft, or creed, the logic went, anyone who refused to join was a scab. The result of this logic was that the line between convincing and coercing laborers to join the union sometimes was thin or nonexistent" (153). If a Wobbly found a hobo riding a train then he needed to buy the red card and be part of the movement; if he did not, then he could be considered a scab and dangerous to all Wobblies. In time of revolution, there is no space for standing on the side.

Both the IWW and the IBWA were therefore struggling (both successfully and unsuccessfully) with how to organize this sub-section of the rootless class and were at times vying against each other. But although the IBWA stated clearly that it was there to help labor unions, other hobo organizations were anti-political—their efforts were mainly to memoralize what they felt was the dying hobo figure. For example, the Hoboes of America, Inc.(also known as the International Itinerant Worker's Union) was formed by Jeff Davis, a self proclaimed "King of the Hoboes" who had a knack for getting his name in the papers and making money off of his notoriety. The organization was "more like a fellowship organization in which men tell each other stories of the old exploits on the road, much like veterans' organizations can serve as forums for telling old war stories" (Adrian 136). Davis, himself, was vehemently against the IWW and other types of organizations that could harm the image of the hobo in the public's eye. In a 1915 article

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for *The Independent*, Davis, who was opening a hotel for hobos, is quoted as saying, "This ain't goin' to be any hangout for cranks, either. No 'bugology' or socialists or anarchists. You treat the public right and the public'll stand by you, 's our motto." In an article for the *Literary Digest* of the same year, Davis, again tries to connect the hobo with a sympathetic mainstream audience by recounting a story when he warned hobos to stay away from a planned IWW demonstration. "Now don't go near Union Square on New Year's will you, 'Bo—that's what I said—that kept the down-an'-outers away from the anarchists' I.W.W. demonstration. I tol' em, let's help ourselves; if the public will give us the chanst, we'll show 'em. Us 'boes only want an even break." And if any person walking into the "Hotel de Gink" was attempting to organize the residents of the hotel, they were greeted with a sign that clearly stated "RULES: Only real hoboes admitted here, no cranks nor preachers talkin' reform" (*The Independent*).

Through this cursory look at different hobo organizations, it does seem apparent that all three different types of organizations were mostly concerned with the questions "what is a hobo and how do we organize him?" For members of the IWW, a hobo meant a migrant worker and, with the help of some organization, could be used effectively on the front lines of the class war. James Eads How and members of the IBWA thought to be a hobo meant to be a traveler and a worker, and with the help of some organization, could be an educated hobo who would make individually sound, solid decisions about his life. For members of the Hoboes of America, Inc, to be a hobo meant to be a non-political wanderer, and with the help of organization, the memory of the 'bo could be saved.

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But for various reasons, some of which I have discussed previously, hobo organizations were never completely successful in colonizing the hobo. Individual hobos joined some organizations one summer and others another. Loyalty, for many, depended on which groups gave them a better offer at that particular moment. This switching, however, does not mean that these organizations were not needed. In fact, for Anderson, who felt that all hobo organizations were inherently doomed to failure, these groups were "absolutely necessary to [the hobo's] social existence" (249). Being rootless, these organizations grounded him for a time when he needed companionship and gave a particular status to an individual who was at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The hobo no matter how much he avoids public detection will become visible some of the time and these organizations offer him a sense of place for a short time. For example, the hobo who winters in Chicago living on his harvest stake, might join the IBWA because it connects him to "The College" (where he can learn practical knowledge while keeping warm) and is a meeting place for acquaintances from on the road. There is a comfort that he can find in these places. I am not discounting the very real radical political nature of certain hobos and the need to join and remain in organizations for the collective good, but others were using these organizations for a place to go for awhile before, with both belly and head full, they headed for a train and started traveling again. In other words, any organization for these types of hobos were too confining and claustrophobic. And although most critics have looked favorably at how the hobo has been colonized by organizations—especially the IWW—one of the objects of this dissertation has been to show how certain segments of this community were not willing to compromise their individuality. These are decisions based on individuality and needs to be explored in

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more detail. This I will do in my third chapter when looking at the personal politics of two contemporary hobo writers—Eddy Joe Cotton and Jessica Hahn.

Is the hobo, then, destined to be colonized whenever he climbs off a train and enters a jungle or heads into the city for a flop and a bite to eat? To a certain extent yes; the hobo is no different from any of us who are shaped and controlled by the parameters of society and the agents of order who police these boundaries. Although the hobo experiences a type of freedom unknown to anyone who has not ridden the rails and who has only ever been a passenger, the freedom is fleeting, disappearing when he becomes visible in the public domain. But this does not mean that there are not ways that the hobo can manipulate and carve spaces within the dominant cultures. I have already discussed how homeless men and women do this.[108] Before heading into my next chapters where I discuss two contemporary rail riders, Eddie Joe Cotton and Jessica Hahn, and the way that they negotiate their individuality, I would like to focus attention on two particular spaces that embodied what I feel are some of the characteristics of ways that hobos did in fact ground themselves without losing their individuality to a more structured group politics: The Dil Pickle Club and The College of Complexes. By examining these two spaces where individuality was of greatest concern and the "–ism" that was most celebrated was Dadism, we can see how hobos were able to enter cities that celebrated their lifestyle without attempting to change it. Fittingly, they were both located on "the wrongs side of the tracks" in Chicago.

Although the Dil Pickle Club was an actual place with walls and a (leaking) ceiling, it originated out in the grass of Washington Park on Chicago's Southside, on the

[108]See my example on converting a bench into a place to sleep in chapter one.

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steps of Newberry Library a mile or so away from the city's busiest streets, and in various alleys throughout the city where men and women would get up on a soap box and, using their constitutional right to free speech (helped sustained by the Wobblies and their free speech fights), they would pontificate about numerous and various subjects. Soap boxing was an art form and many hobos were very serious about their oratory skills (Brundage 94).[109] But not wanting to have to depend on favorable weather and needing a place to congregate at night, a group of soap-boxers gathered together and pooled their money to start the Dil Pickle Club. Jack Jones, a former Wobbly, was the janitor in Pickle at first but because he was also the only one who paid the bills, soon he became the sole proprietor (90). Jones, the force behind the Pickle's success, was admiringly described by many as an eccentric character "who might have stepped out of a Jack London story" (Parry 201). And although the club considered itself to be for "pseudo-intellectuals," many famous writers and educators stepped low through the odd-shaped door in Tooker Alley to hear or to speak before the audience. According to Frank Beck:

> The Dill Pickle Club drew to its platform a surprising "Who's Who" of speakers. In my diary are listed speakers heard there and many of them were monthly guests. There was Maxwell Bodenhiem, author of *Ninth Avenue*; Carl Sandburg, the poet; Ben Reitman, King of the Hoboes; Ben Hecht author of *1001 Afternoons in Chicago*, editor of the *Chicago Literary Times* and a promising poet; Countess Luddie, who wore sandals and bobbed hair; Paddy Carrol from *Hell's Half Acre*, Aimee Semple McPherson and a Spanish spiritualist who shaved her head and dyed it green; Morris Levine blind, gray-haired orator, Evan Cima, Dutch artist and piccolo player; Emma Goldman the Anarchist, and Robert Menken, Russian art critic, Eugene Debs and William D. Haywood, tycoons of the labor movement , Sherwood Anderson, the

[109] See Anderson, "The Soap Box and the Open Forum" (215-229) for a detailed description of soapboxing in general. See Beck, "Martha Biegler: A College Bread Soap Boxer" for a portrait of a soap boxer in action (73-79).

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> playwright and Jim Larkin, the famous Irish rebel, Harry Betters selling socialism to the Democrats and democracy to the Socialists . Yellow Kid Weil of *High Finance* fame; Clarence Darrow and scores of the more brilliant members of the faculties of Northwestern and Chicago universities. Sooner or later everybody had a chance to express himself and the Club's Sunday night doings often made Monday morning news. (82)

Jack Dunn, the director of Military Intelligence, wrote that the Dil Pickle was "a club composed of intellectual anarchists, radicals, free lovers, and revolutionaries," but for others, it was a space for like-minded people to come by, have a drink, listen, talk, and then to move on (as quoted in Yanbella 120). "It was always open and various lunch counters were set up, so that in winter it was a real home for many of the boys" (Parry 202). A home that was designed, as the sign hanging in the vestibule said, "to elevate the minds of people to a lower level." And although Floyd Dell might have called the Pickle "one of those imitations of Greenwhich Village," Sherwood Anderson wrote in *The Chicago Daily News* that the Club was one of "the bright spots in the rather somber aspects of our town" (as quoted in Parry 200, as quoted in Beck 78). Whether imitation or not, for a time, it was an exciting hub of activity where men and women were able to come together and communicate and become educated. As Slim Brundage writes in an essay entitled, "Memoirs of the Dil Pickle," it was an "art center, little theater, indoor Bughouse Square, Bohemian tourist trap, latter-day hangout for country-store Solons, or just a dive for nuts? Maybe it was all of these things" (88).

In other words, it was an extension of the Hobo Colleges. But even though the Colleges were set up by How to make hobos better 'bos, The Dil Pickle was set up as more of a communal space for free spirits who wanted to talk. As Brundage continues,

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"Since most of us were uneducated workingstiffs, what we wanted was knowledge, learning a liberal education . . . Of course, most of us Picklers were fearfully young and insecure. It was understood that none of us would ever amount to anything around a joint like that. Weren't we the great unwashed? Didn't respectable people warn their teenagers not to hang around with us?"(88) With this self-knowledge of being "the great unwashed," the Picklers were also therefore free to question everything and to join together in their anti-traditional pose.[110]

When the Dil Pickle closed due to financial and safety violations, The College of Complexes, also run by a hobo-turned-Wobbly-turned-janitor-turned-businessman named Slim Brundage, opened a space in the 1950's for the bohemian crowd to argue, drink and to laugh. Connecting the world of the hobo to the world of the Beatnik, The College of Complexes built on the foundations of the Dil Pickle Club: the College was based on the idea that everyone and anyone is entitled to an education and, as long as they had a thick skin, they had the right to speak their mind in an open forum. Frank Rosemont, who in an introduction to a collection of Briundage's "ravings" writes that the College was:

> A kind of modern-urban-nightclub version of Brook Farm, the college billed itself as The Playground for People Who Think—a place where learning and having fun were not regarded as irreconcilable opposites .

[110] For example, on any given night the audience might have a lecture on anarchism or get treated to a theatric performance. "Certain nights of the week were given over to the playwrights. Ben Hecht, then a reporter for the *Chicago Daily News*, produced a play but it was a bit raw. It represented a hobo one freezing night who sees Jesus in a store window. He talks to the image numbed with cold delirious with hunger crazed with fatigue. The language was awesome but too strong for many of the listeners, and they left in numbers. It turned out in the end that Jesus was the hobo himself he was talking to his own reflection in the window. It was a stupendous thing, or did only seem that way to me because I was young and moony and bevisioned and in a protracted adolescence?" (Parry 203). Pretentious dribble or masterpiece in guerilla theater? While I can see arguments for both sides, I am just fascinated and excited by this type of space created within a city that allowed for people to sit in and become a part of a discussion whose main purpose seems to be the discussion itself.

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> . . At the College, moreover, 'No subject was sacrosanct, no theme was taboo.' Openness was the basic ingredient of its creative talk-fests. Each and every person could speak, restricted only a pre-agreed-on time-limit. (11)

While the Dil Pickle might have been more traditional in its stance to education (although there was still freedom to speak one's mind, there was a separation between instructor and student), The College of Complexes broke down any remaining walls. Brundage provoked scorn and poked fun at mainstream liberal intellentsia and the result was a kind of playful, anything-goes anarchist quality to the all night sessions (Brundage 35). As Rosemont contends, "[u]nlike the traditional Left, which tended to fetishize archaic programs and to approach anything new with utmost trepidation, the College always welcomed extremists, eccentrics, oddballs" (14). And, it seems, everyone was welcomed to join in topics on conversations that ranged from "Why the Next President should be Shot into Space" to conversations dealing with "religion, economics and power (12). To put it another way, we hoboes were out to kill Christ, cops and the boss" (66). And even though a respected list of speakers on the left (and right) came to speak in the front of the room, the main part of the night was found in the middle of the room, or off to the sides, or in the back, as "students" joked, harassed and cajoled each other.

What I find of most interest is that, as Rosemont asserts, the College was not constructive but rather deconstructive:

> The aim of the College of Complexes, as an educational/recreational forum, was neither to recruit members nor to mobilize troops for the achievement of specific goals, but rather to inform, agitate, educate, emancipate, provoke, inspire, offend, scandalize, tickle and excite. Its status as a non- or anti-organization, the range and unusualness of its activities, its emphasis on improvisation and "goofing off" all served to distinguish the College from everything else that was happening on what passed for the left in those years." (22)

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The College of Complexes was a space of "creative anarchism" where anti-rationalism was mixed in with the humor and political discussions (24). The College took its stance against the conventional and existing orders of the day and, for a time at least, all types of eccentrics looking for a place to express themselves found a home.

If we re-examine the Mac character through the lens of the Dil Pickle and the College of Complexes and the energetic discussions that happened there, I think we can find a new appreciation for the Wobbly-turned-proprietor of a bookshop. As I stated earlier, Mac never turns his back on the revolution; instead of organizing, though, and being on the front lines, he is happy to sit in a cantina and discuss it to all hours of the night. Like the Slim Brundage and Jack Jones, two former Wobblys themselves, Mac finds an enjoyment in the discussion of revolution. But Dos Passos's character also finds the constrictions placed on him by any institution to be too onerous. And although he is determined not to sell out, what he is most afraid of losing was his masculine, individual self-identity. The "sonsofabitches" that he is so afraid to give up his individuality to turn out to be not only the capitalistic bosses with an eye on profits but anyone (especially females) who are imposing rules or regulations. Whether it is Fred Hoff who tries to stop Mac's drinking and carousing or Maisie who is demanding and controlling, Mac refuses to succumb to the rules of any institution (the IWW or marriage). And the train car (whether on the cushions or on the rods) is always the method for Mac to escape. When he leaves Maisie, he hobos his way to Goldfield; when he decides to abandon the IWW, he hobos his way back to his fiancé. When he tires of the domestic sphere again, he then escapes by a train down to the Mexico-American border; when he decides to leave

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Juarez, he takes a train to Mexico City. When he must leave his home there, he takes a train with Concha and her mother back to Mexico City.

The train is the symbol of freedom for him, and as long as he is able to move by train, then he is able to breathe much more easily. Mac has found his freedom and identity in the exotic world of Mexico where there is always a train ready for him to move whenever things become to constricting. If we move to a more contemporary hobo figure, Eddy Joe Cotton, one who seems as if he would fit nicely on a barstool in the back of the College of Complexes, we can examine a man who is also interested in movement as a self-defining measure but in a different, and in my opinion, more conservative way than Mac.

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CHAPTER IV

Eddy Joe Cotton: Ridin' with the Historical Hobo

Getting ready for his show with his eclectic traveling hobo band and vaudeville sideshow *The Yard Dogs*, Eddy Joe Cotton muses about the origins of his ten year of adventures hopping trains by stating very simply, "I wanted to ride to Mexico but somehow America got in the way" (Kotler) (PAGE ?). *Hobo: A Young Man's Thoughts on Trains and Tramping* (2002) is an autobiography detailing Cotton's "discovery" of America. But like other explorers before him, his discoveries are seen through a narrow lens. Cotton's personalized America is a mosaic of a man searching for his muse in the back rooms of bars, in the eyes of tired waitresses willing to give him a cup of coffee for free, in an old man's jig as they ride through fields of wheat, and in the arms of hard-luck women trying to score both drugs and love. In other words, he discovers an America with dirt under "her" fingernails.[111] For Eddy Joe Cotton, a writer who positions himself securely in the tradition of Jack Kerouac and his fellow Beat searchers/writers, he finds a comfortable place for himself within this world. Equal parts travel narrative, train-hopping how-to manual, and misogynistic boast, *Hobo*, is a celebration of those who live dangerous lives on the fringes of society, as well as a concentrated attempt to place the hobo figure (and consequently himself) securely within the paradigms of accepted heterosexual masculinity. Defining his country as "the most glamorous tragedy in all the

[111] And for Cotton, as I will show below, America is most definitely a feminized place.

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world" (225), Cotton writes himself and his fellow wanderers as the principle actors in this play about the search for an authentic place within America.[112]

Hobo is the result of a chance encounter in 1999 when Cotton met Steven Kotler, a freelance writer for the men's magazine *Maxim*, and the two hopped a few trains together. Kotler, after publishing a short article about their misadventures, is so excited by his travels and this gregarious man that he asks to see Cotton's 27 journals that the author had been keeping regularly during his travels. Seeing the promise of a book in the windy and philosophic prose, Kotler hands the journals to Mary Evans, a publisher whom he thinks will be interested in the subject matter. She is and with this encouragement, Cotton heads to *Budget Suites of America*, a Las Vegas motel room whose main feature is "a clean white toilet" which he prizes above all else, and he attempts to write his first book (xxix). Feeling that his "audience is blue collar, hardworking individuals who don't need to tell me what's wrong or right," and supported by Linda Loewenthal, editorial director of *Harmony* books who bought the rights to the book, Cotton finally finishes the book and it is published in June of 2002 (Benson 27).

Hobo is released to a mix of both rave and unfavorable reviews. Dave Eggers gushes that *Hobo* is "one of the most electric books I've read in years;" Hubert Selby, Jr. sees the book as a "vision quest . . . told with simple, straightforward clarity," and Howard Zinn writes that "Eddy Joe Cotton takes us on a breezy, delightful ride through parts of our country and our culture we have never known. His style is refreshing and

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[112] This is obviously a romantic view and *Hobo* is filled with philosophical meanderings about life on the road. For example, Cotton writes, "In the end love is the only sure thing, to be hopelessly in love with life as it's lived in America's armpit—sipping her ginger ale over a lipstick-stained glass and getting kissed by the candy-red lips that laid down the heat on the Friday morning fever" (84). In other words, the road is a place for males to find their freedom in the arms of women.

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humor infectious."[113] However, some of his reviewers—especially those from established newspapers—are less positive in their remarks. Eddy L. Harris in a review for *The Washington Post*, finds fault with the prose style of Cotton writing: "A book about a young man riding the rails in search of whatever young men leave home for is an irresistible concept. But it takes a writer with the skills and language of Ted Conover and a book with the wit, the grace and the insight of his *Rolling Nowhere* to make of the idea something more meaningful and longer lasting than Eddy Joe Cotton's *Hobo*" (June 23, 2002).[114] Caroline Leavit of *The Boston Globe* attackes the prose and the lifestyle, writing: "there's nothing vivid enough about Cotton's vagabonding or his writing life to hang my heart on to, and in the end, even the photos in the book look blurred" (Oct 13, 2002, D6).

The reviewers, freely admit that they want to like the book and feel the premise has much promise, but most quickly discounts Cotton for his lack of literary maturity and find fault with his derivativeness of other established writers who write more skillfully about their personal quests to discover America.

Regardless of whether or not they find merit in this book, all of the reviewers unquestioningly place the author in the past. They insist that this is one man's journey through a history that is relegated to the past. The reviewers see *Hobo* as a self-examination of a young man on the brink of his twenties who comes of age by listening and living with a motley crew of mentors who have connections to a fabled American

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[113] Eggers is the author of *A Heart Breaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Selby, Jr. is the author *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and Howard Zinn is the prolific writer of such books as *A People's History of the United States* and *You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train.*

[114] A description of Ted Conover's book *Rolling Nowhere* can be found in chapter one.

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history. It is not considered a social document of living in the 1990s subcultural society. The story, by relegating it within the safe confines of the past, becomes whimsical instead of harrowing; it is therefore a story about the past filled with nostalgic reminiscences instead of a story of the present day and the conditions of lives lived on the road.

Granted, *Hobo* is a text filled with grittier stories than the ones that Steam Train tells, but it nonetheless nostalgically recalls a time that had passed by the time Cotton finds himself on the road.[115] In fact, I see Eddy Joe Cotton having many of the same ideological moves as Steam Train. Both are invested in the term hobo and they want to place this term within certain parameters. Although Steam Train is by far more dogmatic, *Hobo* is a book that, as I will be discussed below, deals with places instead of spaces.

While moving back and forth in time, the bulk of *Hobo*, which is separated into "Book One" and "Book Two," is a detailed account of Cotton's first three weeks of living on the road when he was introduced to riding the rails. The first book is a description of his learning curve as he hops trains and learns about the rules of the road from old time hobos who take him under their tutelage. The second book moves somewhat away from the rails and details seven days in which he fell in love with Las Vegas as he followed Misty, a drug addicted woman, whom he travels with for a few days. Although varying slightly, most of the individual chapters follow the same general form: each chapter begins with a heading of a title, a date, and a time of the day in which the action of the chapter is taking place. Following a description of one of Cotton's adventures, there is

[115] There is a long analysis of the hobo figure as Steam Train embodies in chapter one.

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then a journal entry that is part philosophical whimsy and part straight monologue directed at the reader instructing her/him on a particular aspect of life on the road.

Cotton's impetus for this journey moves from the poetical to the practical. He wistfully writes that his travels are the result of, "[h]ot rods, Powder Puffs, tornadoes, transvestites, merchant sea men, magic mushrooms, Papa Pistelero, Providence and pool halls" (7), but the more practical reason that he finds himself on the road is that after falling asleep in a brickyard during the early morning of his 19th birthday, he has a fight with his father (who is also his boss) and with only a pair of strong boots, a warm jacket, and five dollars in his pockets, Cotton decides to quit his job and just start walking in the direction that his feet are pointed. It is an impulsive action but one that he has been desiring for some time.[116] His mother had left Cotton as a baby and he had consequently grown up with his "hippie Harley" father traveling the country, looking for both work and adventure. As they are attempting to subsist, they are also eagerly conspiring together to take a trip to Mexico. When another winter is upon them, however, and they once again have no money for the journey, Cotton in that moment of anger and frustration, leaves his father and his job and just starts moving.

But while Cotton does not have a direct plan of where he is going, he does have a general idea. He wants to make it to Mexico, like his father had done when he was younger and had ridden his "Harley Davidson, full throttle in the wind . . . beard pushed back and his sunglasses on" (16). And Cotton does, in fact, have a postcard to "direct" his way. The postcard is of a white beach and an attractive Mexican woman in its center

[116] This is reminiscent of Jimmy Herf in *Manhattan Transfer*. Herf, however, makes a clean break with all he knows. Cotton is not willing to do so.

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which gives Cotton, "a bosom to lay [his] head on, an ocean to bathe in, and a destination. A place to go" (85). His journey therefore is a result of a "postcard that started it all" (45). The postcard offers a direction to his masculine sensibilities and Mexico is the exotic locale that offers a (bosomy) paradise/other.[117] As his feet pound the asphalt away from the brickyard and his father, Cotton writes, "Behind me was home and ahead of me was a fantastic railroad of opportunity" (83).

At the beginning of his journey, Cotton is interested in places. And for Cotton, although "place" might refer to a specific geographical area (Mexico), in most cases, he is more comfortable discussing his destination in terms of the female body. Indeed, the "place" of the female body is most often conflated with the place of his destination. In other words, for Cotton, Mexico *is* the woman on the postcard. "I wanted to get to Mexico. That was it. I ventured into the currents of darkness and sunshine—walking the countryside trying to find a place to rest my head, shamelessly, a place to stab my flag" (xxiii). Only when he can penetrate Mexico and stab his flag into the feminized landscape, can he stop traveling and claim his newfound place; something that he does not feel, as he left his job, is possible to do in the United States. His destination is a place that he commodifies and is able to locate within his very narrow and fetishized understanding of place as bodies. As he writes, "[d]own there they have chocolate-

[117] There is no shortage of proof for Cotton's particular masculine sensibilities. One example of how he was brought up into this male dominated subculture was when he was younger his father took him to a pool hall so that he could learn a skill. "Most of the guys in the pool hall wore suits—they were sophisticated men—men of stature who drove Lincolns and Cadillac's. American men. . . Some of those guys were good and some were bad—no matter what they were, they lived in truth, walked Denver down, and crashed through Colorado's powder-blue skies like Bigfoots" (22). It is important to notice the linking of the subcultural man (the pool hustler) with the larger American culture. Cotton's aggrandizing of the lower class to a definition of a whole country (or at least one gender of the whole country) will be discussed later on in this chapter.

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dipped bananas and caramel-coated lips and all the sweetness of a lady's dancing hip. I'd undress her. I'd spread her legs. I'd sink into Mexico like a hundred-dollar bill" (104). He believes fully that his flag/bill/phallus will guide him through the wilderness and bring him to his (climactic) destination.[118]

Kicking stones along the highway, leaving the comforts of a job and his father's home, Cotton needs a place to go. But although the postcard refers to a beach in Mexico, as Alabama (his hobo mentor who will soon help direct his way on his discoveries) tells Cotton when he asks the older man if he knows where the *specific* beach is; "Blue trees, palm trees. Shit could be anywhere" (46). Unable to know the specific location of the beach, Cotton therefore contains the geographical area that the postcard represents within the body of a female. The geographical area—Mexico—is contained in the body of a woman, the bosom to lay his head. Both serve as physical representations of an abstract concept that he is trying to solidify in his mind: freedom. Cotton, as he writes over and over again in *Hobo*, is attempting to find freedom.[119] As shown with the different

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[118] Cotton consistently equates women whom he meets on the road with Mexico. For example, right before he meets Misty, a woman who picks him up and pays his way to Las Vegas, he was showing the bartender the postcard and once again musing about Mexico and all of its beauty. Misty's body then becomes the surrogate for Mexico and he spends the next few days colonizing the space. In a passage entitled "Highway Finger" he talks about this strange sexual encounter with Misty: The passage ends, "Her legs spread across the seat like chocolate pudding and her crotch wet, pink, and trembling under her finger. Sunlight shot out of her eyes—she let out a moan and in the dim Nevada sunlight she rolled off the toilet seat and passed out . . . .She came to a hundred miles later, in Sparks" (181). When their love grows cold and Misty "cold-cocks" him and leaves him on the side of the road, he thinks about her again, specifically her ability to please him sexually, writing, "She knows what she wants and she knows where to get it. She wants it hard. She wants it in. She doesn't want slobber on her neck. She doesn't want a word in her ear. She's the brown-skinned woman of my Mexican dreams and she wants it *in* (207). Mexico, again, is a woman who wants to be fucked by the traveling white man. Of course, he only realizes this as he is lying on the asphalt watching Misty drive away.

[119] Cotton, in fact, links his understanding of freedom to his acknowledging that he is a hobo. He writes, "So maybe I am a goddamn hobo—I don't know what it means to be anything—I don't want anything more than my freedom and anything that gets in my way will be left behind. If that makes me a hobo, then I guess that's what I am" (xxiv).

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definitions of the term both in London's and Dos Passos's texts, this word has a plethora of meanings. And it is a term that Cotton does not really understand. Unable to conceptualize its meaning, he instead contains it by placing the term within the sexualized female body that can be bought for his personal gratification. Although he ostensibly espouses freedom as the philosophical underpinnings for his travels, on closer inspection, he is actually looking to contain that very anxiety-causing idea in terms of a place that he can control and use. Cotton's narrative, therefore, fits within the paradigm of the archetypal male "coming-of-age" story, albeit with a twist. Unlike most of these texts, he is not leaving a feminized home sphere that he must reject because it is making him soft, rather, he is leaving the masculine realm of construction sites and pool halls filled with "men of stature who drove Lincolns and Cadillacs" in order to find his own personal place where he can be free (22).[120] But it is a freedom that he must (literally and figuratively) "fuck," a freedom that he controls by degrading and sexualizing in a body that is usually adorned in "red lipstick and platform shoes" (xxix). Freedom, in other words, is defined by using the bodies of women.[121] Safely located within the place of these bodies, freedom takes on the recognized shape of the women whom he meets—women who he does not grasp as real but that he is able to mold to his wishes and desires.[122]

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[120] Please see my first chapter, specifically my analysis of Teddy Roosevelt, for examples of these texts.

[121] If we look at what attracts Cotton to Misty (and to places like Las Vegas for that matter) is that are representations of other things—they are not authentic. When he meets Misty for the first time, the thing that attracts him the most is that she was "wearing a jazzercise headband and her eyes were caked in butter. There wasn't a thing about her that looked real" (173). But Misty is the exotic body that he links to Mexico and therefore tries to contain and control.

[122] Just a few of the many examples found in this book of the types of the way that Cotton categorizes and types the women that he gazes upon/meets: Upon seeing a young girl eating with her family, "I stopped and just stared at them until the young lady at the table looked over at me. She was real cute—a princess with

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Therefore, as Cotton sets off on his own, he is not riding without a net, but rather he has a "place" from which he is moving away as well as a "place" that he is heading towards. And he either wants to arrive in his new place or, if he fails to find it, head back to his recognized home. More specifically then, Cotton's journey is not a rejection of his father's home but rather, more simply, a (temporary) leaving of it in order for him to make his way through a new body that he can try out and "discover." And even though he writes in some parts that "there isn't a place to fit me into" and that "going home is not part of [the hobo's] journey," he also realizes that life on the road will be at times too difficult for him and, eventually, "home was the only place I could think to go" (67, 87, 222). But although he does reject this idea—"I would go home when I was broke. . . I was nineteen years old and strong and that alone was a reason enough for me to keep trying"— it is the fact that he has a home that gives him the courage to keep traveling and hoboing his way along the iron road (236). Indeed, it is having a home—a recognized and established place—which allows him to search for the body/place of Mexico. And just as important, this journey is a continuing of the journey that his father had first made years prior.

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big dreams" (63). Setting up a dichotomy of the different types of women that he sees: "Sitting at the bar was the little princess from the Café El Toro. At the restaurant she was all smiles with teeth pink sheets and flowered wallpaper—a girl with ballerina dreams. But sitting on that bar stool with her vintage whiskey and her devil-red boots—thigh-high and stacked—she was a "God Damn!" Hot full-fledged dame" (81) " I looked out the window and across the street there was a housewife hanging her morning laundry under her carport" (82). Feeling sorry for the trapped women (who also, he figures, would not speak to him) "I stood out the door of the boxcar and in the window of a small house I saw a silhouette of a woman preparing hamburger. She probably wanted steak but the money hadn't come. I could tell by the wrinkles in her face that she was frustrated" (123). Other females that are outside of his reach: "There were sexy teenage girls sliding down slides and mothers fixing sandwiches or orange cheese and rye at the resort" (150). Other women he paints in a sad light: "She smiled an embarrassed smile. She was too young to be losing her teeth, but she was losing them anyway and that explained a lot" (191). "She sat on the roof of a go-go bar—smiling. She was real pretty but not too bright" (216). But many of the women he meets, he only understands them as reasons for his sexual gratification: "The ladies were Coppertone like Misty but as timeless as cheese. I wanted to ejaculate into the nearest slot. I wanted to cut the skirt off a TV girl and eat her designer stockings" (226).

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But Cotton never quite makes it to Mexico. Instead, he finds himself intertwined with another geographical body—one that after spending some time with, he realizes he will never be able to let go:

> I should have covered my eyes before America took her clothes off—because once you've seen her naked ass you are bound to be her slave. America is a hooker with a purse full of dreams, a stiletto gate, and somewhere hidden in her valleys of optimism is the belief that life could be a little bit better. I've paid Miss America too many visits to be part of any church, my religion is the country—the greasy spoons, the quarter panel from an Old Mercury that kept me out of the rain that one cat-and-dog night in the howling bone yard, the free bar of rotten motel soap they gave me from the shelter, for now these things are who I am. I did it all out of necessity, so it's not my fault. I don't want to go to hell, but my home is no more than a ghost and I have nowhere else to go. (195)

Mexico is a dark fantasy that he can buy for a hundred dollars; America, while still a hooker that takes off her clothes for any man willing to search her out, is not so easily seduced. Unlike Mexico that can be bought on the cheap and controlled (obviously containing disturbing racist understandings of her dark and foreign body), America's sexualized body can make a man a slave to her expertise. It is this female form that preys on these men of longing and Cotton, by placing himself (at times) as the seduced, dismisses any responsibilities—due to her behavior—for his actions. Giving up church and risking hell for his wanderings, he becomes the voyeur, the man watching America slip off her clothes, revealing her skin.

While Cotton's understanding of himself as a voyeur who gazes upon the "naked ass" of America is, to say the least, troubling, his prose is filled with contradictions that show both his confusion and his anxiety when he chooses to drop his hands and look at the body that, because he looks, so controls him. If, as he writes throughout this book, he

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left his father's home and took off for the Iron Road in order to become free, and he attempts, as I suggest, to control and regulate that freedom by embodying the term, then there must be some unease produced by the fact that the body that he so much wants to enter is actually a "ghost." Although Mexico is all shaking hips that he can slide easily into, the body of America, however, is not so easily penetrated. This frustration leads to his movement. Unable to find Mexico that he wants and unable to find orgasmic release in the ghost of America, he instead finds himself traveling and watching, gazing whimsically out the doors of the moving freight and writing down on napkins and matchbooks what he sees. As he writes, "I have cried alone in Mexico and I have cried alone in America and the pain is . . . that of a young man trying so hard to find a place to call home" (238). And although he does have his father's home to fall back on, he is unable to be fully satisfied by the freedom that he wants to contain and penetrate; America is elusive and he must try to keep up with her. He keeps moving, trailing the flash of skin that so excites and entices him. "The funny thing is that I grow more in three weeks on the trains than I do in six weeks off of them. Off the trains I feel like a dime on a dirt road—like if I don't keep rolling I'll get pushed deep into the mud" (238). Stationary, he loses sight of the strip show, and therefore he keeps hopping on trains and listening around campfires, always attempting to keep the mud from his eyes that block him from seeing her. Unable to enter America, he can only watch and observe. And although this may be exasperating, it does give a narrative paradigm for him to keep traveling and searching for his elusive freedom, prostitute and place.

The idea of the male writer's (very sexualized) muse being elusive is obviously nothing new in male-identified literature. Even though this is true, however, it is

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constructive to link Cotton's understanding of the muse and his traveling after "her" to specific writer whose prose I feel Cotton emulates—Jack Kerouac. But although their styles are alike and their subject matter similar, the two writers are divided by one important difference. Their understanding of the word freedom. By comparing the two, I will then link Cotton's attempt to corner "the ghost" in terms of geography and the female form with Kerouac's understanding of "the ghost" in terms of an ontological lostness and a more intangible view of freedom. For Cotton, an attempt to "place" his experiences within accepted paradigms of masculine heterosexuality connects his lifestyle to a recognized history that older hobos, as I have shown in the previous chapters, have also attempted to do. Therefore, Cotton is compelled to connect his travels to a geography (including the imaginary site of the female body) which then connects to the accepted and safe definitions of the term hobo. Kerouac, on the other hand, travels in an attempt to disengage with both geography and time.

Although Kerouac does sexualize the landscape of America, he does so in much different ways than Cotton.[123] Much like Cotton, Kerouac is also interested in the idea of and search for freedom and how the very movement of a body in motion is a way to touch this freedom. But although Cotton limits his freedom in terms of the body of a woman, or in the feminizing of a geographical area, Kerouac's idea of freedom is in terms of losing form and borders and entering into a more ecstatic, or what I term "lost"

[123] For example, in *On The Road*, Kerouac describes the Mississippi River as, "dry in the summer haze, low water, with its big rank smell that smells like the raw body of America itself because it washes it up" (13). Although Kerouac does sometimes place the geography of America into a physical body, in this case, he does not give it a sex and rather, makes it an entity that has a strong, pungent smell. In other parts of the novel, Kerouac allows himself or his friends to become the body of America as when (in the words of Carlo Marx) he asks, "Whither goes thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?" (119). Here, America gets embodied with Dean, who while a sexualized body, is male. Kerouac does not sexualize America the way that Cotton does in his text.

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state. I am in no way attempting to be an apologist for the ramped misogyny in *OTR* specifically or the Beat culture in general, but it is my contention that the womanizing and the sexualizing happens when the main characters fail to find the freedom that they so desire. The bodies that they fall into are results of not being able to reach the level of lostness that they attempt to reach.

Whether hopping a ride on a pickup speeding through the Mid West, swaying to a tenor man speaking into his instrument, or frenzily driving a beat-up car to its absolute limits, Sal Paradise is in search of freedom, the elusive *It*, that both Dean and Sal in the text are so struggling to find. But although Dean and Sal taste freedom in their travels, they are never able to completely embody it; they are searchers, wanderers in the Great American Night, but only those whom they revere and see as "God," are able to hold onto *It* for any amount of time. This is not to say, however, that there are not moments though when Sal does reach this state of freedom. For example, he writes of a time when he has a vision:

> I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was a complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the bleakness of the mortal realm, and the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on, with a phantom dogging its own heels, and myself hurrying to a plank where all the angels dove off and flew into the holy void of uncreated emptiness, the potent and inconceivable radiances shining in bright Mind Essence, innumerable lotus-lands falling open in the magic of mothswarm of heaven. (*OTR* 173).

He cannot hold onto these moments of ecstasy, however, and he is forced to take a step back into chronological time where he must find his friends to travel and talk with about these visions. That is why throughout the book, Sal is traveling after the mad ones, who can cross into "timeless shadows" and exist in a state of ecstasy. While he himself

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cannot always reach this state (or when he does, he feels the need to retreat from it), he wants to be in proximity with those who can.

While Slim Gillard, the famous jazz musician whom Kerouac immortalizes in this book, could hold onto *It* precisely because he could hold onto a note from his instrument for so long and so true and lose himself in the music that he creates, others are also able to reach this state. Germaine to this discussion, Kerouac holds up for praise and admiration, the hobo.[124] Like the other "mad ones" that Kerouac admires, the hobo is a figure in America that embodies a freedom that his wanderings can only touch upon. As Kerouac writes in his ominously entitled article, "The Vanishing American Hobo," "[t]he hobo is born of Pride having nothing to do with a community but with himself and other hobos and maybe a dog . . . Proud was the way the hobo walked through a town by the back doors where pies were cooling on window sills" (*Lonesome Traveler* 176-177). There was a nobility to being a hobo and when meeting and getting to talk to these men, "you've got to admit these bums into your soul" (66). Kerouac for all of his travels—unlike Cotton who places himself mostly within this imagined community—distances himself from this group, writing, "I myself was a hobo but only of sorts, as you see, because I knew someday my literary efforts would be rewarded of social position—I was not a real hobo with no hope ever except that secret eternal hope you get sleeping in empty boxcars flying up the Salinas Valley in hot January sunshine full of Golden

[124] What drives Sal and Dean ostensibly to the road is to search for "Old Dean Moriority" who was a hobo and taught Dean in his youth the hobo ways (*OTR* 139-140, 233). Other mentions of the hobo can be found in the first journey when a cowboy tells him, "During the Depression . . . I used to hop freights at least once a month. In those days you'd see hundreds of men riding a flatcar or in a boxcar and they weren't just bums, they were all kinds of men out of work and going from one place to another and some of them just wandering. It was like that all over the West. Brakemen never bothered you in those days. I don't know about today" (20). But even though Kerouac is talking about the past, the hoboes that he meets are still traveling and walking down the sides of roads. They are not history.

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Eternity toward San Jose where mean-looking old bo's 'll look at you from surly lips and offer you something to eat and drink too" (173).[125] Although there is a deep respect for these wandering men, and a connection to his own life and travels, Kerouac understands that these hobos—like the gods that he admires—are also on a different plane than he is. His hobos, like all the mad ones who people the storyline of *OTR*, are crucial to the novel, and they help reinforce the ways that travel for Kerouac directly relates to a disconnection from geography. Kerouac's hobos lose themselves in "the timeless shadows" and this is much different from Cotton's more regulated and structured placing of his hobo experiences.

The Ghost of the Susquehanna is a recurring figure in the texts of Kerouac. In *OTR*, he is described as a "shriveled old man," about sixty years old, whom Sal meets when walking along the side of the road, trying to find a ride to take him back home to Queens. On closer inspection of the old man, Sal sees a "semi-respectable walking hobo of some kind" who promised that there is a bridge that they could cross that would lead them forward—although, important to my reading, the old man never says where the bridge will specifically lead them. After walking for some time though, they are never able to find the bridge and Sal, frustrated at the circular conversation of the hobo, throws out his thumb, leaving the "little madman," and quickly gets a ride from a passing motorist. Cushioned in the front seat of the car, he soon drives past the "poor forlorn man, poor lost sometimeboy, now broken ghost of the penniless wilds." The old man is

[125] Cotton does at times question whether or not he is a "true" hobo—or even if it is possible in the present time to be one—but he distances himself for very different reasons than Kerouac does.

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lost, Sal is heading home, and the whole meeting is described as a "sad endeavor" (104-105).

But although this old man might have seemingly lost his way when Sal comes in contact with him, Kerouac writes of the old hobo as a prophet, a man forever tramping across the land laden with his visions and madness. Early in the text, Sal, talking with friends, anticipates his meeting with the old man, writing, "we were on the roof of America and all we could do was yell, I guess, across the night, eastward over the plains, where somewhere an old man with white hair was probably walking toward us with the Word, and would arrive any moment and make us silent" (47). But although the old man could never go as far west as the rooftop where they were shouting, when Sal finds him in the east chasing after magical bridges, he is lost and his words are rambles, low mumbles of Red Crosses and long-ago warm baths. There is no Word that makes Sal silent—in fact, Sal keeps interrupting the old man with questions about accurate directions and specific roads. Sal is frustrated because even though the old hobo says that he is trying to head to "Canady" and that he knows where the road leads, Sal realizes that he does not—at least not in a strict geographical sense. Following the old man along the side of the road, Sal is also lost and confused, trying to look ahead into the "inky night" to see the physical bridge that the old man says is right up the road. Sal, frustrated by being lost and wanting desperately to head home, leaves the old prophet, leaves the Word that would silence him, and finds a driver who knows the right direction to take him to the *place* (home) that he so desperately wants to find solace within.

Identities are connected to places. For Kerouac, home refers to a place in Queens where his mother makes his lunches and a crucifix hangs over his bed. For Cotton, home

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is a trailer that he and his father share. Both places connect directly to the identity of the particular individuals. But although Cotton wants to connect to some sense of place to find his freedom, this is not true for Kerouac. To reach *It*, to enter in an ecstatic moment, means to lose oneself, to get lost into the geography of the land. Although the old man might be a representation of death as some critics suggest or a prophetic angel sent to guide those wanderers in the night, when the old hobo meets Sal, he is trying to help Paradise find the bridge that will allow him to lose sense of both geography and time and to become lost within the moment. The bridge that the old man mumbles about does not have any physical place in the geography of the land; rather, it is a bridge that one will find only when one has embraced lostness. Sal, however, needs to head home.

Norma Walrath Glodstein writes in her article about the Ghost of the Susquehanna that, "[t]he bridge image is not necessarily linked to a place but to an essence, an idea or spiritual state. The directionlessness of the old man supports this theme and the old wanderer teaches Sal that the wilderness of America cannot be defined by place like east or west reinforcing the notion that their quest is a spiritual one befitting a ghost." Although I am not completely comfortable with Glodstein's term "spiritual" and her understanding of the Ghost of the Susquehanna as a representation of the "Dogma of the Holy Trinity," I think that she does articulate how the ghost imagery is one that is not connected to a geographical base but to a non-physical state. To embrace being lost is to accept that you cannot recognize the land that you are standing upon. And to lose this connection to the geography means to lose a connection to how you define yourself and to lose your identity.

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Analyzing this relationship of physical space and a person's subjectivity, Elizabeth Probyn writes about the need to understand ourselves in terms of our location, writing, "[p]rofoundly we experience our subjectivities, the ways in which we are positioned in regard to ourselves as subjects, in terms of both space and time. How can it be otherwise, given that our bodies and our sense of ourselves are in constant interaction with how and where we are placed" (291). In other words, where we are is who we are. But although much critical attention has been focused on how we define ourselves in terms of our geography, Kerouac (at times) wants to un-define himself and to lose himself and his identity in order for him to free himself.[126] Losing the sense of place may be disorienting and therefore not a space that he can inhabit for long. It is also, for Kerouac at least, a way to reach the ecstatic moment that all of his wanderings lead him toward.

This happens to Sal in the opening pages of *OTR*. In his initial journey, after traveling for a few days alone, he pays for a hotel room and quickly falls asleep. Waking up, he has a moment where he is not quite sure where he is. I quote here at length to get the intensity of the moment:

> I woke up as the sun was reddening; and that was the one distinct time in my life, the strangest moment of all, when I didn't know who I was—I was far away from home, haunted and tired with travel, in a cheap hotel room I'd never seen, hearing the hiss of steam outside, and the creak of the old wood of the hotel, and footsteps upstairs, and all the sad sounds, and I looked at the cracked high ceilings and I didn't really know who I was for about fifteen strange seconds. I wasn't scared; I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was

[126] There has been much critical analysis in theoretical geography. A small sample includes: *Human Geography Today* (Doreen Massey ed, Polity Press, 1999), *Cool Places* (Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine eds, Routledge Press, 1998), *Handbook of Cultural Geography* (Kay Anderson, Sage Publications, 2003), *The Geography of Identity* (Patricia Yaeger, University of Michigan 1996), *Mapping the Subject* (Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, Routledge, 1995).

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> a haunted life, the life of a ghost. I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future, and maybe that's why it happened right there and then, that strange red afternoon. (15)

It is in this moment when he is between geographical areas, when he can neither locate himself in time nor locate himself in a particular place, that he becomes, like the old man wandering on the side of the road, a ghost. He is lost and because of his lostness he loses his identity and becomes a stranger to the life he has been leading. It is not a frightening experience but one that happens when one disconnects with geographical place-ness. As Jeffery Andrew Winstock writes about this state: "Geographic lostness contributes to a sense of temporal lostness, and the two together participate in the development of a profound sense of ontological lostness—the sense not just of being lost in the world, but the loss of the world altogether" (Higley and Weinstock 237). Kerouac, at certain moments, is able to achieve this state of lostness in America, and while he is not able to stay lost, and instead sadly slinks back to a recognized place—his home—at the end of all of his cross-country journeys, the old hobo, who has allowed himself to become a ghost, fully embodies the ecstasy of lostness. And though he does not realize it while he is with the old man—the thoughts of home are too strong—he has regrets almost as soon as he sees the hobo in the rear view mirror.

Leaving the old hobo is his "day of the Laodiceans" (106). Although true that biblical references abound in all of Kerouac's works, this reference is particularly interesting in its intensity of harsh understanding. The Laodiceans, who are found in the Book of Revelations, are described as blind to themselves. They think of themselves as spiritually rich and favored in the sight of God. But, in God's eyes, they are wretched

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and miserable creatures, poor in spirit and soul. In other words, they are delusional and do not see the truth in front of them. Traveling away from the old man, heading in the "right" direction, the one he could follow and chart with a map and soon to be dropped off at one of the most popular of geographical markers—Times Square—Sal suddenly loses his blindness. Tired, hungry and cold, he sees himself as God sees the Laodiceans.

Gilles Deleuze also reads *OTR* as dealing in very intimate terms with geography. Kerouac's writing is not a mere representation of an America that he sees as he wanders across the American landscape. It is neither a simple re-telling of a land, nor a description of the contours of a geographical area. It is not even a re-creation of a trip through fantastical stories. Rather, it is a creation, Deleuze suggests, of a whole new world. Through their journeys, Sal and Dean, the philosopher contends, "create a new Earth" and they do so through deterrorialization, or, a breaking away from the more hierarchal ways of traveling involving maps that contain vertical and horizontal lines on a grid (36). Instead, *OTR* is "a flight towards the West, the discovery that the true East is in the West, the sense of the frontiers as something to cross, to push back, to go beyond. *The becoming is geographical*" (italics mine, 36-37). By moving and consistently pushing through borders and slipping through frontiers, there is a way to manipulate organized and regulated places. It is geographical in the sense that it is a losing of the established borders that place the land into observable and countable areas, and their travels allow geography to become something new. I read Deleuze's comment that "the becoming is geographical" as meaning that their creation of the new earth is one that happens when they lose their sense of geography and become lost. When Sal wakes up in a motel room and is caught for fifteen seconds in a space where he is a ghost, he is

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experiencing a type of ontological lostness and becoming something different, something new. It is in this lostness that one finds a freedom that cannot be so readily experienced.

It is also a lostness that causes much anxiety.[127] Kerouac, when he does experience this type of freedom, cannot handle it. As every trip that he takes in *OTR* begins with excitement and enthusiasm filled with innumerable possibilities (a type of birth), all of his trips end with an intense sadness, and a slinking back to a place that he recognizes and knows—his home (a type of death). Sal states of one of his journeys, "I had my home to go to, my place to lay my head down and figure out the losses and figure out the gains that I knew was in there somewhere too" (234). He needs to reestablish his identity by subtracting the losses from the gains and placing himself, once again, in a specific geographical place; a place that he grew up in and whose umbilical cord stretched into the west of his travels. Even though Sal desires the lostness that the old hobo experiences and that he himself had a taste of for the fifteen seconds in the motel room, he does lose faith of the possibility of this freedom.

In "The Vanishing American Hobo," Kerouac writes of the death of the hobo in America due to the fact that the once revered hobo is "made to slink—everybody's watching the cop heroes on TV," resulting in "*calling all cars, calling all cars, hobos seen in the vicinity of Bird-in-Hand*" (italics his, *L.T.*, 174, 176). Although slightly

[127]Being lost is a fear that most of us have. When one enters a new city, for example, one of the first thing that one does is to get markers down. The subway is two blocks east of Times Square, the hostel is three blocks south of the Eiffel Tower. We need the confidence of understanding the contours of the land and *recognizing* its markers ("as long as we know where we are starting from we can always come back to it"). Or a more frightening experience: When hiking for three days alone in the hills of Lake Como in Italy, I became turned around and lost the trail markers. No one knew where I was and I was walking blindly through the trees searching desperately for the red dot that signaled that I was on the right path. Nature disappeared from my eyes as the only tree that was real for me was the one that was marked. While the forest was unique and hundreds of different types of trees and bushes lined my walk, all were meaningless to me except for the one that would tell me that I was heading the right way.

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exaggerating, Kerouac shows how the agents of law and order are called to specific areas to place the hobo and to censure his movement and traveling. This leads Kerouac to conclude despairingly:

> As far as I am concerned the only thing to do is sit in a room and get drunk and give up your hoboing and your camping ambitions because there aint a sheriff or fire warden in any of the new fifty states who will let you cook a little meal over some burning sticks in the brake or the hidden valley or anyplace any more because he has nothing to do but pick on what he sees out there on the landscape moving independently of the gasoline power army police station—I have no ax to grind; I'm simply going to another world. (182)

Identifying those who are "lost" and placing them in jails leads Kerouac to sit in his room and drink heavily, dreaming of another world. It is pessimistic and sad and a realization that the old madman hobo talking to himself and searching for bridges will never bring "the Word" specifically to him.

What fascinates me so much about *Hobo*, then, is that although both Cotton and Kerouac travel frantically and are both eager to meet the "mad ones" who can be found in the margins of society, they do so in pursuit of goals that are, ultimately, very different. Kerouac, while unable to do so for too long, wants to be lost in the world, to lose a sense of time and direction and reach *It*. Cotton does not have this desire. Instead, he travels to and from "home" places. It is important to recognize that for Kerouac, the ghost is the old man eternally wandering in his state of lostness, or, when the author reaches this state in select moments, the ghost is himself. But for Cotton, the ghost is not him—he knows who he is and what he desires. Rather, the ghost is the place that he wants to sink into, a

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place that he can manifest in a physical form and contain. And the particular ways that he embodies this place connects intimately with his particular masculine identity.

But although Cotton sexualizes his future home in the body of females, and the book seems to be a testament to his finding a climax within his new home, I feel as if this story is more about the home that he left than the one he explains he is searching for. Fully granting that this book is filled with chapters dedicated to misogynistic prose detailing his sexual encounters, I think at the heart of his text, this book is instead about a significantly different type of relationship.

At times, especially in the beginning, *Hobo* is a "young man's thoughts" on trying to locate and place the America that he so lusts after. In the opening pages of the book, Cotton finds himself in a truck stop with only a few cents in his pocket trying to scam the waitress for an extra cup of coffee. But although he is interested in the waitress physically, he turns to the man sitting next to him who seems to understand the scam that Cotton is pulling. After a brief conversation and hearing that Cotton is not sure if he wants to continue on the road and is thinking about heading home, Half-Step plainly tells him, "I'll push your ass out that door before I'll let you go home" (29).[128] This is the first of many pieces of advice that Cotton will receive on the road from those who become his mentors. After only a few moments, Cotton is listening and will soon enter into a community that he has heard about but has never intimately known. Following Half-Step around the back of the truck stop, Cotton sits at a jungle fire listening to his stories and philosophical whimsy until a passing locomotive slows down and an older man tumbles from a side door. This is Alabama, an eccentric, wild, and energetic man who has been

[128] Half-step's moniker came form the fact that he lost four toes when he fell under the wheels of a train.

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traveling the Iron Road for many decades and who, every fall, stops at this particular jungle camp to meet his son.[129] After some greetings and exchange of presents, Cotton is immediately sized up by the old hobo, accepted, and quickly given food and advice. Cotton, sitting in the fading light of day, is completely taken by the idea of traveling that these two men talk so favorably about. As he writes:

> I decided that night with [Half-Step] that if I had to, I would become a "gentleman of the Country." A tramp. A man who could break codes. A man who says what he's going to do. I might catch a few colds. I might trespass a fence or two. I might sleep in the dirt. I might sit behind a truck stop in Wyoming waiting for a train. I might get on that train. No matter what I did I would do it with honor. (33)

What is it that attracts Cotton so much to the road? First, it is the mythical history of the hobo. Half-Step and Alabama do not introduce Cotton to the hobo world—it is something that Cotton obviously knows about before he met these two men. Without a doubt, Cotton is writing himself into this imagined community: the gentleman of the country, the lawbreaker who has his own unbreakable ethical codes. These are generic figures that are based on romantic images of the hobo, figures that Britt commemorates every year. Cotton does not need Half-Step or Alabama to tell him; these are pre-existing and static figures that the young would-be author already admires and would like to emulate. Wanting to jump trains and to live his life "with honor," Cotton is tapping into these representations and, although not connected to the life of the road as it is

[129] As Alabama tells Cotton of the schedule that his father takes, "He likes to think that he don't run a schedule, but I can tell you where he's at anytime of the year. Follows the sun like any right-minded bird" (30). Frank Tobias Higbie, in his highly informative book *Indispensable Outcasts* (2003) about the migrant worker in the Progressive Era, also writes about the structured traveling of the hobo: When we map these travels it is apparent that what observers took to be aimless wandering or unthinking migration was guided significantly by economic structures, family, and individual survival strategies" (26).

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necessarily lived, it is one that Cotton, in the beginning of his travels, feels very comfortable with.

There is, though, another community that Cotton is joining. One that is connected to my earlier remarks about his desire and need for a place to call home and what I feel is the central relationship in this book: meeting Half-Step and Alabama brings him into one of many father-son relationships that he will enjoy on his journey. *Hobo* is filled with this type of relationship—he will either play the role of the surrogate son in the first part of his initial journey or the role of the surrogate father at the end of it. *Hobo* is therefore a book about both the separating and rejoining of fathers and sons. And although Cotton may attempt to show that these relationships dissipate with ease and without any tugging of strings, his text and recounting of experiences disclose a much more complex traditional, heterosexual, male relationship.

So even though Cotton might write that he is searching to find America in order to sneak a look at "her" skin this is a story about trying to (re)establish the place that he leaves. In other words, Cotton's journey is to find freedom by attempting to recreate the bonds that he breaks when he leaves the brickyard and his biological father. Undeniably, he is trying to find the home he leaves. In this reading, *Hobo*, therefore, is not an attempt to plant his flag in the soil of America, rather, it is an attempt to reestablish a connection with his father by traveling through a male dominated world where certain men teach and others listen. It is an education that is connected to a sense of place, traditions, and gendered history. This is not to say that there is not a search to capture and have sex with females or to find temporary "homes" in the passing bodies that cross their paths—these fathers and sons are certainly not celibate and many times bond through the women that

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they gaze upon when looking out the boxcar door or through the haze of smoke in the back rooms of a bar. Sex, or the talk about it, is a way to ease the bonding experience, to help facilitate it, or even to explain it, but the father-son relationship still has a paramount importance.

Cotton's first concrete connection to the train hopping community is through Alabama. After being accepted by the old hobo who readily agrees that Cotton can travel with him, Alabama leaves Half-Step, immediately reminding Cotton of his own relationship to his father. As he writes of the two hobos parting:

> They didn't seem bothered by the quick good-bye. I think they had done it that way a million times before. It reminded me of my father and me. The way my father always let me go without concern. It wasn't that he didn't care about me. It was that he knew I could take care of myself and he knew that if he didn't let me go he'd probably have a fight on his hands. (40)

Half-Step's and Cotton's relationships with their respective biological fathers are one of constant quick removals and intense intertwining. But Cotton's boasting that these partings are without remorse is somewhat suspect. Each time there is a severing of biological ties, surrogate bonds are then quickly formed. For example, Cotton, after a few short hours after leaving his father, then becomes Alabama's "son," learning quickly what the old man is more than happy to teach.

After spending some time jumping trains with Alabama, Cotton muses, "[h]obos know their place—in the trees—out of sight—a whisper below the breeze. Many jungles, including the one in Missoula are in the same place they were one hundred years ago. That's good, strong culture there—as old as steam locomotives but no longer lived" (87). After following Half-Step around the corner of the truck stop, Cotton immediately feels

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as if he is entering a culture whose history is strong and fixed. It is a culture that he respects and he wants to be a part of it. He follows Alabama, eagerly listening to his stories and advice. When placing this advice down on paper for other people, however, Cotton feels the burden of responsibility to represent accurately this culture that has such a strong history and, at times, he is not sure that he can do so. As he states, "I don't even know how to raise a child or love a woman right, let alone tell the story of the most powerful breed of American outlaw" (197). Cotton's priorities are obvious here, as he places raising a child and loving a woman as subservient to writing about hobo culture. But, through the advice of Alabama and the rapid growth process that he experiences under his tutelage, he feels that he is able to learn the ways and, importantly, to then give this advice to younger rail riders as well as to a reading audience.

Alabama (much like Cotton's biological father) had previously made it to Mexico in his youth and stabbed his flag into its land, building a hut where he was able to gather "stories in Spanish and kisses in bright red lipstick" (46). But he was not able to stay there and claim it as a permanent home. Interestingly enough, Cotton feels a sadness that Alabama will never be able to retire from his life on the road and find a permanent home, but he also (like Alabama) has a reactionary and somewhat contradictory disgust for those who spend their "retirement check on Long Island ice teas and diesel for their Winnebago" (49). Alabama is part of a powerful breed of American outlaws and in the few stories that Cotton relates of their experiences together, the reader is witness to the ritual introduction of Cotton into this community. Although it is a community based on the codes of the hobo lifestyle, it is also based on traditional heterosexual father-son relationships.

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After an acknowledgement of the mentor/student - father/son relationship around the dying embers of the jungle fire and his first train hop on the sly, Cotton's education commences immediately through advice, stories and gigs by the old man. The road is a dangerous place, however, and soon the two find themselves in a small railroad town face to face with "Pork Pie"—and Cotton experiences his first test in becoming an "authentic" hobo. When Cotton leaves the safe confines of the boxcar (which is basically his classroom with Alabama as the teacher/father) and heads into town to find food, he runs into an overweight man driving a pickup who demands to know if Cotton is "a damn homeless son of a bitch" (51). Cotton runs and soon "Pork Pie" traps him and Alabama in a boxcar pointing a loaded shotgun in their direction. After a brief interchange in which he berates them and their lifestyle, the man, easily satisfied that he has exerted his power as a "respectable" citizen over them, slides out of the car and hops back into his truck only to drive off to his mobile home that is right off (the wrong side of) the tracks. Cotton is scared and clearly shaken by the encounter but he has stood his ground, refusing to run away (he, in fact, risks his own safety trying to warn Alabama of the approaching man). He survives his first test and after Cotton calms down a bit, Alabama begins the lesson. He tells Cotton that "Pork Pie" is probably "the saddest man alive," but interestingly enough, thinks that the encounter is "bad karma" that follows him around because he "killed over two thousand people in Vietnam." "Pork Pie" and other men and women like him are his retribution even though all he wants to do "is live . . . but [his] damn past won't let [him]." Although the encounter might be some divine justice, Alabama sees an innocence in Cotton, and turning to him says, "you ain't hurt no one yet and I can tell . . . you never will" (54).

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Part of Alabama's story fits neatly into the world view of Cotton about why men hit the road. "There are two things that put a man on a train—a woman or a war," and for Alabama, being a gunner in a helicopter led him to living his life on the road (56). And while this inability to stay in one place is common for vets of Vietnam (and for all wars for that matter), Cotton is not on the road because he has hurt anyone.[130] He is there, however, because of a woman (Mexico first and America second) and his life, Alabama implies, will be one of discovery instead of avoidance. Through the stories of Alabama, Cotton is solidifying his reasons for not wanting to be part of the "brown mobile home" of Pork Pie but rather to stare at sunsets from a boxcar. Because of his tutelage with Alabama, Cotton realizes that he wants to be part of the group of men who have their own codes and live by them (the codes though are, at best, ambiguous). But it is also the acceptance of Alabama as the surrogate father that Cotton desires so much. In the nod of the head and the pat on the back proclaiming that he will never hurt anyone and that his road will be true, Cotton receives the acceptance that he lost when he left his own father and walked down the road by himself.

While surviving the first encounter by not running away from Pork Pie and his loaded shotgun, Cotton must now face another test—this time, though, he must do it alone. This challenge comes in the form of Bobby Blue and Levi Stout, two hobos who,

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[130] See *Soldiers in Hiding* (Malcolm Clark, director, 1985) for a grim portrait of Vietnam Veterans who are unable to cope with life in US society and live in woods away from "civilization." In my personal encounter with hobos who gravitated to the road after a war, I have met and talked to NY Slim, a large, eloquent and friendly African American Vietnam Vet. After coming home from Vietnam after a tour of duty and realizing that "there was something so different about me" than the other people he met, he reenlisted and near the end of this tour, he spent 26 months in a POW camp. After returning home a second time and drifting through a few jobs, he decided that he needed to stay in motion and in 1976 he hopped his first train. See *Around the Jungle Fire: True Accounts of Life on the Rails* (Oats, ed., The Hobo Press, 2000).

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as Cotton sees immediately when he and Alabama run into them around a jungle fire, "reeked of compromise" (101). They are angry men who (Cotton would find out later) have killed a fellow tramp and buried him in the bottom of a river which, due to the heavy rains falling, threatens to overrun its banks. After a night of talking and drinking, Cotton moves a little away from the camp and heads uphill to dryer land. When he wakes up the next morning Alabama is gone. Alone, Cotton is tired, worried, and angry. He explodes, "Fuck this adventure hero crap! . . . Fuck this growing up fast crap. I need a fucking car and a fucking suitcase and a fucking motel room and a fucking girlfriend who wears too much lipstick. I need some class" (105). But, once again, Cotton does not leave and decides to stick it out. He calms down, sits under a tree, reads *Midnight Cowboy* and romantically comes to the decision that "you have to keep walking to Mexico or wherever your heart wants to go. It would be red roses, white sand, and bad disco from there on out" (107).

Almost miraculously, as soon as Cotton makes this decision to stay, Alabama reappears and the two hug. Alabama has allowed him to face life on the road alone for a short period of time and to feel the loneliness and confusion of being out on the side of the road with nobody to help guide his way. But although this scares Cotton, it does not diminish his desire to travel and find his home. Like a proud father who sees his son succeed, when Alabama sees Cotton and his determination to stay on the road, "the old kid got a little tear in his eye" (107). The bond between these two men becomes stronger and Alabama, convinced that Cotton has earned his entry into the hobo brotherhood, eagerly prepares Cotton for the type of lifestyle that the author insists that he wants to live. Alabama does this by introducing him to the hobo community.

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This community is a brotherhood, peopled with father/son relationships where "[hobos] keep each other company and they walk together and talk together and protect each other and sometimes die for each other" (xx). Jumping off a train, Alabama and Cotton run into four hobos sharing a campfire: Yukon Sam who has been traveling for over forty years, Tall Tim whose vest detailed all of his travels throughout the years, Billy the Kid, a street fighter and addict, Carny Chris, an African American man from South Dakota, and Bear, a fat, and, to Cotton, dangerous man. They are all sitting around the campfire, drinking, laughing, and telling stories. Alabama immediately begins a conversation with Yukon Sam, the man who has been traveling for the longest amount of time and they begin telling Cotton of their past adventures as well as the rules of the road. Alabama is bringing Cotton into the community through the retelling personal histories which Yukon Sam and Alabama see as a microcosm of the larger history of the hobo. These are the only men who have anything to give to Cotton. Although he might laugh or get annoyed with the antics of the others, it is the older hobos and the lives that they represent to him that holds the charm.

Cotton becomes quickly aware of the fact that all is not well with the modern day hobo and the rules of the jungle fire are not being followed by the newer generation. As they sit down to talk, they notice the smell of burning plastic in the air; Billy the Kid had thrown the lid to the cooler on the fire. When they request a beer, the young hobo, who is carrying a gun and happily firing it into the air, throws the cooler at the two, spilling water and ice onto their pant legs. Alabama, while angry at his wet clothes, is more angry at the lack of manners shown by Billy the Kid who is not following the code of conduct when sharing a jungle fire. This is an ethos that he had already taught Cotton

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when they first met outside the truck stop and Alabama had cleaned up the camp and placed a can of chili in the center for the next hobo who happened upon the camp. Cotton captures this moment of frustration in his prose:

> Alabama shook his head and looked over at Yukon Sam.
> "It ain't what it used to be . . . is it Sam?"
> Sam shook his head.
> "Nope."
> "Shit, don't know what to make of it anymore."
> "Me neither." (72)

Alabama is lamenting the loss of the old hobo lifestyle but he has found in Eddy Joe Cotton a son who is eager to follow in his father's footsteps. The old hobo recognizes the fact that the lifestyle that he is living is one that will soon be regulated to the past but one that he can pass on to keep its memory alive. The lectures that Alabama gives to Cotton are history lessons and while he encourages Cotton to travel and to see the world, he also knows that Cotton will probably slow down one day. And while Alabama feels as if he can travel until the day that he dies, he does understand that most will not. In fact, Yukon Sam tells him that he is "retiring [his] spurs" and that he will find an old age home somewhere and settle down soon. It is not something that he wants to do but as he sadly says, "at least I won't be killed there" (73). And, he acknowledges, there are perks that he has missed by being on the road for so many decades, "Shit, look at all the pretty ladies and the warm homes and the movies, out there you can go to the movies and I ain't been to the movies since I was a kid" (74). Alabama is upset at his friend giving up the lifestyle but he also knows that if Yukon Sam can no longer survive, then the old time hobo's day had come. Father's are dying off. One of the last pieces of advice he therefore gives to his young follower is, "Stay clean and you might find a nice home

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some day" (100). And although the road might no longer be a lifelong option, when he finally settles down in his home, Cotton will know the history of the hobo and therefore keep that history alive.[131]

Once the history lessons are taught and Cotton has listened carefully, Alabama and the rest of the older hobos christen Cotton with a name—Blackjack—that he then scribbles onto the vest of Tall Tim, (literally) marking him as one of the group.[132] He has now been initiated as a hobo through this important rite and it is time for a celebration and—in the speeded up classroom of the hobo lifestyle—a farewell. When they wake up at six in the morning the next morning, they all head to town for the local bar. Cotton is no longer an outsider but a member of the community:

> Here we were—four dirty outlaws—old western cowboy bums—trudging down the center of Main Street. . . Yukon Sam was oiled from head to toe. Yukon Sam was the tallest and kind of a father figure. My Ford winter jacket felt like wet meat and my boots squeaked on the concrete. I had railroad oil on the soles. Billy the Kid walked beside me. He was pulling a wagon full of regret and holding a teddy bear that wasn't really there. He walked ahead of us. Carny Chris had his bedroll with him because he was on his way to the interstate, and Bear took up the rear—hunched over like the missing link and fluttering his lips with some hummingbird song. *We were one big goddamn happy family.* (italics mine 81)

Cotton is now part of the family of hobos, and while they are not as pure of purpose or heart as Alabama wants them to be, they are walking down the center of main street in the early morning hour, and through their mannerisms and looks, they are showing to the "straight" community who and what they are. After drinking a few beers and falling in love with one of the women at the bar, Cotton states that he had received "the golden

[131] Cotton will do more than this, though, and by forming *The Yard Dogs* he is doing more than just keeping the history of the 'bo alive but he is also teaching it to others through his shows and performances.
[132] The giving of a moniker to a new hobo is a very important ritual in the hobo community. See my discussion of this ceremony in chapter one.

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ticket—gifted me by my friends, the tired and ancient knights of the American railroad" and it is time for him to leave this particular family and make out for the road on his own (83). And although this would mean breaking the bond with Alabama, it is something that he must do because, "[i]n this business of tramping, it's impossible to hold on to anybody or anything" (xx). There are constant re-enactments regaining and losing the place of home. Alabama, meanwhile, is expecting that he will leave and just pats him on the back. Just like his farewell with his son Half-Step, the good-bye was short but Cotton knows that if he uses the ticket in the right way that "the lady of the land would open her front door" for him (84). His freedom lies ahead of him. And so, deciding that chasing after the ghost and looking for that home that the "lady" willingly keeps open is an important quest that, as a newly inducted hobo, he should follow, Cotton slides off the stool at the bar and heads for the train yard.

While he is under the tutelage of Alabama, Cotton enjoys being placed in the role of the son. But because the growth process on the road is quick, he is now on the road, alone, and he will soon, in turn, become the father figure to whom his paths cross. And even though his "childhood" might have only lasted a week, he is more than happy to take on this new role. He does so when he runs into Jefferson, a fourteen year old kid who has been traveling for a week with only a watermelon and a few colored pieces of plastic in his back pocket that when combined form a palm tree. He is heading to (any) beach where he can see a real palm tree for the first time and finally eat that watermelon with a view of the ocean. In the very first conversation, Cotton takes on the role of the father, showing his superiority and boasting that "I was climbing palm trees when I was fourteen, in fact, I could build an entire house with one of those [coconuts]" (130). And

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although he is only aping the knowledge that a person could shingle a house with coconuts that he learned from Alabama only days earlier, it is now his turn to play the role of the experienced hobo and teach the younger wanderers the rules of the road.

As they travel together, they become stuck on a secondary line and have to wait for two days to move again. While they sat around, Jefferson talks about his own father who has "a mean right hook—on good days. On the bad days he used a shovel" (134). Leaving his home under very different reasons than Cotton, Jefferson immediately takes to Cotton (he is, after all, only fourteen and traveling on his own!) and listens to his ramblings/lectures about life on the road. But Jefferson has his own views of the road that closely mirrors Kerouac's view, and while Cotton feels as if they are the same in the fact that they "both had a destination" (139), Jefferson, who has been physically and mentally abused in the place that he was running away from, does not have the faith in places that Cotton does. This fourteen year old boy wants to get lost, to lose himself in the travel and to keep traveling. Being a minor participating in an illegal activity, he knows the consequences of being caught by the police. By staying on the train and riding under the radar, he says, "I mean look around, there's nothing around that could hurt us." When Cotton, in the role of the realist instructor counters his optimism by stating, "I guess, but you won't be saying that when we stop, there's plenty of things that'll hurt us when we stop," Jefferson, in a fit of determined excitement emphatically announces, "Who said we're going to stop, hell I'm not going to stop . . . *Never*" (italics his 137).[133] It is unrealistic perhaps, but it is an attempt to stay free from the law and abusive fathers.

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[133] Jefferson reminds me much of Dean in *OTR* when he excitedly tells Sal: "Whee. Sal, we gotta go and never stop going until we get there."

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Cotton, however, continually takes the role of the father trying to make the young naïve Jefferson into a grown up. This is a much different role from the one that Alabama had towards Cotton; the old hobo's mentoring—while filled with lectures and advice—is never as authoritative (or as traditional) as Cotton's advice to Jefferson. After threatening to beat up Jefferson (just like his biological father, Cotton uses threats of physical violence), he berates the young boy for having abstract dreams stating that, "[s]omeday a kid has to grow up and realize that life isn't that sweet. It's more sour than sweet and that's just the way it goes" (146). Jefferson understands that by staying in motion and being lost in the real world and living in world of his dreams (for example, he believes that the pine forest that they pass has an ancient Indian village in it), he can disappear from the world of fathers who beat their sons. He does not want to arrive at a destination and believes that he will never stop moving. Looking at his colored plastic that forms a palm tree, he thinks that it looks like paradise because, "I like wide-open space." Cotton, though, sharply dismisses his dream and says, "Yeah? Well, I like cold beer and kind women" (153). Although desirous of the son/father relationship he has with Cotton, going so far as risking his life to pick up a bag that Cotton had dropped on the side of the railroad track, Jefferson does not want to live in the world as Cotton wants to.

And although Cotton believes that he did learn from Jefferson to be more of an optimist and that the boy "was a reflection of [himself]," it is apparent that the role that Cotton enjoys playing the role of the father (153). "Alabama taught me a few things about getting along, and in my own dumb way I tried to do the same for Jefferson. We

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"Where we going, man?"
"I don't know but we gotta go" (240).
Movement, to Jefferson, is key. And while he might be running away from something concrete (his abusive father) and towards something abstract (freedom), he knows that while he is moving, he will be okay.

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gave each other shit, we drank together, we looked at naked women, and we traveled together. If that isn't bonding like a dumb American kid, then I don't know what is" (152). They had bonded in the "armpit of America" and Cotton feels as if he has become that which he has sought to become (84).

Illustrating how much he has learned on the road in a very short time, a few days after Cotton leaves Jefferson and is traveling alone, he once again meets Bobby Blue, the angry "yegg" he had met near the rising river. Bobby Blue is a mess after "riding the belly" (another term for riding the rods) and "his skin was probably burned from what looked like three weeks in the sun and his legs were splintered from walking on the railroad rock" (96). He is so disheveled and hurt that railroad men, who see him stumbling around the tracks, decide that he needs some emergency attention and, after finding some rope, hogtie him to the railing of a boxcar so that he wouldn't fall. Cotton after looking upon the "Old-bonehead . . . fuck-nugget" soon realizes that the pathetic man is Bobby Blue (99-100). After giving him a cigarette that he asks for, Cotton then pulls out a knife and cuts the twine that is holding him up. Grabbing Bobby Blue as the train slows down at an intersection, Cotton "walked him down the steps of the unit and balanced him on the last one . . .[and] gave him a push. He took one long step, one short step and fell down on his shoulder in the railroad rock" (104). Although scared of Bobby Blue when he first meets him, Cotton has now become judge and jury to the hobo and inflicts a code of justice by throwing him off the train. It is a code that he wants to uphold and, as if to solidify this point, a woman is a witness to his actions and offers her approval. As he writes, "[t]here was a platinum blond in a Lincoln waiting at the signal. Her lips pinched a cigarette. She exhaled out the window. Bobby Blue lay on the ground

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and she smiled" (104). Bobby Blue is not a gentleman of the road and he does not follow the code of the hobo—and therefore, the platinum blond who can be easily read as the ghost of America, is pleased by the fact that Bobby Blue is lying face down in the gravel while Cotton is still moving. By passing the different tests and being accepted into the hobo subculture by Alabama and the older 'bos and continuing to chase after the "ghost" of America by living the hobo life, he has learned the "codes" that he wants to follow. He cannot have "her," but he does have her approval and her smile to keep him traveling in the right direction.

In only a few weeks, Cotton has gone through a very rapid growth process, and as he ends the first part of *Hobo*, he is confident of his place on the Iron Road. Although he does continue to hop sporadically, the second part of the autobiography is more about his sexual exploits as he travels in fast cars, rides BMX bikes, and looks out the window of a greyhound bus. The father-son relationships, however, never disappear in the book and home is still the main goal for Cotton. After much traveling and finding himself in Las Vegas exhausted and worn out from his weeks of living rough, Cotton decides that he has had enough traveling and that he will head home. He picks up a pay phone and gets the answering machine that says:

> You've reached Eddy and Wild Bill. We're both temporarily away from home. If this is you, Eddy, there's plenty to eat in the pantry. I brought in enough wood for a couple of days and there's ten bucks under the bed. If you need me I'll be out on the highway looking for you. It was the only place I could think to look. I talked to some fella who swore he saw you in Winnemucca. If you need a couple more weeks alone I understand. Take care of yourself. I love you. (222-223)

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Although Eddy thinks he had said goodbye to his home to search for his own, his father (who listed Eddy first and himself second on the answering machine) is actually on the road looking for him, reassuring the tired traveler that he always has a place to come back to and be a part of. They are both, he reassures his son, only "temporarily" away from home. The bond is never cut, and Cotton is never during all of his travels, lost. Much like Alabama does during Cotton's second test on the road, Wild Bill, while disappearing from the immediate sight of his son, is never that far away. And it is this comfort that still allows Cotton to go chasing after America. After he heads to an airport and is about to get on a plane to make it back to his father, he realizes that he does not need to at that moment. His father's message has reassured him and given him the confidence that, if he is poor and broken down enough, he will always be able to head home. But at that particular moment he isn't hurt and so he decides instead to continue on his quest to find "her."

And, importantly, he is also confident that he will never become lost when traveling. As he writes in the concluding pages of the autobiography, "I found a home in Reno for two days with Misty and a home in the heart of Alabama and a home under that willow tree in Green River" (239). As he sits in the Vegas motel with the clean white toilet, and writes about his adventures, he realizes that he is okay in Sin City. He might have stopped traveling for awhile but he knows he will continue to travel and move, "hoping for the best and sharing all the rest" (240).

Part of this sharing is passing along hobo wisdom with his traveling hobo vaudeville band, *The Yard Dogs*. Self described as "a cocktail of saloon vaudeville and noir burlesque" this traveling group started in the late 1990s by Cotton and Flecher

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Fleudujon (aka Five Livrd Larry) and Miguel Strong (aka Voodoo Freddy) as they were traveling to a Ken Kesey party. Fans of sideshow and freak shows, they decided while passing a bottle of liquor near Dog Creek Road to tap into this particular history and become their own traveling show. And although their first show in a roadside bar was (not) seen by four men who purposely turned their backs on the fledgling group, *The Yard Dogs* have become a 13 piece traveling ensemble complete with fire-eaters, sword-swallowers, burlesque dancers and human oddities, traveling around the country for a few months at a time, "playing to anyone who will listen, anywhere they'll have us." (Silke Tudor *SF Weekly* April 21 2004).

It is important to note how Cotton—with both his communing with the older hobo population as well as traveling with this vaudeville show—is attempting to place his travels within a particular accepted context. Although the vaudeville show is, to say the least, an oddity, it is a recognized and accepted oddity that has a long history that goes back to the late 1880s (a time when hobos were first stealing rides on trains) when small medicine shows were seen traveling through small country towns. Whether just a two person show hawking miracle cures for gout and hair loss or twelve wagon caravans with a plethora of weirdness to sell, they were an event that rolled into towns and brought entertainment and excitement to all those who listened to the ballys crying their pitch. These types of tropes were the precursors to the "10-in-One" shows (10 acts under one tent), circuses and traveling carnivals. And while they are no longer in favor with the paying public (why pay for a "Freak Show" when you can see *Fear Factor* or *American*

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Idol for free on television), they are still part of recognized Americana.[134] Cotton loves placing himself within this history and revels in the chance to bring these shows to new audiences, living the codes and lifestyles of days and people gone by. In *Hobo*, he discusses how he bases his hobo persona on these types of shows.

> [I]t is sometimes helpful (in Hobohemia) to think of oneself as a vaudeville clown. Behind the red velvet curtain at a ragtag vaudeville show, "reality" is in all ways debatable. This is also true of Hobohemia. When a tramp is calling into the jungle, it is very similar to a clown walking onstage. The tramp must have his spiel or his skit prepared. Honestly, it's not this romantic. But a good spiel can go a long way. While tramping I find it helpful to think of myself as a Joey clown tramp—loosely defined as follows: Joey is the term for an old circus clown, taken from the famous Italian pantominist Joseph Grimaldi. Joey can also mean hypocrite. Back in the day the old road clown learned his business of mugging and the art of his spiel from performing in vaudeville shows and manipulating lowbrow drug deals. A Joey clown tramp will use these same tools of theater to hide his tears and present himself upstanding to the outside or inside world. A clown will ride freight and a tramp will work under canvas. At times the clown and the tramp are one and the same. (xxiv)

Although both the clown and the tramp/hobo are the same, Cotton has marketed himself successfully as a member of the past and is willing to entertain the listener or the home viewer (you can buy a documentary of *The Yard Dogs* on DVD from his website) with his stories of travel and adventure.

What is missing from *Hobo* and from the interviews that I have read with him is any contact with the new train riders that he must have met in the ten years that he was on the road hopping freights. While the women that he sleeps with or chases after are young,

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[134] While still around, the freak show and traveling circus has become a lost show in recent years. For a good description of the last night of *The Hall And Christ World of Wonders* at the Allentown Fair in September of 2003 (Ward Hall was one of the most famous and successful ballys in Sideshow history who had been on the road for 57 years), see the wonderful article "The Last Sideshow" by Lane DeGregory of the ST. Petersburg Times (Sept. 28, 2003). Cotton and *The Yard Dogs* traveled with Hall for a short period of time.

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the men that he talks about are either older (either his fathers age or older) or significantly younger (like Jefferson). When we do run into other rail riders his age, like Billy the Kid, we only see dangerous addicts who are willing to shoot at passing railroad patrol cars. We do not read or hear about the current day rail riding community; it is all history and an attempt to find a part of that history in the present day. All relationships that he has with the hobo community are based on hierarchy: he is either the father or the son, the teacher or the student. Through all of the pages in *Hobo*, there is, in fact, no one like him on the road. Cotton seems to enjoy it this way. Young addicts and alcoholics people his story but not young adventurers trying to find their space in the world. Although Cotton feels as if his quest is pure and the older hobo's living history is one to be admired, there is a distrust of those who are young and new to the road. All bonding is therefore hierarchical; none are vertical.

This is not the case with Jessica Hahn. In *Transient Ways*, as well as in her full length novel *Elysian Fields* and her book of poetry *Elemental*, there are no mentions of older 'bos who give sage and romantic advice to their young acolytes; in fact, besides a mention of a drug addicted father in one of her stories, or hassling and vindictive police officers, there is no focus on anyone who is outside the squatter rail riding community. Not concerned with fitting into accepted notions of hobo identity, she is rather interested in finding others like her who share her values and political/social outlook. She knows the road is a lonely place and she is looking for others to help create and share her space. These are different values from Cotton's and even more importantly, different stakes. Moving to a discussion of Jessica Hahn and her experiences on the Iron Road, a new type

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of hobo—one that distances herself from the masculine hobo codes of conduct and focuses more on a community of autonomous individuals—begins to emerge.

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Chapter V

JESSICA HAHN AND THE SQUATTER/PUNK COMMUNITY

What if the uprising doesn't come?
Are we never to regain the land of summer even for a month?
Never vanish from the grid even for a moment?
--Hakim Bey

It's a cut and paste story of a million little pieces of paper
glued together in the middle of the night.
-Sascha Dubrul

I love the trains and I will be on them soon enough
and goddess keep me in one piece
and I will ride them always
-Jessica Hahn

Hakim Bey passionately promotes the need of individuals to become invisible in cotemporary society and in his many articles, books, and manifestos, explains why and how to do so. A proponent of "ontological anarchism," Bey is seen as a leader in contemporary subcltural politics, a "Marco Polo of the marginals milieu," or a "mental masturbator" who is only interested in personal pleasure at the cost of collective action and thus a symbol of what is wrong with the contemporary anarchist movement.[135] In his 1985 manifesto *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Bey writes that contemporary anarchism has lost its way and that "we are reduced either to nostalgia for the past or nostalgia for the future" (98). Instead of seeking or naively wishing for a bloody revolution to take place in the streets which would only lead to fruitless martyrdom, Bey challenges those who are not comfortable with the State's control to focus their attention

[135] The former quote is from Bob Black from *Beneath the Underground* (Feral House, 1994) and the latter is from Murray Boochin from *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism?* (AK press, 1995).

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on "uprisings," and "bootstrap operations" that will allow for personal autonomy in a world that is becoming increasingly restricted.[136] Rather than creating a movement, Bey, instead, advocates *moving*. "The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it." The TAZ is a tactic of quick hit and run attacks along the fault lines of the State's control. Unlike direct confrontation, it (momentarily) succeeds because it uses invisibility as its means of operation. Even though the end of the "terminal State, the megacorporate information State, the Empire of Spectacle and Simulation" would be greeted with wholehearted applause by Bey and although he still holds out hope that the current capitalistic State will fall in his lifetime, Bey understands that the present political and cultural climate does not make direct attacks feasible. Therefore, "[t]he TAZ is . . . a perfect tactic for an era in which the State is omnipresent and all-powerful and yet simultaneously riddled with cracks and vacancies." Instead of being visible in a climate of relentless surveillance, "[a]s soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it will vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because undefinable in terms of the Spectacle" (101). Using language that seems almost magical—a subcultural community that can "vanish" into thin air at any time—Bey is suggesting that in the contemporary world that is increasingly centered around simulation and spectacle and carefully watched and

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[136] Steve Pile, in "Opposition, Political Identities and the Spaces of Resistance," agrees that there need to be spaces of resistance that are not overtly aggressive. "Indeed, one of authority's most insidious effects may well be to confine definitions of resistance to only those that appear to oppose it directly, in the open, where it can be made and seen to fail" (3).

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recorded by the machines of surveillance, real flesh and blood bodies can become invisible from the apparently omnipresent eye by remaining in motion. Although it is the tactic of the weak, it is also, Bey contends, highly pleasurable and effective on an individual level. The TAZ's "defense is invisibility" and the result is an autonomy that most will not feel in their lifetime (102).

Well versed in the philosophy of Baudrillard's, Deleuze and Guattari's and their discussions of simulation and spectacle, Bey's debt to the philosophy of Michel de Certeau is even more apparent. But where de Certeau sees tactics of resistance in seemingly insignificant mundane acts of everyday life, Bey is demanding for an intensification of the everyday. His vision for resistance, like de Certeau, is based on pleasure, but is perhaps even more deviously conscious than that explicated by the French philosopher. The Temporary Autonomous Zones that Bey imagines (as well as points to in the present day) are what he terms "pirate utopias," intentional communities that are formed outside the reach of the law.[137] These mini-societies are determined to come

[137]For an example of a present day TAZ zone, one could look to The Burning Man Project, an art experiment that has been taking place annually in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada since 1986 (although due to its popularity and increasing exposure, it has become less of a TAZ and more of a regulated and planned "event"). Individuals gather together in the desert for a week to participate in art experiments where nothing may be sold but all must create. At the end of the festival is a huge bonfire where everything that had been created gets tossed into a large ritual burning ceremony. Part solstice celebration, part commune, part bourgeois festival, one of the three rules that all must follow is "No Spectators." See http://www.burningman.com/ for more details on the festival or Julie Chase's article "Man of Fire: Burning Man and Temporary Autonomous Zones" (*On Stage Studies* 199-200 80-89). For a more overtly political example of a TAZ, one needs only to look at the resistance to the 2004 Republican Convention in New York City. One of the many non-sanctioned protests in the city was a 1000 strong anti republican, pro environment bicycle protest. What is of particular interest of this event can be gleamed from the decription in the New York Times. "The ride is known as a Critical Mass, a bike ride that claims no organizers and simply materializes, thanks to leaflets and Internet messages, on the last Friday of every month." ("100 Cyclists Are Arrested as Thousands Ride in Protest" August 28, 2004, by Randal C. Archibold). These cyclists "materialize" seemingly out of nowhere, and—those whom did not get arrested—disappear again until they reappear another day. Other unscheduled but disrupting protests during this week were the harassing of Republicans by self-described anarchists who would heckle the Bush supporters in hotel

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together for a common purpose of living consciously—even if they realize that their community will be short-lived. Drawing on the first hand experiences of pirates (and those attempting to bring them to justice), Bey reports the desire of these roving seamen to find spaces where they could meet with other outlaws for both social and economic relations.

There have always been attempts by governments to map and therefore know the area of land under their control. But there are always open spaces that can still be inhabited without the official powers "seeing" them. Floating in their ships with stolen booty, pirates would find unknown islands not drawn on parchment paper and locked in some government drawer (and therefore these spaces did not "officially" exist). Other ships, also needing to disappear would sometimes accidentally find these same unknown or "lost" lands and, if both groups found pleasure (both socially and economically speaking) in the other's company, then they would join together and form a "band" that worked and coexisted. According to Bey, these formations could be called a TAZ because they were formed off the grid and away from the State's gaze. In other words, they were operating and existing outside of Time and History—both of which exist when those in power, who have the strength and ability to record, place these concepts within recognized and ordered values.

The pirate's power, according to Bey, existed horizontally among the group and could be disbanded as soon as the group needed or wanted to dissolve. For example, if the State's soldiers (and it did not matter which state—all states whether Spanish,

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lobbies or on streets. Word of mouth and text-messaging lead to quick moments of disruption in these hotels and restaurants before the protestors quickly moved on to another place.

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English, or Portuguese were the enemy of the pirates who had allegiance to no flag) happened to appear on the horizon, the complexly functioning and close band would not stand and fight the overpowering warships. Rather, they would quickly enter their own ships and sail away. The pirates' gains therefore might be fleeting and the land and friendships that they nurtured given up as soon as an enemy's flag appeared on a fast-approaching ship but, for Bey, this was a type of space that could be continually recreated and cultivated for a time, an autonomous space that signals a freedom from the Other's control.

This space is very much the same sort of space that the hobo creates when hopping a train. The important difference, though, is the more obvious and intimate communality that is present in the pirate utopias. Hopping a train does allow an individual to "disappear" for a moment and this invisibility allows, as I discuss in chapter one, for her to be outside of time and history. These are, however, mostly solitary travels. What the pirate utopia suggests, though, is that a group of individuals gathering together can use their *collective* invisibility to consciously separate themselves from an overtly hierarchal oppressive state. Although there is definitely communality among hobo themselves, and many do travel together for stretches at a time, the hopping of the train is a singular act that happens—literally—on the fly. Pirate utopias involve more than just individual moments of stealing rides and disappearing, they can also be a celebration of invisibility and a co-existence apart from the gaze of authority.

Bey writes that he and his followers seek "'spaces' (geographic, social, cultural, imaginal) with potential to flower as autonomous zones--and we are looking for times in which these spaces are relatively open, either through neglect on the part of the State or

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because they have somehow escaped notice by the mapmakers, or for whatever reason" (103). These temporary autonomous zones do not form by happenstance but are deliberately created by those who want to resist the gaze of these multiple surveillance systems that impede their autonomy. It is my contention that Jessica Hahn and others with her ideological motives who traveled the country in the 90s hopping freights, created their own TAZ communities. Hahn might not articulate her travels in the overtly political ways that Bey does, but she does express herself more simply, stating that she was on the road to fulfill "a desire to Live Free" (89).

It is important to concentrate on Hahn's belief in personal freedom because it suggests some hidden motives for her travels and also uncovers some of the principles of the modern day train rider. Unlike Kerouac's view of freedom that involves a sense of ontological lostness, and unlike Cotton's understanding of freedom that concentrates on misogynistic and sexualized codes of conduct, Hahn views freedom as a manifestation of a non-hierarchal autonomous space that she can share with others outside the gaze of the watchful and judgmental society.[138]

Jessica Erica Hahn was born on the *Olive Oil*, an old oil tanker restored by her father, David. Jessica's mother, Pat, an expatriate traveling through Belize with her young daughter from a previous relationship, met Jessica's father, David, while on the road and soon joined the crew of his ship. On January 8, 1975, after reading a few books on the subject, David, in the middle of the ocean, helped deliver a healthy baby girl on the rocking ship. From her birth, then, Hahn was already in motion. The ship's business

[138] Much of the following information in this chapter was made possible because I had the opportunity to meet with Hahn on three separate occasions in August 2004. Jessica answered my many questions and allowed me the privilege of combing through her personal journals that she kept while on the road.

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was successful, mostly delivering tallow from South America to the United States, but when Jessica was a year old, her father died in a freak accident when on a scuba diving salvage project off the coast of Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. Jessica's mother, a resourceful and independent woman, delivered the last shipment to the U.S. and sold the *Olive Oil*. With the money that she made on the sale, she packed her children in a used mail truck and headed for San Francisco where she built a house and has remained there to the present day.

Even though Jessica would have this house to return to her whole life, she found herself on many occasions rootless. Due to the nature of her mother's business, frequent trips to South America and Hawaii led Jessica to appreciate the spontaneous and unpredictable aspects of travel. Far from being a tourist snapping pictures at historical landmarks, her trips usually involved making contact with small communities of people who existed both legally and illegally, banding together to survive. Looking back at her travels as a child, although she has some misgivings, Jessica appreciates this traveling and credits her upbringing to her mother, saying very ardently in the documentary *Catching Out*, "I was raised by a really strong woman." Even though she did have the support system of her mother and half-sister who sustained her when they could, Hahn, who was separated at times from her mother while she was growing up, needed from an early age to acquire independence and a willingness to explore. Facing many challenges growing up in this transitory lifestyle, she was forced at an early age to accept responsibilities and to survive on her own.

As she entered her San Francisco public high school as a freshman, Jessica entered into another community. Although always receiving high marks in her classes,

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like many students, Jessica felt alienated from her teachers and other classmates and, searching for a community that she could relate to more honestly, found solidarity with the punk squatter kids. Relating to these punks through their music and eventually spending large amounts of time with them, Jessica discovered a network of individuals who were not only connected throughout the city but also throughout the country. It was liberating for her to become linked to this web of individuals. As time went by, she increasingly embraced this community and participated in the rituals of the lifestyle. When she was sixteen or seventeen, for example, her punk boyfriend Erin brought Jessica on her first dumpster-diving experience. Raiding the dumpster of a local store, Jessica ate the food—and to her excitement and pleasure—did not get sick.

Sitting over a cup of herbal tea in the small kitchen of the house that she has just bought on loan in the working-class San Bruno section of San Francisco, Hahn looked at me writing notes about her dumpster-diving experience and said, "I wouldn't do it now—would you?—but then I thought that is was really cool and freeing." Four years of teaching special education classes in the public schools of San Francisco have distanced her from her former train hopping companions and, feeling financially comfortable with plans to build onto her house, she feels no need or desire to look in neighbors' garbage cans for food. Somewhat defensive now about her past lifestyle, she is currently on an ideological border, attempting to stake out a life that is acceptable to mainstream society while still holding onto beliefs that she formed while on the road. But as a teenage girl, awkwardly growing up, the ability to feed herself—and not get sick—from eating food that others had thrown away was a liberating experience. Although others were plunking down money on counters for lunch, Jessica and her friends were able to separate

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themselves from those in the mainstream community. If they were hungry, they only had to look in the back area of the next fast food restaurant. There was no need to ask for money from parents or hold after-school jobs in those same fast food places where they were dumpster- diving in the middle of the night. Their lives circled around the DiY principle (Do It Yourself) and they felt they had the power to separate themselves from the mainstream culture that they despised.[139]

This type of behavior is very different from the accepted notions of respectability and the code of conduct for the "gentleman of the road" that some older hobos cling to when discussing their own travels of the road. Indeed, it serves as a perfect example of where the hobo and the punk train-rider differ. Although the popular image of the hobo sitting around a jungle fire cooking a Mulligan Stew is an image that has been produced in numerous magazines from *Good Housekeeping* to *Reader's Digest* as examples of harmless Americana, the image of a young punk kid digging through the garbage is not as appealing to the masses. But even beyond the image, there is something else at stake. Mulligan Stew is created when a number of hobos pooled their resources in a camp outside of town. The dumpster diver, on the other hand, is not someone asking for food but rather taking it upon themselves to dig through the garbage of previous customers and

[139] The most obvious example would be the music that they listened to. The music that they would trade and pass back and forth, the shows that they would go to, and the reviews and discussions of that same music was all created and sustained through their own circles. They put up the advertisements, they passed along the zines, they formed their own bands and played for each other. Just as the food that they ate and the clothes that they wore separated themselves from others, the music was another aspect of the community that was self-sustaining. Sascha Dubrul also writes about how important music was to his introduction to the squatter scene. "Music was really a big part of the scene we created. We'd put on our own shows and had our own spaces to play music. We had our own underground networks for distributing our demo tapes and little magazines with stories pouring out our souls to each other about our lives. There was a real emphasis in those days of a self-sufficient culture" (The Vida Secreta de los Gabachos 28)

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eating what they wasted. The former is an image immortalized by Norman Rockwell, the later is a more anxiety-producing manifestation of poverty. Living off the refus of others, these punks subsists on garbage. The warm glow produced by Rockwell is immediately dimmed, therefore, by these new rail riders.

While they didn't have to pay for the food that they procured for themselves, many of the punks that Jessica knew also refused to pay for transportation. Some of Hahn's community stayed put in the cities, but most would be gone for stretches of time seeing the country from a perch of a boxcar. With stories circulating around her constantly of "hot-shots" and adventures on the road, she too was determined to ride the rails. Together with her friend Mark (who had lied about his experience traveling and was a neophyte as well) Hahn hopped her first train. Sneaking in the dark past the K-Mart, they entered the Emeryville yards and hoped onto a 49 (a flatbed car that has a trailer fastened on top) and within a few minutes the many wheels below them began to turn. Inexperienced and fearing that the train would knock them off their feet and send them flying into the air, they grabbed onto the intestines of the trailer with all of their might. The ride, much to their surprise though, was remarkably smooth. They rode for thirty miles and when the train stopped for the first time at a junction, they jumped off and soon were heading back to San Francisco and their friends.

What amazed Jessica about her first train-riding adventure was the same thing that amazed her about her first dumpster-diving experience—the ease of getting what she wanted. There were no fences in Emeryville to stop her; the train was just sitting there inviting her to hop on, and the ride was smooth and beautiful. There was plenty of noise and screeching of wheels which excited her and she had a front seat to a scene of, as she

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put it, "complete industrial harmony." And it was free. Economically speaking, she was no "Amtrack sucker" paying for her seat. She also was free in the sense that she was seeing things that others were not able to see. And she could do it anytime she wanted. It seemed like a secret that everyone turned a deaf ear to because of fear, but Jessica, sitting on streets with her punk friends, was listening, talking, and acting on what she heard.

This feeling of connection to a group that is outside of accepted norms is central to much of Hahn's published writing. In her poem, "It takes Courage to Grow Up," Hahn outlines this difficulty of making one's own path at an early age. The first part of the poem states that it might be "better to lock you in a cell/ in an institutional hell/ where teachers treat you/like shit/like a Pavlov dog/heart/dropping/dead/at the ring of a bell" she later writes:

> and if you break free
> you only got the movies in your head
> they'll imaginate for
> a night, make you think
> you're all right
> ha
> with no food, cash or clothes.
> you got to learn quick that it takes
> courage to grow up,
> and remember that
> if you cry
> who'll help you?
> (*TW* 12)

Seemingly pessimistic in tone, the poem states that in order to survive, one must rely on oneself. Placing the subject of the poem as a child, the adults are powerful teacher/wardens who treat their captors badly in institutional cells. And if she can manage an escape, Hahn writes, she will only have movie images to guide her on the

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path. These images are illusions, however, and without food or money, one would have to grow up quickly to even have a chance to survive. The subject seems to be in a bad position with neither option—institutional hell or alone on the street—proving very satisfactory. But the last line, while ostensibly the most pessimistic line in the poem and sounding a lot like Eddy Joe Cotton's harsh instructions to Jefferson while they were hopping trains, is not a declarative sentence but rather it is a question without an answer. When one finds oneself on the road with only pop culture movie stills in one's head, is there anyone who will help out? In her novel *Elysian Fields*, her book of poetry *Elemental*, her non-fiction book *Transient Ways*, her many journals, and through the various conversations and interviews I have had with her, Hahn answers this question with an emphatic "yes" and spends much time in her texts documenting the people who answered her call and helped her "grow up."

This growing up process continued as she became ready to leave high school and enter college. Looking at Tulane University in New Orleans, while she was in town, Jessica was able to use the apartment of her mother's friend who would be gone for the duration of her trip. Going on one campus tour led by a smiling co-ed and quickly realizing that the school was "too white" and "too clean," she ran into some punks who were hanging around the campus. Inviting her to come with them that night, she decided not to head back to the apartment but rather to squat with her new-found friends. When she had been spending time with San Francisco punks, she had always returned home at the end of the night; this was the first time that she slept in a squat. Meeting people ranging in age from high school kids to Vietnam Veterans, Hahn again found how easy it was to do something that was both illegal and liberating. No one bothered them, and

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despite being alone, she explained to me that she felt completely safe in this community.[140] Feeling as if she could now have access to food, transportation, and travel at any time, Jessica was on the cusp of cutting ties to her stable lifestyle and heading for the road.

It would, however, take some time. Not ready to join completely with the punk squatter community, and trying to recover from a physically abusive relationship (the main focus of her novel *Elysian Fields*, which is appropriately subtitled, *A Fucked Up Love story*), Hahn then began taking classes in Berkeley while still spending time on the streets with her friends. Participating in two very different cultures, she would remain in this schizophrenic state for two years until she finally jumped into the squatter lifestyle whole-heartedly. There were two main catalysts that drove her to the road. Starting her third year of school, Jessica found herself walking across the campus planning out her life. "I figured out that I would finish college in two more years, publish some books, possibly get a PHD, meet someone and have a child with him—Everything was planned." The idea of having her life mapped out scared her and she wanted a life of more spontaneity and freedom. Standing on the Berkeley campus, she realized that she wanted to be among a class that she felt more comfortable connecting with. As she writes about her experiences in *Elysian Fields*:

> With college I buried all my underground roots. I also buried my enthusiasm for life and got really depressed after a year. If I had remained in my stable rut, this would be my second year of college but I'm fed up with the beauracy, the forcing of declaring a major, the educational system and the competition. By dropping out and traveling

[140] For a more detailed account of her squatting experience, see *Elysian Fields*. While this book could be considered a road novel, the first part of the book deals with the punk/squatter community in New Orleans. Many details are given about the squatting lifestyle explaining how Jessica found the squats and the intimate, although transitory, relationships that she formed on the road.

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> once again, I'm on a conscious reclamation and it would be my plan to find someone to travel with. (7)

Wishing to pull up roots from Berkeley, Hahn wanted to make a claim on her life, thereby consciously choosing to travel. But it was a tough decision to make and she had much difficulty giving up her stationary lifestyle. But when her cat died a gruesome death—the second main catalyst for the road—and her living arrangement with her roommate became stifling, Hahn was ready to go. The jump to living this life fulltime, though, was quite difficult and she needed a friend to take her hand and help her grow up.

She describes her life in Berkeley as "self-destructive." Drinking too much and getting involved with drugs, she was harming herself with her lifestyle feeling pulled in two directions and imploding inside. Dan, a multi-pierced man with tattoos on his face, who was drug and alcohol free and was a positive influence on her during her self destructive stage, helped her forgo the "easier" route of institutional education. After a few weeks of dating, "[Dan] helped me drop out of college . . . He came with me to sign the papers which made a big impact on me—the insurance that I was doing the right thing" (*CO*). As the ink was drying on the page, she left Berkeley's campus behind her and headed with Dan for the train yard where they began hopping together.

This was Hahn's major entrance into the train hopping/squatter community that she would be a part of for the next three years. It was meeting and spending time with this group that convinced her that she needed to travel in order to find the freedom that she desired. In her poem, "In the spirit of Finding Something," she writes,

> Then I met squatters
> Who breathed a boldness

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I'd never tasted before.
They were unhygienic & unlaundered,
Got ousted from poolhalls, marched down the streets,
Watched out for new kids like me. (*Elemental* 1)

By their literal smells, she realized that these punks were different and possessed a freedom that others who needed approval from mainstream society could not connect to. Her traveling experiences had progressed "from weekend camping trips to road trips with friends, Greyhound rides to see far away comrades, occasional freight train hopping until now where I've graduated into an ease of movement and change. Fluidity" (*EF* 9). Although she had been on the outside of this community for years, it was not until she shed her permanent home and headed for the road that she fully realized the complex network of individuals that lived on the road. And it was an experience that she found liberating. And even though making the first step was a hard decision, to keep traveling, she found, was much easier.[141]

Part of what Hahn enjoys about hopping freights is the power that one comes into contact with when becoming a part of this machine that is both beautiful and dangerous. Sounding like many of the other authors who have written about their experiences, Hahn explains the fear of dying as well as the exhilaration of living when hopping a train.[142] It is the very enormity of this machine that places her physical being in perspective. "One's ego is shattered right away because you know you are on this thing that you can't get off

[141] How many squatters are out there? There are no definite statistics about squatting but there is circumstantial data. For example, Christian, a 19 year old punk who has squatted in Ohio, Southern California, Vancouver, and New Orleans estimates that "there were 200 young punks were squatters in buildings in the summer of 1997 in addition to 200 non-punk squatters [in the Bay Area]" (Corr, 25). Even more reside in Oakland than San Francisco because of the higher vacancy rate.

[142] This seemingly oxymoron is present in her reaction to her relationship to the whole punk squatter community as well. Explaining to me in one conversation that she has a deep fear of death and is constantly in fear of dying, she told me in another conversation that she also believes that she is protected and that she would not come to harm. When pushed to explain the obvious contradictions, she just smiled and said, 'We are all complicated, aren't we?"

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of without risking injury or killing yourself" (*CO*). In love with motion and traveling for traveling's sake, Hahn submits to the power of the train, accepting the risks in order to have the fluidity of motion that she so desires.

Despite the danger, therefore, Hahn and Dan hopped trains, never having a concrete plan of where they were heading but allowing the train to take them where it was going.[143] Dan, who had never hopped a train until Jessica introduced him to the iron road, states, "[n]ever in my life had I done anything that fit so perfectly. Like I was meant to be there. Like a puzzle piece is supposed to fit. I absolutely fell in love with the lifestyle" (*CO*).

Important to note, as Dan describes it, hopping trains is not simply a means of traveling but it is a lifestyle—a lifestyle that includes making intimate contacts with others who are traveling just like him. In Sarah George's documentary *Catching Out*, there are interviews with other rail riders who were stealing rides at the same time when Jessica was traveling, all of whom discuss this lifestyle. Baby Girl, a woman who had hopped trains for years alone and then with her husband, Switch, whom she met on the road before "retiring" and attempting to live the "straight" life, simply states about the community of train riders: "On trains everyone is equal. No one has more than you" (*CO*). It is this perceived equality that she appreciates and distinguishes from life lived

[143] This is reminiscent of August Wilson's hauntingly beautiful play *The Piano Lesson* where Doaker, who has been employed with the same railroad company enlightens the rest of the characters about the simpleness of trains saying, "Now what I done learned after twenty-seven years of railroading is this . . . if the train stays on the track . . . its going to get where its going. It might not be where you going. If it ain't, then all you got to do is sit and wait cause the train's coming back to get you. The train don't never stop. It'll come back every time" (19). Without a set schedule, Jessica and Dan followed the train allowing it to take them wherever it was going. The ego is shattered and there is an acknowledging of the power that is greater than them.

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outside of this community.[144] When Switch proudly tells the camera that he "feels freer than the average person," Baby Girl, however, acknowledges the problems associated with joining this subculture and separating themselves from normal society. "We live with the very basics and people think that we need to be converted" (*CO*). But although she can resist this conversion by hopping undetected on the next freight, when she has her child, she warily realizes that accepted paradigms of motherhood do not include hopping trains. Choosing "civilization" and attempting to adapt and survive in an apartment with a newborn baby, she understands that since she is no longer in motion, she is also being watched. "I feel threatened because I am a mother. I feel threatened that someone might take away my child because I am not the norm" (*CO*). Detached from friends she knew on the road, she now feels alone. Although she views the train-hopping community as a family of compatriots who would ride 100 miles down the road if they heard that she was in trouble, rooted in an apartment, she understands that she is not equal to those who have more money and more stability to their lives and that she will have to submit to their rules and laws.[145]

Lee, the most outspoken and overtly political active rail rider interviewed in *Catching Out*, also spends much time discussing the community aspects of the lifestyle.

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[144] This sense of equality is the catalyst for Sascha Dubrul and Arrow's *Carnival of Chaos* summer tour that I will discuss below.

[145] This anxiety can be found in the conversation that Baby Girl and Switch have when discussing their newfound roots.
SWITCH: I'll end up being a 40 miler. A person who goes from one point to another point. He doesn't go anywhere else. I'll always be a train rider.
Baby Girl: Always
SW: Always.
BG: (after a pause)Not so much a trainrider. As a tramp . . .Like you're a maverick in your life.
In this discussion, Baby Girl is acknowledging the dangers of being associated with being a trainrider—even if its only as a "40 miler" and instead uses the relatively less dangerous and more ambiguous term "tramp."

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This environmental activist who has been a member of various collective political organizations, considers trainhopping to be "one of those few genuinely American things" that allows for "a sense of momentum" both physically and emotionally. It is a lifestyle that is dangerous but one that is built on the pleasure principle. "There is really a strong element of play. Dancing in the freight yards. Dancing on the boxcars. Zooming through the deserts waving at passerbys and waving at little kids who pay attention to trains." Even one of the principle dangers that the railrider faces—being fined, arrested, and harassed by police—is considered fun. "How often as an adult can you hide out and sneak around and try to outwit the cops. Darkness helps. Lots of shadows. Lots of industrial wastelands that allow the tramp and hobo to blend in. It's a bit of a game."[146] Lee, who spends much time alone in a squat that he built in the woods, appreciates the fact that at any time he feels like it, he can hop a train and find others whom he can relate to. "I really love the deep conversation that happens on a train or happens waiting in a yard . . . I really cherish that" (*CO*).

As Baby Girl, Switch, and Lee attest, what they respect and enjoy most is that they have formed a community of individuals coming together for mutual cooperation, conversation and fun. For Hahn, this too was what she was seeking. The desire to be a part of a punk rail riding *community* is also one of Hahn's main differences from Eddy Joe Cotton. Cotton was fascinated by and attempted to model his lifestyle on the advice of older hobos who subscribed to an overtly masculine code of conduct. He formed relationships based on hierarchal models of fathers and sons. Hahn was more interested

[146] This sentiment is echoed by Duffy LittleJohn, author of *Hopping Freight Trains in America* (Sand River Press, 1993) who, when not hopping trains illegally, is an attorney. He states, "There is nothing better than getting up on the heat. I've been chased by a lot of cops . . . It's fun and its cheating" (*CO*).

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in finding people around her own age who were struggling to find their own space. Not wanting to "stab her flag" into any particular place, her traveling was an attempt to find authentic spaces of freedom, in which she could discover and embody her identity.

Hahn's unpublished journal, which she kept when on the road in 1997, reveals her strong desire for this actualization. After finding out that *Max Rock N Roll* delivered a scathing review of her book *Transient Ways* as being merely popcorn for the bourgeoisie, Hahn wrote a response in her journal:

> Living Free is a state of mind . . . To me, my lifestyle is exactly how I want it. I am living free to my fullest and life is just a series of experiences mostly unpredictable but always an experience in every aspect be it good or bad. I wouldn't ever dream of trading what I consider to be living free with what she considers to be living free.

Still angry about the review when speaking to me, Hahn however grew frustrated when repeatedly questioned about exact definitions of the philosophy of living free. Not able to define in short terms, the answer seemed to lie in the three main aspects of the punk rail riding squatter lifestyle. Free from having to pay for food. Free from having to pay for transportation. Free from having to pay for a place to live. Taken apart, she implies, are only ways to escape from paying from things. Taken together, however, and combined within a transitory but tight-knit community, they construct an ethos to live by.

The identity politics that Hahn and others like her seek is distinct from train-riding communities that I analyzed in the preceding chapters. Although it is a politics of identity that, like the previous hobo communities, is built on individuality, pleasure, and invisibility, it is the way that these aspects interconnect that is distinctly different from the communality of the older generations of hobos. There is one aspect of this

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communality that speaks directly to these distinctions—squatting. It is this action of squatting that develops a distinct identity politics that plays more concretely and dangerously with the line between visibility and invisibility.

In *Elysian Fields*, Hahn states that, "I realized in my teenage years that the group of people who believed they could do whatever they wanted with their lives and were the most liberated from social convictions, are squatters. I felt most comfortable around like-minded people, where we agreed politically and socially. So with this as the pivotal bond, I connected to the underground world" (9). As previously stated, even before her first train ride with Mark and her extended period of living on the road with Dan, Hahn was intimately connected with the underground scene through her associations with squatters. Even though squatters are as different as hobos and there are a myriad of reasons for squatting and many different types of squats, generally the term usually implies "the illegal takeover of existing housing as landlords often leave a significant percentage of a city's housing stock vacant and deteriorating" (Corr 9). Squatting, in other words, is the direct action of entering private property and taking it over for a time to serve an individual's need for shelter.

Squatting is a different form of space creation than previously discussed. It is not creation of space by appropriating a park bench to make a bed. It is not creating space by trespassing and entering a train yard to hop a train. And it is not creating space by joining together around a jungle campfire on the outskirts of town. Although all three of these instances could be considered illegal and a public nuisance, none of these examples deal with the appropriation of distinctly private property. Hobos might violate a company's private property (the railroad), but it seems to me to be a more conscious,

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perhaps even arrogant, act of aggression to take over a building—almost like the difference between stealing a candy bar from a Wal-mart to swiping a wallet from a businessman when he has bent down to tie his shoelaces. Even though both are stealing, one has a more corporate face while the other is, for lack of a better word, more intimate.

Connie Morgenstein, a young squatter, understands how her actions are both shocking and disturbing to those who are not living her lifestyle by stating that "[s]quatting is a violation of everyone's basic idea of society. Property is sacred. When you open up a building, you are violating someone's property" (Corr 20). Whether consciously or not, Morgenstein is using a rape metaphor to describe how people view squatting: it is the forcible opening up of a sacred place and violating it with a profane body. The building is something to be protected and kept clean from violent attackers. In a capitalistic society that has as its core belief the sacredness of private property, squatters are in fact physically using their own bodies to contradict and resist this belief. And normative society could term this as a type of rape. It is an aggressive act that entails a type of violence. "Breaking and entering" are violent words that places upon the person committing these "crimes" a stigma of brutality, savagery, and lawlessness. Squatters, of course, read their actions very differently.

In the first issue of *Squatter Comics*, Eric Drooker has a full page drawing that shows the opening of a squat.[147] The opening of the squat a physical expression (explosion?) of power. In the picture, a woman wearing an above the knee skirt, with long flowing hair, a muscular and chiseled body, swings a large sledgehammer into a cement wall. A look of fierce concentration and determination can be seen on her

[147] See appendix three.

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darkened face. She has come upon a brick wall—a wall that was placed on the opening of a doorway in order to keep her and the likes of her out of the building. But the unnamed woman, with her own two hands (and the help of a sledgehammer, of course), is breaking down this wall, allowing homeless bodies to enter and to live within the sacred space. This is not, however, a solitary action. In the background, large groups of people watch. Even though they are shaded dark and their features represent the larger squatter contingent, we are able to recognize men, women as well as a child. Some are actively cheering, some are pointing and others are looking on. But, all are witnessing that brick walls are not enough to keep them out.

This aggressive tone is present in the zines, the music, and in conversations with people in the squatter community. Not content to build fires on the edge of towns, they are inhabiting buildings in the heart of the city. Forgotten by some or seen as "scary" places that the mainstream community avoids, they are still structures that these men and women break into and call—for a time at least—their own. *Shadow Comics*, an off shoot of *The Shadow* newspaper, is filled with comic and serious confrontations with the police, the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development, and other agencies, all showing men and women fighting to claim a space of their own. For example, Eric Drooker, in another full-page spread, has a drawing of a squatter's building.[148] Throughout the windows are depictions of squatters working together. On the front of the building is a sign that states "Meeting Tonight." Throughout the building other squatters are shaking hands, taking care of young children or handing flyers out to people walking by the newly renovated apartment building. Coming out of the side of the

[148] See appendix four.

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building, however, is a huge muscular arm raised with a clenched fist. The huge bicep itself has bricks along its skin—this is the abandoned building, forgotten by greedy landlords, that has been transformed into a muscular, living entity because of the cooperation of the squatters.

The transformation of this building from private property to communal property can be seen in the second issue of the comic. In the story "The People United," John and Jane and their child are trying to find a place to squat. When they take sledgehammers and break open a squat to live, they are rousted from their sleep by "The People United" who—looking very much like a police goon squad—tell the couple that they have to leave. The comic asks and then answers why these two groups—the squatters and a homeless advocacy group—are on opposite sides. The result is a history lesson of the neighborhood of the Lower East Side, describing the various ethnic communities and the many different radical political groups (everyone from Emma Goldman to Abbey Hoffman are mentioned) that were present in this small section of Manhattan. The comic then explains its view of how former homeless advocates "sold out" to government pressures and became embedded in buacracy instead of taking direct action like the squatting community does. And while the end of the comic shows how squatters joining together can win a battle against the politically influenced group, "The People United" angrily shouts, "[w]hat you are doing is illegal! Soon the Police will throw you out! No one will care because the neighborhood hates you!" The last panel of the comic depicting the squatters standing in front of their building, states ominously, "Victory. At least for now."

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These visual representations of the squatting scene suggests that squatting is a confrontational, aggressive act. Sleeping in a dilapidated house that has not had tenants in it for three years is, however, very different from revolutionaries entering a mansion of a wealthy businesswoman and declaring her property to belong to the proletariat. I am not attempting to conflate the two.[149] As Nick Anning writes in *Squatting: The Real Story*, "[s]quatting is a very human activity, full of contradiction, inconsistency, wonder, and desperation" (174). Squatter's personal politics, both conscious and unconscious, are wide-ranging and often contradictory. Many squatters are poor, young, and addicted and they are just attempting to stay out of the rain and away from the police and have not thought about the aggressive and resistive nature involved with entering an abandoned building. But others, like Hahn, are consciously taking over these houses creating temporary "homes" in moves that I see are in line with Bey's pirate utopias. Hahn is not attempting to topple governments or to attack the wealthy landowners, but she is attempting to "live free." Her vision of freedom is in line with Anders Corr's definition: "to be truly free, people need a place to call their own, privacy not only from governments but landlords" (51). Hahn, who did have options of places to live, wanted to be free from the restrictions that are inherent when one rents or owns property. As Anning concludes, "Some people have found that as well as providing a roof over their

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[149] In this dissertation as a whole, I am not attempting to glorify this lifestyle. Nor am I attempting to romanticize it. Instead, I feel it is important to study this subculture to understand how it speaks to subcultural politics, issues of personal and autonomous decision making, and the creation of space in public places. Here I would echo bell hooks who writes, "So I want to note that I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as "pure." I want to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance . . . We are more silent when it comes to speaking of the margin as site of resistance. We are more often silenced when it comes to speaking of the margin as site of resistance (*Yearning* 151)

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head, squatting is able to satisfy their needs for self-determination, independence, experimentation and creativity. Squatters are not plagued with landlords, council housing officers, planners or mortgage companies breathing down their necks, and many people have taken advantage of this to experiment with alternative ways of living"(2). And for a few years, Hahn lived this underground lifestyle, entering buildings, clearing spaces for herself to sleep, all the while transforming buildings into "homes" for a night at a time.

On March 22, 1996, this is exactly what Hahn did. She and Dan met up with two squatters, Frank and Jordanna, and the foursome entered a house, cleaned out some rooms and proceeded to make it their place for the night. They did not just lie down on the floor and sleep, rather, Dan and Jessica improved the place, creating a bed that was comfortable as well as stylish.

> Dan and I are snuggled under two blankets, on our homemade bed of big plywood board raised up on plastic milk crates, with lots of blankets as padding. Last night he and I made a huge canopy of trash so now I see the world through draped sheets of plastic which cover this cardboard cocoon. I started to make the top of the canopy with the pre-made structures sticking out of the wall, and got Dan excited enough to lurk the streets with me while everyone else slept, I think it's quite a structure, kinda funny and impressive. Anyhow, it did its duty and we slept well. (5)

While it did "its duty," these two squatters individualized the space and make it their own. But like an artist who builds elaborate castles in the sand, the bed set that these two created was ephemeral and would not survive.[150] But they did create it for a night and that was what they wanted. Indeed, Jessica was not content just to make a "flop" but rather was interested in creating something new.

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[150]For a pertinent example of this, see *River and Tides* (2001), a film that captures Andy Goldsworthy's process of creation and destruction of his environmental art. Goldsworthy's art entails creating a piece on a beach, for example, and then watching the tide take it into the sea.

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Breaking into a building might be read as a violent act, it is not necessarily destruction for destruction's sake. Rather, it may also be read as an attempt to create a space to comfortably exist for a moment of time. Later that same night, rummaging around the building, Jessica and Dan find two block letters, an "H" and an "O" and half-jokingly say, "now all we need, we all laugh, are the M and the E" (*TW* 6). During the middle of the night, they then go on another dumpster diving spree and they find, "buckets, toys, carpet, and an army helmet and some piping" which they bring back to their squat to further personalize their space (7). Using food from various relief organizations as well as what they could find from dumpster diving, they return to their home and they all sleep in the same room together. All four squatters, she writes, are happy to be spending time together and everything therefore is "copasetic" (*TW* 6).

Avoiding shelters that have rules and regulations, Jessica and her friends instead found a building that was not in use, entered it, and then fixed it up to meet their particular needs. Although their actions were practical—finding shelter—it is the way that they created these spaces that has resistive and oppositional connotations. Susan Ruddick, who wrote a book on her observation of the youth squatting community in Hollywood in the mid-nineties, explains how the appropriation of space by squatting is connected to an oppositional and gendered politics. "Space [is] a constitutive medium" that allows for individuals to create an identity that they feel comfortable with (6). And although these squatters are homeless, many do not see themselves in this way because they felt that they could get a transitional home whenever they wanted to.[151] Squatting "suggests that the homeless negotiate their identity above and beyond the label of

[151] This echoes Jessica's realization of "how easy" it was to find a squat, eat free food, and hop on a train.

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homeless—as men, women, children of many different backgrounds" (43). The result is that "they also use urban space to produce 'small dignities' in which they struggle to redefine their social position or to force concessions from those who have power over them" (45).

Hahn, as well as some of her traveling companions, wanted to create a space where they were equal and where they could celebrate their marginality.[152] They were negotiating their identity within the community that they were forming. They identified themselves with the punk/squatter subculture and through their actions affirmed their beliefs in their lifestyle. They had an oppositional stance that was formed by the way that they created their communal space. But what type of space does the squatter occupy? And how is it connected to Jessica's notion of freedom? Ruddick interprets the marginal squatting subculture as bricolurs who potentially co-exist in a non-hierarchical third space:

> One might identify three formal types of space within a landscape of meaning. Each of these inscribed within a particular political economy of production of space. The first is the space of the citadel. This is a space of exclusion, a marked space, like the post-industrial city space that expels or submerges all other meanings except those of the privileged classes to which they cater. . . . The second space is the space of the ghetto. This is a space of rupture, or potential rupture, the forgotten devalued space occupied by those that are excluded, who may accept the nonmarked status imposed on them or who may seize their own forms of subjectivity in and through the claiming of that space . . . The third space, however, lies between the citadel and the ghetto,

[152] Pleasure and the search for it is at the center of this lifestyle. As Sascha Dubrul writes about being part of the squatter community—and being forced outside of the straight community—in *The Vida Secreta de los Gabachos*, "At some point I exploded and a couple of years later me and my friends were punks. And I had a lot of friends by the way because there were a lot of us alienated, fucked up kids. . . .For the first time in my life I learned about what it was like to have a real community around who looked after each other . . .Meanwhile, we just had so much more fun than everyone else" (28-30). Long late night talks, joining together to form a band or put on a show, walking neighborhoods to discover and open up squats are all activities that are based around sharing and working together.

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> where a kind of hybrid new meanings are produced. This is a space of suture, where meanings are fused together to produce something new. . . Spaces of suture arise where production of place must occur through hegemonic alliance, and not sheer dominance. (199)

In the above example, Jessica, Dan, Frank and Jordanna created their own home—perfectly symbolized in the letter blocks that they found and displayed. With no money and clothes that signaled their poverty, they did not belong (nor would they be allowed) within the citadel. Neither did they want to stay in the ghetto where their poverty should solidly place them. Rather, through their movement, they decided on the in-between space which Ruddick describes as a place of suture and the creation of meaning.

But while Ruddick rightly points out that suture is a connection of possibly divergent meanings, it is also important to note that suture is a surgical term. Suture implies a procedure to close an open, gaping wound. To open a squat means to create a hole, to physically rip apart a closed space and create a wound. The community that forms within this hole will thus determine the type of suture that takes place within it.[153] Physically resisting a society that holds private property sacred and abstractly imagining an existence outside of the capitalistic society that she was born, Hahn was partaking in a conscious resistance. "Resistance may take place as a reaction against unfairness and injustice, as a desire to survive intolerable conditions, but it may also involve a sense of remembering and dreaming of something better (Pile 30). On March 22, 1996, the four squatters were communally dreaming and attempting to actualize a space where they could be free. And the squat was the space to do this.

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[153] To continue the metaphor then, from a capitalist position, these squatters would be considered germs that are inflicting the body of the building. Medicine, in the form of evictions and arrests, would therefore be needed to heal the body and close the wound. For Jessica, the way that she creates her identity and therefore sutures her meaning, is directly related to her notions of freedom.

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Riddick's use of the term "third space" might seem to be too idealistic and a romanticisation of a lifestyle that has members who may be reactionary, racist and sexist. For example, while I read Hahn as having anarchist, non-hierarchal leanings, when she was building a "home" in one of the rooms in March of 1996, in another room in that very same squat there could have been a self-identified Nazi who spent the night searching the streets for homosexuals to attack. As Steve Pile states, "Spatialities of resistance imply a subject of change that is not necessarily coherent nor has an essential constitution nor a fixed goal, with a clear direction" (27). Similarly, though, the squatting lifestyle also has the potential to produce a safe, non-threatening, and feminist space. Pat Moan, for example, found that squatting made her more confident in a sexist society. Thinking about her squatting experiences, she understands them as the catalyst leading her to become cognizant of her abilities and independent in her relations with males. Being an equal member of a community allowed her to achieve this understanding.

Moving into a squat, Moan realized the complexity of living that takes place within the walls. "People don't just sleep here. They live here—work, play, sit on the front porch talking, drinking beer" (Anning 179). It is here that she found "a community of peers, support, like-minded people so as not to be always defending myself and my outlook" (183). She also felt freer and more competent than she had in the past when she lived in her own apartment because she now lived in a situation that was always changing and offering up challenges. "The world was at my feet and for the first time in my life I really got into doing what I wanted to do, instead of what I was supposed to do. I think men generally have a broad range of opportunities so I doubt if they experience this

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freedom as intensely as women." When she joined with other female squatters she realized:

> We kept finding out that we weren't powerless and [men] weren't omnipotent. Possibilities bloomed before my eyes. The whole area of skill-sharing opened up a wealth of opportunities for women . . . . As women we really started to feel our power, individually as well as collectively. There was a general challenge stance in the whole situation. It was illegal (I thought). Stealing houses (they said). It was taking a risk breaking the law and once you'd done it and started thinking about why houses were empty, it made you think a lot of things. You'd cross the line, you'd hit the bottom and it wasn't so bad. In fact it was liberating leading on to the next question: what about all these stupid laws, conventions and attitudes which people hold sacred? (183)

Crossing the line by squatting, Moan sutured new meanings between the citadel and the ghetto and produced new understandings that allowed her to question the rules and regulations of private property and gender conformity. The result was that for Moan, "the quality of my everyday life has never been better. This is revolution. It is on now. Not only is it bloodless and leaderless, it is fun" (183). Squatting, therefore, for her, "has been about women, about power, about independence and breaking a deadening pattern of passivity" (185).

While Moan saw her squatting as part of a bloodless revolution, it is important here to take a step back and to explore how Jessica and her fellow squatters, who left the next day on a train and whose presence in that particular building would never have been known if she hadn't published sections of her journal, were forming a resistive or oppositional identity by their illegal occupation. In her book, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks writes of her own attempt to choose a marginality: "[t]o be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside of the main body" and to live and

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speak not from the center but from the edge (148). When one accepts the margins and no longer seeks the center, she believes that one has the possibility of a radical openness. This radical openness is a profound freedom that people desire and seek and which "cut[s] across boundaries of race, class, gender and sexual practice"(27). But this space is a dangerous space and "it is not safe . . .one is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance" to protect and nurture (149). It is this type of community that Hahn (and Lee, Baby Girl and Switch) finds within her squatting family. It is a choice—one that she was not forced into but actively sought out. And for hooks, this is exactly what is needed to form a community that seeks this radical freedom. "I make a definite distinction between the marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination" (153). By choosing the margins, they are attempting to find a radical openness—a freedom they are doing so by squatting.

Throughout *Transient Ways*, Hahn discusses her desire to live in the margins and to be part of this segregated culture—it is a way for her to "live free." To use hooks paradigm, Hahn would not be able to do this alone. Rather, she needed a community of like-minded people around her to do so. And while in another room of a squat that she is inhabiting may be "tweakers and wingnuts" or perhaps even the skinhead that I earlier referred to, Hahn associates with only those whom she is able and wants to relate. It is an insular, protective society. And throughout her journal entries and stories, there is this acknowledgement that when she is within this community she is safe, but when she is not, she is in danger.

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When the squatter/punk is outside of her subculture, she is liable to be recognized and assaulted by those who do not like her chosen lifestyle. The most obvious example and recurring theme in Hahn's work (and in much of squatter literature) is the corrupt and overweight policeman. But although they are always a menacing force that needs to be avoided, when the squatter is together with others, Hahn suggests, she will be able to outwit the dull-witted police. But if the squatter find herself alone and away from her friends, the results are usually bad. For example, in the short story "An Occurrence at the Howard Street Building," when cops whose "faces puckered like eyes squirted with Tobasco, flute-playing fingers curled round their crotches" find Kelly, a squatter who is protective of his girlfriend Pippin, alone in an abandoned building, they beat him up mercilessly (9). When Kelley breaks free from their grip to warn Pippin, the policemen shoot him dead.[154] It is the fact that Kelly searches out Pippin and resists the authority of the cops that causes his death. Alone, surrounded by the "sweaty and tired" cops, he succumbed to their physical onslaught. In another short story from *Transient Ways*, "One Summer Evening Drunk as Hell," the cops arrest Nixon who had been stealing liquor from an A & P. When Nixon is with Poke, they are fine, stealing and joking from the store at will. But when Poke heads down the street leaving Nixon alone, the cops magically appear and roughly place him in a squad car. Poke is left alone where she is forced to pretend that she is "just another air head who'd show her boobs for plastic beads" to avoid detection from the police (15). Again, it is the moment of separation

[154] The story is written in a way that Kelly's running for Pippin could be either a dream or a true occurrence. Either way, it is the desire to warn Pippin that is the last wish of Kelly before he is killed.

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when the punk squatter finds himself alone does he succumb to the forces that are greater that him.

But while squatters are able to be hunted and discovered when they are alone, in the texts of Hahn, this is not the case when the squatters stay together. For example, on that day when they found the lettered blocks of wood, the four of them take a walk around town. Immediately, the police spot them as suspicious characters and begin to follow them. "An undercover pigmobile tried to be slick and follow us—like we couldn't tell he was a stupid fucking pig—and we got him lost in the maze of one-way streets" (7). Although apparently being the watched, the squatters are also the watchers and could easily recognize an undercover police car. Negotiating the territory that they are comfortable with, they were able to use their knowledge of the streets to get the police lost.

Even though this is a simple example of these squatters being able to outmaneuver the police, and choosing the margins does protect them somewhat, it is imperative to note that by opening and entering a squat they are somewhat shedding their cloak of invisibility and allowing themselves to become visible. For a visual example, if we go back to that drawing by Drooker of the woman, there is a huge chasm between a hobo cloaking herself in invisibility and sneaking onto a train, and a woman in the center of a crowd, crushing brick underneath her sledgehammer. Does this visibility, then, lead to a suppression of this lifestyle by outside forces?

To a certain extent it does. Depending on city budgets and the level of the public's interest in these neighborhoods and buildings, squatters can be arrested, chased out of the buildings, or left alone. Overtly political squatting movements, which do not

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seek invisibility, are mostly seen in Europe (although also present on a smaller scale in the U.S.), will force recognition and response from governments. With visibility comes direct confrontation. But other squatter movements, which are more transitory and less noticeable, are also taking place at the same time. And although they might sometimes become seen, they are more like the pirate utopias that exist unknown for a time and disappear once a fast approaching ship is spotted on the horizon. Sascha Altman Dubrul, a committed and articulate anarchist punk squatter, has a foot in both of these camps.

Sascha grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, the son of politically left-leaning parents who had working class sensibilities. Sascha is an intense and passionate individual who, echoing Hahn's "live free" motto, speaks of the need to live in the margins. As he writes in the zine *Slug and Lettuce*,

> Strikes me like I've always found all the good stuff at the edges and inbetween spaces: the bleed in time between late night and early morning when the mind runs fast and free and isn't afraid to make connections that might normally seem a little strange; the edge of urban neighborhoods where people from different parts of the world cross paths with each other; the edge between different ecologies like the land and the water, the forest and the grassland, the estuary and the ocean – places where different species learn how to live with each other and create whole new ways of interacting; spaces where strangers meet like bus stops and 24 hour diners and underground parties on the edge of town.

Sascha's politics are up front and clear. For example, dealing with a bi-polar disorder that has caused him to be institutionalized at times, Sascha has written many columns about his experiences in zines as well and in the mainstream press, publishing his fight and attempting to form networks with others who

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have mental health issues.[155] He has set up a DiY mental health forum and workshop in Berkeley and has been a contributor and the force behind the highly informative collaborative website *The Icarus Project.*[156]

After trying, much like Hahn, to have one foot in the college culture and one foot in the punk culture, he eventually gave up his classes and headed for an education on the road. He is heavily involved in the squatter community on the Lower East Side and the experience of participating in the Tompkins Park riots made him more overtly political. "I threw my first brick at a cop and set my first barricade on fire in the middle of the street" (30). He is against private property and sees his squatting as a political act with his body as the weapon. Not content to just write and theorize, he attempts to live in the spaces that he creates. Although he admits that that the edge is a dangerous space where "there's always the possibility of falling off," it is here that he believes that he can live free.

Even though he has participated in direct confrontation, Sascha believes that he can only survive in spaces that are constantly in flux and that he must stay moving in order to survive. He believes in TAZ collectives—these bands of people who draw together and split apart only to form new collectives and new subgroups away from the line of vision of those in authority. As he states clearly in his book *The Vida Secreta de los Gabachos*, when he was younger he was alienated from society and he wanted to fight back with direct confrontation

[155] See his article, "Bipolar World" that can be found in the *SF Bay Guardian* September 2002.
[156] See http://www.theicarusproject.net/purpose.php.

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because "[e]verything looked ugly at fifteen anyway: life was short and we were all gonna die young" (29). However, as he grew older and traveled the country more, he realized that there was a whole underground network that was connected in non-hierachal ways that could support each other while staying invisible and out of sight.[157] Realizing that the revolution would not come as quickly as he wanted, he also realized that he did not know what it would look like if it came.

> I don't think that me or most of my friends have a very easy time trying to imagine a large scale social revolution. Most of us are way too alienated from mainstream culture and even most other people to be able to begin thinking on such big levels. Most of us are covered with emotional scars and have retreated to our safe little enclaves in big cities or rural communities. A lot of our attempts at political organizing seem to end up only reaching each other because we know how to talk to a certain kind of people (34).

Instead of being beaten by the police while resisting efforts to close a squat, Sascha instead has opted to create TAZs throughout the country. Not being pinned down to one place, he instead travels the country attempting to have moments of rupture when underground scenes that have been lying invisible for long periods of time suddenly make themselves present and a force for a short stretch of time. This is the philosophy

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[157] He compares his community of travelers to the roots of an old growth forest. The trees are all connected by this intricate webbing and knots of roots that are formed hidden below the surface. And he realizes that the longer the trees grow the more connected they will be. The ground is filled with moss and growth, the trees are hanging with thick trees and there are so many different animals crawling over the land. And still the roots, day by day, slowly get a bit closer to each other. And while Sascha sees this as beautiful, the lumber companies want to destroy this and instead "envision the forests of the future as vast tree farms: straight rows harvested in squares, purely a cash crop, something to be cultivated for the optimum amount of years and then cut and replanted with no memory of what came before" (2). Making the move that has global repercussions, Sascha then contemplates, "Walking through the forest that day, feeling the earth under my feet and all around me, I wondered if the trees all the way down in the jungles of South America could feel it when the trees up here in headwaters forest get clearcut. If the trees have global solidarity like me and my people underground roots that stretch across continents (2)

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behind Sascha and his friend Arrow's *Carnival of Chaos*, a summer anarchist road trip that he documents in a book of the same title. In a review of the book, the travels were described as: "somewhat similar to Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley, Carnival of Chaos* is less of a search for America than it is a search for similar anarchist spirits and a confirmation of an anarchist's worst suspicions about North America" (*Social Anarchism* #26, 1998). Sending off flyers beforehand, the group set off in a van across the United States (although most ended up hopping freights to get to the various places) in order to have workshops and put on performances in such diverse places as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Eureka Springs, Arkansas. The purpose of this trip according to Sascha was to drop off the grid for awhile and suddenly appear in moments of anarchistic satori.

> We're experimenting with different living systems and alternative communities, networking our own underground support systems. We're learning together to outsmart the system, to live outside the system as outlaws. We're learning more about moving past our differences and working together pooling our resources and stealing the rest. . . . Some people call us parasites because we tap into the resources of the hyperdeveloped industrial grid and pick the over ripe fruits off the massproduction tree as we struggle to build our own independent world underground (6).

They don't mind being parasites as long as they are causing the host body to become sick without "doctors" detecting the source of the irritation. The carnival stops were these quick temporary autonomous zones that would happen and suddenly disappear before any authority could figure out what to do with them. And although he might describe the group as "growing out of the cracks in the cement like weeds, slowly taking root under all the strip malls and jails," he believes that these gatherings within the cracks will continue to produce more ruptures and division in the parent culture (2). Even though he

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desires a social revolution on a mass scale, he realizes that "the truth is that I don't see the old system going anywhere yet. I think at a certain point if we want to be effective on a mass scale we have to learn to negotiate a balance with the system" (6). And while this negotiation might include using their invisibility at times to disguise their rebellion, Sascha and others are willing to a degree to do this.

Sascha's actions are intended to consciously live in hook's radical openness, and his writing charts his varying opinions of a radical. The Carnival of Chaos tour was an attempt to spread anarchist ideas throughout the country. If we return to Hahn, however, we encounter a woman who is not attempting to change any one else's views. Her actions, unlike the site of anarchist fire-breathers in Alabama, are more subdued. And her cloak of invisibility is important—especially when she is squatting. For example, on the night that they make a "home" in the building, Jessica and Dan wake up to a violent pounding on their squat. Thinking that the police were raiding the squat, they were relieved to find out that it was only a "pumped up, crazy wingnut in a trench coat beating down the CAUTION railing protecting our underground entrance" (5). In the morning light, after they get a closer look, they realize that their disguise was perfect and "it doesn't look as if the wingnut realized the board at his feet was covering an underground tunnel into this warehouse" (6). Knowing and creating their space, they were able to form a community and remain safe.[158] The use of invisibility—for example only telling friends about a particular squat or only entering the squat in the dark when no one is

[158] This is obviously not to suggest that they were always able to control the safety of their squats. While Hahn never wrote of an experience where she was harmed by anyone, others have been victims of violence by those both inside and outside the squatter community. As Graham, a young squatter, states, "You would come home and find security guards had kicked your bedding around and pawed through all of your stuff. You had to wonder whether it would be there the next day" (Corr 25).

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looking—is a way for her to sustain her freedom while she is bodily resisting notions of private property.

This does not happen in solitary groups, however, but exists within a community. As Jessica writes in La Migra Part 2, "I found out in the Sf/underground/and out on the streets/that it's only/my good friends/ & my close family/ &the animals that trust me/ &myself/ who will protect me." Understanding this, and sounding convinced and determined to live with this knowledge, she concludes the poem in affirmative, quasi-religious rhetoric: "so be it/so be it/ so be it" (*TW* 21).

The common denominator, therefore, in all of Jessica's stories and journal entries as well as in our conversations is her negotiation between visibility and invisibility.[159] By creating her own spaces of communality, by knowing the contours of the buildings that she squats, by disguising entrances and exits of the spaces that she temporarily inhabits and by choosing who she will share these spaces with, Hahn attempts to become invisible to those outside of her community while becoming a vital, if only temporary, compatriot for fellow squatters. When on the road, she does not have the luxury of being unaware of the gaze but must be vigilant. The gaze, not surprisingly, is a recurrent theme in the stories and journal entries that she has published. For example, in her short story entitled "Like Piss in a Pod, It's the Blasphemy Squad," focuses upon looking relations.

[159] This is a cause of tension for Jessica, however, and she seemed most uncomfortable in our conversation whens she was explaining the need to break some of these ties that connected to this invisible underground scene. For example, Jessica had her fingers tattooed with symbols when she was first on the road. Coming back and desiring a job in the public school system, she had them removed. Another moment of tension happened the night before I came to interview her for the first time. An old riding companion (who was also interviewed in *Catching Out*) called her number and wanted to stay at her house for a few days. She refused. Talking to me about this encounter, she was uncomfortable with her decision—this was a friend that she shared many miles with—but she ultimately has realized that both of these lifestyle cannot exist in the same space. The process of getting grounded in the parent culture is to clip some of the ties to the underground subculture.

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George, a young boy, instead of eating his food and listening to his overbearing mother, is instead fascinated with looking at the waitress, the police, the customers, and an old man who are all present in the diner. All of these characters, however, are also looking at each other, but being adults and "proper," look out the corners of their eyes because they do not want to be caught by others who are also watching. George, though, has more freedom to look and therefore sees all the nuances of the characters that they think they have hidden from view. Hahn suggests in this story that, because of his age, George is placed in the margins and therefore from his position can see what those who are afraid of being caught looking or do not have the ability to look, cannot. Although he might be reprimanded by his mother, the punishment is nil, just hot air being pushed around the table. And so he can see the police and their blind arrogance. He can notice the waitress and how tired she is. And he can notice the old man slowly limping out of the diner without paying. From the margins where he is invisible, George is able to see more than those who are in the center. Although this story has nothing to do with squatting or train hopping thematically, it does capture wonderfully they way that when someone is somewhat invisible (nobody pays attention to George), s/he has certain advantages and knowledge because of this marginality.

But even though in this story George may become invisible and unseen because of his age, Jessica knew that when she was on the road, her lifestyle made her a target of surveillance. Her mannerisms and her clothes made her stand out to the public. On October 23, 1995, Dan and Hahn leave their underground existence and travel to the heart of the city in order for him to take care of a toothache and for her to have a pregnancy exam. Tired from their travels, they sit at a bus stop at Hollywood and Wilcox and Dan

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sleeps in her lap for a half an hour. Even in an eccentric area and sitting at a bus stop, though, they are seen by others. "Everyone driving past was staring at us, some waved (huh?) and the young drug dealers took interest from across the street but left us alone (*TW* 25). Although part of this might be a boast (everyone was looking?), there is the understanding that they do stand out and that their bodies are sites that are interpreted by others. In this case, passing motorists just stare (or wave) and the drug dealers keep their distance. Another time, these waves could turn to fists and the distance quickly closed. Hahn, while enjoying the "exotic" days of being the focus of this attention, also realizes the dangers and she knows that she'll "only be around" for a short time before "I return to the train yards" (26).

Sitting in her house in San Bruno, drinking herbal tea and playing with her dog, it is obvious that Jessica did eventually leave those train yards behind her. And although she wrote in her journal on August 25, 1997 that "school is a dreadful concept," she did get through two more years at Berkeley, graduated, and now is an excited and passionate high school teacher.[160] Not many can or want to stay on the road for a long time. Eventually most people stop floating and develop roots and this is what Jessica has done. But when she was on the road hopping trains and squatting, she was part of an underground subculture that lived an existence that, while arrogant and confrontational at times, hid their bodies from the agents of order while still sometimes offering them up as fleeting sites of invisible resistance to a way of life that they did not subcribe to. And for Jessica Hahn, this was a lifestyle that led her to "Live Free."

[160] What I found interesting was how passionate she was talking about her classroom—she was more animated about this subject at times than her stories about traveling on the rails. A perfect example of this was when she was going through and giving me pictures of herself and her friends when she was traveling—she also slipped me a picture of her classroom.

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In the poem, "A Livid Power" that closes *Transient Ways*, Hahn discusses the rewards of being a transient and living this underground life.[161]

To the squatter, the "livid power" that s/he has is in the ability to be part of a city that exists because s/he is willing to explore it.[162] Although others might see the city as only a place to put their stuff, Hahn uses the metaphor of a dusty attic to show that, because she is willing to explore, she is able to discover its many miracles. Her lifestyle is one of exploration and discovery and the "white plastic faces" stuck in their cars traveling to and from work cannot see her, and if they do, they would only choke on the freedom that she exudes. These men and women of the parent culture have only the ability to see her (when they do) as different and potentially dangerous. But she can disappear into the attic and they lose sight of her because they cannot see into her world—this city that she gyrates through "stopping and starting" through its veins and cracks. And even though they might "know computers" they have no idea that "under the board/ where Caution tape growls/ is a big black hole" that, while menacing to those who follow rules and regulations, opens up a squat where, as Hahn emphatically states, "I'm in an existence/ where I know I am safe."

This safety exists because she is willing to be free from possessions and landlords and can actually listen to the city, to hear what it will tell her and what it will reveal. Being safe and free she becomes a true "queen . . .and a peasant included." In this poem, she is not ghettoized in the city. Because she is able to suture a new meaning in the hole

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[161] See Appendix three.

[162] For all of her traveling, she does also write much about cities—New Orleans and New York and especially her home city of San Francisco. See her poem "The Ballad of San Franpsycho" which has these lines in the concluding stanza: "place her memories in a poem's cache, hope/someone understands what it is/to be gone & return with a slap/ to lose a land, a city one called home.

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that she creates, she is both the queen with a crown on her head and the peasant in dirty clothes. Just as important, though, in the following line, she clarifies her statement by writing, "I'm myself and I'm no one." The queen is the recognizable figure of power and at times, her arrogance and clothing was quite visible and shocking to those outside of her community. But she was also "no one" and therefore, like the peasant, could disappear because she is not important enough to notice and she has used this invisibility to fulfill her desires on the road.

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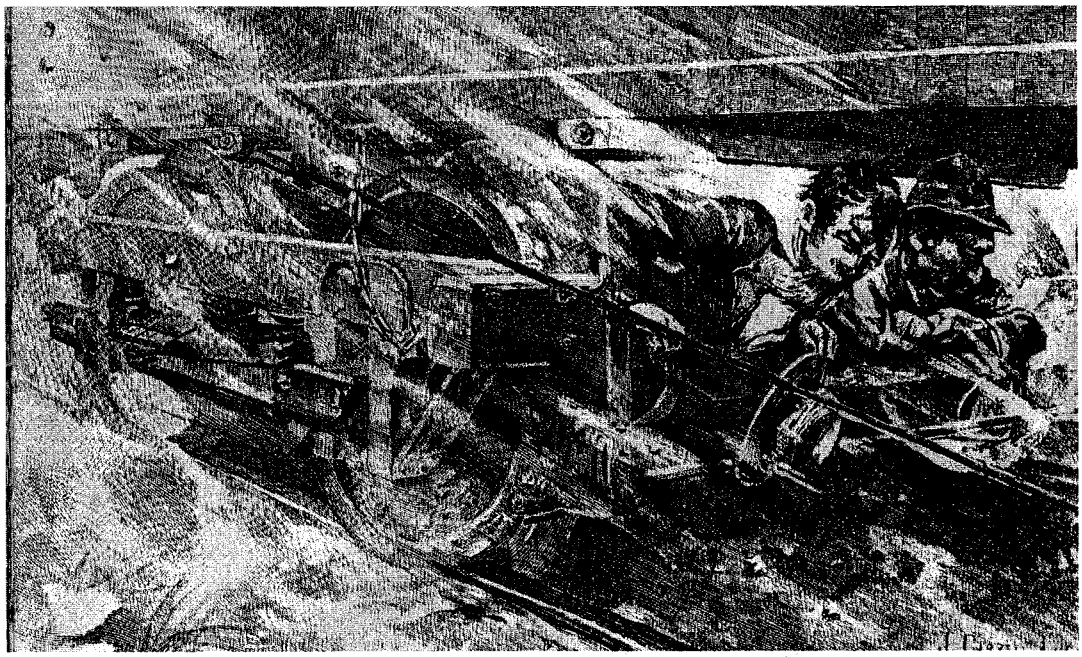
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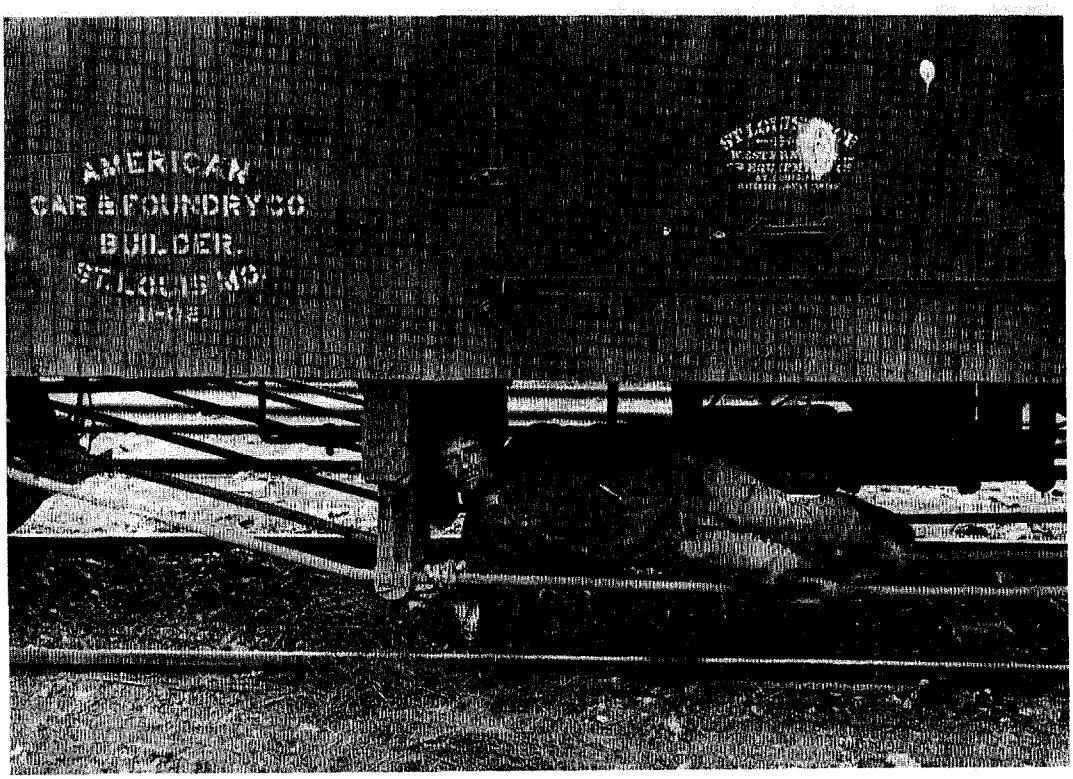
Appendix I



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Allsop, Kenneth. *Hard Travellin': The Hobo and his history.* New York: The New American Library, 1967.

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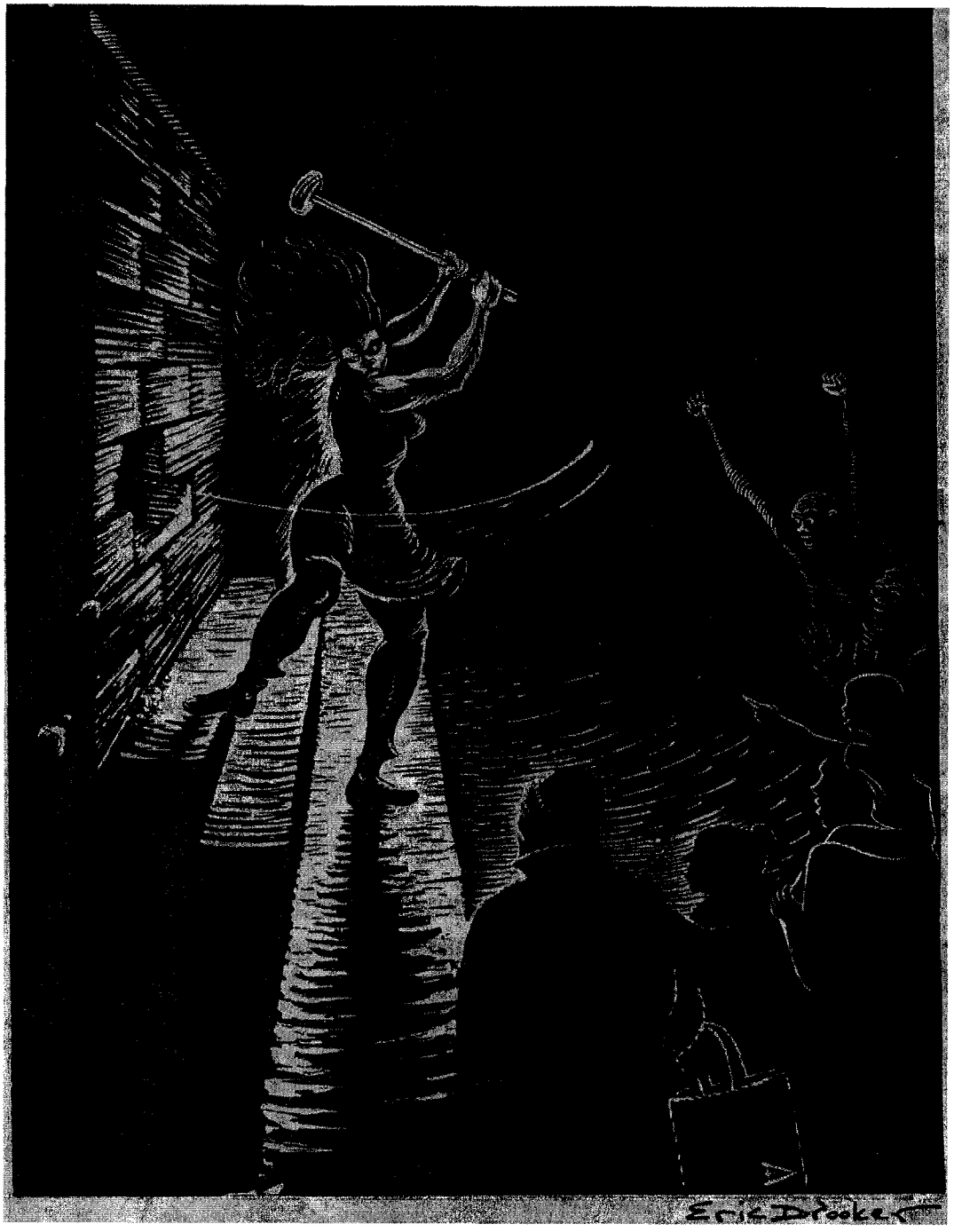
Appendix II



Allsop, Kenneth. *Hard Travellin': The Hobo and his history.* New York: The New American Library, 1967.

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Appendix III



--Eric Drooker
Shadow Comics. Number 1. New York: Shadow Press, 1990.

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Appendix IV



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Appendix V

A Livid Power

The simplest miracle I know is to explore
An old dusted attic
Which the city becomes as I pad
Down the street with my dips and
Gyrations, my stopping
My staring
The scent of the wet concrete
Taking me forward
Its cracks and
Its veins
And the foot-bent weeds
Jutting like arrows
Or a map, saying

Go there. Peep here. Stop still.
Sit and listen.

The cars peel by me through
Deep oily swamps
The white plastic faces inside swung in a stress wrap
Of work and long duties---
if they see me
right now
I bet they'll wring wry
with sour distaste of my
dirt and
my freedom
because I know the streets
like they know computers.
I know that under that board
where CAUTION tape growls
is a big black hole
dropping into a long tunnel
where sunlight fails to enter
only can highlight the cobwebs
show me an outline
take me inside a huge building
where dust shakes the floorboards
and pigeons *shreesh* past me
the higher I climb
to the fourth floor or

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rooftop

I'm in an existence
where I know I am safe

there're no robbers
collectors
or repo men
no shotguns
no shrieks
I ain't got a TV
or a house filled with crap
no VCR or
stereo
no nothing to stress on.
I can lounge on the roof
On the cool rainy
Gravel, watch
Thick herds of clouds
Gather above and black
Streaking birds
While I lay on my back
And listen to the city
Vibrate far away and
Below
I'm queen here
A true one
And a peasant included
I'm myself and I'm no one
I'm laughter and
Calm and
Strong protective anger

The rain dampens my face
So I rise like
A sanke from my garden
To pick up where I left off
Of parting the cobwebs
From paths unexplored
Embracing the city like a leper
Who you all forgot
Has the feelings
Of a lover.

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Curriculum Vitae

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"Learning to Play in the Tower: Oedipa's Transformation from Tourist to Post-Tourist in *The Crying of Lot 49*"

"A Matter of Pride: A Misplaced End Quote in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*"

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American Literature Survey; American Modernism; Contemporary American; Popular Culture Studies; American Studies; Introduction to Film; Cultural Studies; Critical Theory

Publications

"Too Dirty to be a 'Bo? Gutterpunks, Hobos, and Subcultural Negotiations of Identity," *Notes from Underground: Essays on American Youth Subcultures,* Arielle Greenberg, ed., Longman Publishers, 2005

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Presentations (selected)

"The Politics of Squatting: negotiating city spaces," (Dis)junctions: Theory/ Reloaded, Humanities Conference, California, April 2005

"Pedagogical Blogging? The use of blogs in American Studies," Technology Lab Forum, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, February 2005

"It's not Phair! The Performances of Liz Phair," Midwest Modern Language Association Women's Caucus, St. Louis, November 2004 (co-presenter)

"Creating Place: (Re)Defining the Hobo in the Works of Eddy Joe Cotton and Jessica Hahn," Northeast Modern Language Association, Pittsburgh, March 2004

"Hobo Philosophers: Labor and Education at Hobo University," Midwest Modern Language Association, Chicago, November 2003

"The Battle over Being a 'Bum': Hobo Subculture and the Negotiations of Space," Popular Culture Association/ American Culture Association, New Orleans, April 2002

"The Vietnam Wall and the Politics of Cultural Memory," Mid-Atlantic Popular Culture/American Culture Conference, Pittsburgh, November 2001

"Hobo-ing with Martin Scorsese," Southwest Texas Popular Culture Association, Albuquerque, April 2001

"Box(ing)Politics: Sexual Politics and the Hobo in *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Box-Car Bertha*," Crossing the Boundaries IX, Binghamton, March 2001

"Learning to Play in the Tower: Oedipa's Transformation from Tourist to Post-Tourist in *Crying of Lot 49,"* 20th-Century Literature Conference, University of Louisville, February 2001

"A Matter of Pride: A Misplaced End Quote in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," Medieval Forum, New Hampshire State College, April 1999

Teaching Experience Lehigh University (selected)

Humanities Lecture/Survey Class; Co-taught with Dr. Anthony Bleach
"Literature and Film in the 30s, 60s, and 90s: Responses to U.S. Crises" Spring 2005.

Introduction to American Studies; Lecture class
"The 1990's: Constructing Identities in The Real World" Spring 2004, Spring 2005

Literature Classes
"(Re)Creating the City: Literary Negotiations Of New York" Fall 2004

"Travel and the Sense of Self: The Importance of Movement in 20th Century American Literature" Fall 2003

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Online course for graduate and undergraduate students examining the Library of Congress Archives; my focus was on the WPA collections
"Virtual Americana: Studying American Culture OnLine" (Co-Facilitator), Summer 2003

Summer Excel Program; Minority Leadership Classes
"20th Century African-American Literature: A Survey" Summer 2004

"How to Read War: Applying Critical Thinking" Summer 2003

"The Search For Identity: Locating the Self in Education/Work" Summer 2002

Inquiry in Contemporary Critical Issues: Writing Intensive Courses
"Reconsidering Resistance in 20th Century American Literature" Spring 2005

"Watch Out For The Road Signs: Class/Race/Gender Border Crossings" Spring 2002

"The 'Other' Road: The Female Traveler in 20th Century American Literature" Spring 2000

"Rebellion. Everyday?: 'Cultural Dopes' or 'Resisting Readers?'" Spring 1998

Composition and Literature I: Writing Critically
7 sections, computer classrooms, 1997-2004

Teaching Assistant to Dr. Barry Kroll (chair)
"Tim O'Brien's Vietnam War Books" Fall 1998

Honors

Senior Teaching Fellowship, Lehigh University, 2003-2004; 2004-2005

Humanities Center Research Travel Grant, Lehigh University, Summer 2004

Teaching Fellowship, Lehigh University, 1997-2003

Humanities Center Research Cluster Fellowship, Lehigh University, Spring 2002

Technology Fellowship, Lehigh University, 2002

Professional Experience

Assistant Director of The Writing Center, Lehigh University, 2004-2005

Developed course and curriculum for the First Year Composition and Literature

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course taught by all new English teaching fellows, Lehigh University, 2002

Co-organized pedagogical panel discussions and co-facilitator of weekly class with new instructors, Lehigh University, Fall 2002-Spring 2003

Research Experience

Graduate Research Assistantship, Dr. Dawn Keetley, Summer 2004

Graduate Research Assistantship, Clipper Project, Lehigh University, Fall 2001-Spring 2002

Researched, annotated bibliographies, and helped develop a web based course and curriculum for Dr. Edward Gallagher's project, "How Do 'We' Memorialize a War that 'We' Lost: The Vietnam Wall and Cultural Memory," Lehigh University, Fall 2002

Writing-focused Leadership Roles

Assistant Director of First Year Writing Program, Lehigh University, 2002-2003

Head Editor, *verb*, Humanities campus-wide newspaper, Fall 2003-Present

Drown Writers' Series (DWS) Coordinator (A bi-weekly original spoken word forum), Lehigh University, Fall 2001-Spring 2004

Academic Service

Organized *Hobo Week*; responsible for the allocating of funds, securing travel and accommodations and organizing panel discussion groups, talks, And performances of three hobo artists; Lehigh University, April 3-7, 2005

Tutor, Writing Center, Lehigh University, Fall 1998-Spring 1999, Fall 2000-Present

Planning Committee, Humanities Center, responsible for the creation of the new Masters of the Humanities degree and program, Visiting Lecture Series, Fall 2003-Present

Committee Member, First Year Program, Lehigh University, 2003-2004; 2004-2005

Mentor for New Graduate Student, Fall 2002, 2003

Program Committee for the Mid-Atlantic American Studies Association Conference, Spring 2003

Graduate Liaison to Department Chair, Lehigh University, 1998-1999

Judge, Williams Prize Writing Awards, Spring 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005

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Volunteer Service

Writing Workshop Coordinator, *Star Program*, Bethlehem, PA Spring 2005

Volunteered in a 24-hour emergency shelter. Responsible for creation and implementation of shelter policies, bed allocation, assessment, care and treatment of residents. Cork, Ireland, Sept 1999-May 2000

Coordinator of a music/spoken word concert for a volunteer organization Spring 1999

References

Dawn Keetley, dek7@lehigh.edu
Assistant Professor of English, American Studies, and Women's Studies, Lehigh University

Seth Moglen, sema@lehigh.edu
Assistant Professor of English, Lehigh University

Elizabeth Fifer, ef00@lehigh.edu
Professor of English, Lehigh University

John Pettegrew, jcp5@lehigh.edu
Associate Professor of History, and Director of American Studies, Lehigh University

Edward Gallagher, ejg1@lehigh.edu
Professor of English, Lehigh University

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